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# Lincoln/Lancaster County Welcoming & Belonging Strategic Plan

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## LETTER FROM THE MAYOR



Dear Friends, Colleagues and Neighbors,

Lincoln is a strong and vibrant city. Part of what makes Lincoln a great community are the many immigrants and refugees from all over the world who have made their home here. These New Americans contribute to our thriving and diverse culture. A culture where we work collaboratively to make sure every resident feels a sense of belonging and has an opportunity to contribute. Our Gateways for Growth program is a partnership between the public, private, nonprofit, and philanthropic sectors. The purpose of this program is to include immigrant and refugee residents into our community. Through community conversations with stakeholders, they identified the following outcomes: Equitable Access; Community Connections and Civic Engagement; Education and Economic Opportunities; Safe and Healthy Communities; and Affordable and Quality Housing.



To achieve these outcomes, we must continue to build trust across diverse groups, innovate new ways of solving problems, and bring more voices and perspectives to the table.

Another part of what makes Lincoln great is you. Thank you for welcoming our new residents and investing in their belonging and success in our community.

*Leirion Gaylor Baird*

## LETTER FROM THE LANCASTER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS



Dear Lancaster County residents,

Today, as in years past, new immigration to Nebraska is bringing exciting opportunities and new neighbors to Lancaster County. Creating a welcoming and inclusive community involves Nebraskans from all walks of life—business, education, community, faith, and immigrants themselves—who are proud of our welcoming community and who are working together to build Nebraska's future.

In the past five years our county grew by 6.5% while our immigrant and refugee population grew by 16.2%. Proactively planning gives us the durable power of a welcoming infrastructure as Lancaster County continues to grow.

Our community is stronger, more vibrant and prosperous when everyone feels they belong. When people feel they belong, they add to our cultural fabric, economic growth, global competitiveness and overall prosperity and vibrancy for current and future generations.

*Deb Schorr*

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# LINCOLN'S REFUGEE AND IMMIGRANT HISTORY

Located in the southeast corner of Nebraska, Lancaster County has a population of 319,000 and an area of 846 square miles. Its largest city, Lincoln, is the State Capitol with more than 90% of the county's population residing in the city limits.

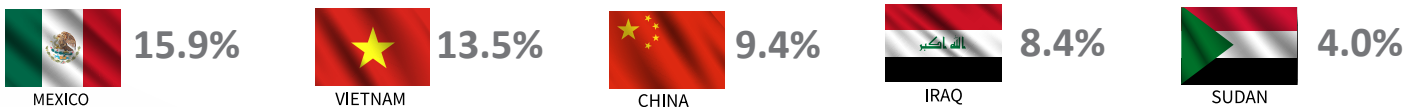
In the 1980's, Lincoln became a federally designated refugee resettlement site and resettled over 5,500 refugees, mostly Vietnamese. Waves of refugees continued to come to Lincoln each year, often reflecting the part of the world most under fire. Following the Vietnamese, Lincoln accepted refugees from the Middle East, Eastern Europe, Africa, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Karen from Myanmar (Burma). During this timeframe, Lincoln also experienced large numbers of immigrants, mostly Hispanic, settling in Lincoln.

Lincoln continued to receive a growing number of refugee resettlements, and by 1993, our community was receiving approximately 1,200 refugees a year. In the 1990's, Lincoln was designated as a "Refugee Friendly" city by the U.S. Department of State. Lincoln became a targeted refugee resettlement site by the year 2000 and received funding from the Federal Office of Refugee Resettlement to assist the city with the cost of resettling refugee populations. Lincoln was recently cited as the 12th largest resettlement site per capita in the country.

## IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES IN LINCOLN AND LANCASTER COUNTY TODAY

Today Lincoln, Nebraska is home to over 30,000 immigrants and refugees from approximately 150 different countries. While the total population in the county increased by 6.5% over the last 5 years, the immigrant population increased by 16.2% during this same time period. In fact, in 2016, Nebraska resettled more refugees per capita than any other state in the United States.

Top five countries of origin for immigrants living in Lancaster County:



Top countries of origin for the refugee population in Lancaster County:



The top languages spoken at home other than English are:

1. Spanish: 33.4%
2. Vietnamese: 21.9%
3. Chinese: 10.4%

About 23.3% of immigrants in Lancaster County are recent arrivals, with no more than 5 years of residency in the United States. In Lancaster County, immigrants are 29.7% more likely to be of working age than their U.S.-born counterparts, allowing them to actively participate in the labor force and contribute to the economy as taxpayers and consumers.



# PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM AND UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA



Lincoln Public Schools (LPS) serves students and their families who come from 107 countries and speak 129 different languages. The top 10 countries represented in the district include: Iraq, Thailand, Guatemala, Mexico, Vietnam, Syria, El Salvador, Afghanistan, Honduras, and Ukraine; and the top 10 home languages include: Spanish, Arabic, Kurdish, Vietnamese, Karen, Nuer, Kurmanji, Ukrainian, Russian, and French.

There are 25 bilingual liaisons in LPS to support the diverse student population. The bilingual liaisons' job is not only to serve as interpreters for the district; but to also serve as a link between school, the family and the community in an effort to establish an open line of communication, which is integral in the educational process. Some of the responsibilities of the bilingual liaisons include:

- Supporting the ELL assessment, placement and enrollment process at the Welcome Center.
- Collaborating with all departments within LPS in order to resolve language and cultural issues.
- Helping the Migrant Education Program in the area of recruitment, program development and community resources.
- Providing support to Family Literacy programs across the district through recruitment, language services and community collaboration.
- Serving as Cultural Ambassadors in order to bring cultural awareness.
- Working in collaboration with school staff and administration in the area of parent engagement.
- Providing language services to LPS staff.
- Working in collaboration with the Youth Development Team.



LPS has an ELL Welcome Center that's mission is to advocate and empower multi-cultural and multi-lingual students and families through education, as well as to build a bridge of communication between Lincoln Public Schools and the community. When completing the K-12 on-line registration, if a language other than English is given to any of the following questions on the home language survey, the family will be referred to the ELL Welcome Center.

- 1) What language did the student first learn to speak?
- 2) What language is spoken most often by the student?
- 3) What language is primarily used in the student's home regardless of the language spoken by the student?

Information provided at the ELL Welcome Center can include:

- \* Language proficiency assessment and sharing of information for enrollment purposes
- \* ELL Preschool application information and registration
- \* Bilingual Liaisons interpretation services, roles and contact information
- \* Services available for ELL students, including Special Education and Gifted Programs
- \* Community Resource Guides
- \* Welcoming processes at school buildings

Lincoln is also home to the University of Nebraska at Lincoln (UNL). UNL is among the top schools for international students ranking 33rd out of 1,204 colleges and universities. International students comprise 11% of total students (roughly 3,000 international students from 115 different countries).



# GOVERNMENT ALLIANCE ON RACE AND EQUITY

In 2020, both the City of Lincoln and Lancaster County were the first sites in Nebraska to join the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) to continue working towards racial equity. GARE is a joint project of Race Forward and the Othering and Belonging Institute. GARE provides support, educational opportunities, peer network of professionals, and training on how to incorporate a racial equity toolkit within policy, program and the budget decision-making process. During the first year of membership, we were able to train several staff on racial equity issues and form a leadership team.

## ONE LINCOLN

One Lincoln works to realize the vision of a community where people of every race, religion, culture, class, age, ability, and identity feel understood, enjoy a true sense of belonging, and experience equal opportunity to reach their full human potential. One Lincoln champions community policies, practices, and culture change initiatives that advance equity, diversity, and inclusion, as well as efforts that foster individual community members' personal journeys of awareness and transformation through conversations on topics like discrimination. One Lincoln recognizes that we create transformed, inclusive new realities by becoming transformed, inclusive people.

One Lincoln promotes the well-being of every resident through affordable housing initiatives, tenant assistance, and policies and programs to ensure healthy outcomes for children and families. The initiative seeks to ensure that the city's workforce is diverse and representative; that no one is discriminated against in employment, housing, and public accommodations; that discrimination complaints are handled fairly and expeditiously; and that unfair inequities in the community are addressed and reduced. To this end, some action steps taken thus far include:

- The City of Lincoln has partnered with Inclusive Communities to provide training for City employees on workplace inclusion and respecting diverse identities.
- The One Lincoln City Employee Advisory Board engages and supports the City's internal diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.
- The Mayor's proposed 2021-2022 budget includes funding for a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Administrator. This staff person will work to ensure that City Hall reflects and can meet the needs of the diverse communities we serve.



# CULTURAL CENTERS OF LINCOLN

Lincoln is also fortunate to have the Cultural Centers of Lincoln (CCL). CCL serves as a model for multicultural collaboration to develop a public dialogue that will increase understanding of the value of diversity for Lincoln and Lancaster County. The CCL also serves to support the member agencies (Asian Community and Cultural Center, El Centro de las Américas, Good Neighbor Community Center, Indian Center, Malone Center, and Ponca Tribe of Nebraska) while building upon their strengths in a collaborative manner to produce community outcomes centered on diversity, social justice, and cultural competency. CCL agencies began meeting in 1999 on a regular basis with the mission to “Promote cultural empowerment through collaboration, education, and advocacy.”

In 2019, the cultural centers started discussions under Cultural Centers of Lincoln Collaborative project to address common needs faced by the centers which include but are not limited to space, programming, employee wages, and consistent funding. The collaborative created a strategic plan that would help the centers:

1. Grow through intentional collaboration
2. Build visibility and trust as community leaders
3. Raise enough money to fully fund the project

The collaborative is thrilled with the current progress for creating a new community facility that aims to build bridges that connect the members of our community through social services, public resources, and cross-cultural relationships. This will act as a welcoming center to provide direct assistance and referrals for social, health and other essential resources. The facility will house two of the member agencies with all their current programs included. It will also create a home for Malone’s Early Childhood program, ACCC’s Senior Center, and GNCC’s Food Distribution Center. There will be community celebration areas, a kitchen/cafeteria, and shared amenities for the cultural center. Other communities are also welcome. This center will serve as a community hub to ensure our New Americans feel welcome in our community.





# NEW AMERICANS TASK FORCE

In 1985, Mayor Helen Boosalis asked the Lincoln Lancaster Human Services Administration to convene a group of people “responsible for bringing in refugees to Lincoln.” Based on that directive, Kit Boesch, Administrator, convened a group of refugee resettlement agencies, the Lincoln Police Department, Lincoln Housing Authority, and Lincoln Public Schools. In January 1991, a more formal task force was created including 13 stakeholder organizations. The group became known as the Immigrant and Refugee Task Force (I&R Task Force). In 2002, the organization was renamed the New Americans Task Force to promote greater inclusion of Lincoln’s immigrant Hispanic and Latino population.

The New Americans Task Force (NATF) is a network of nearly 70 public and private organizations and community members, dedicated to supporting Lincoln’s immigrant and refugee community members. NATF members strive to welcome all newcomers, assisting them in building the lives they seek through the removal of barriers and the provision of culturally competent support services.



NATF has hosted Lincoln Unites! for over 5 years. This event brings community members from all walks of life together who are proud that Lincoln is inclusive and welcoming of all of its immigrant and refugee neighbors for generations. Sharing art, music, and heritage of the many faces of Lincoln helps create one strong and vibrant community. Activities include a Naturalization (Citizenship) Ceremony, numerous food vendors, bands and dancers. Local students are asked to submit art in this theme for a juried contest.

NATF recognized the need for a path for immigrants and refugees to use their skills and education in our community. CareerLadder grew out of NATF and demonstrates the collaboration between NATF member agencies. CareerLadder connects skilled immigrants and refugees to career pathways, digital resources, and a professional network while fostering economic opportunity and restoring dignity through work. CareerLadder tools include:

- Pathway guides in the fields of engineering, law, nursing, accounting, and education providing step-by-step instructions for how skilled immigrants and refugees can pursue re-entering their former careers in Nebraska.
- Digital skills training including resume development, email etiquette, internet safety, Google G-Suite tools training, and more.
- A leadership development program for immigrants and refugees that fosters civic engagement, empowers participants to engage with local institutions, and develops greater social capital.



**CareerLadder** was one of five finalists selected in the Google.org Impact Challenge Nebraska, where nonprofits across the state submitted their proposals to create economic opportunities throughout Nebraska. As a finalist, CareerLadder received a \$175,000 grant and an additional \$125,000 after winning the People’s Choice Award.



**The Connectors’ Program** offers a professional mentorship and networking opportunity for eligible, foreign-trained professionals seeking career advancement services through the CareerLadder Program. The Connectors’ Program Team connects clients with a reliable professional mentor within their industry with whom they will meet at least three times during the three-month mentorship period. Professional fields include: Accounting, Education, Engineering, Law, and Nursing. Meetings can be in-person or virtual (phone, teleconference, etc.) depending on the preference of the client and mentor.

Through the Connectors’ Program, the client has the opportunity to:

- Consult with a career mentor in their field to discuss their professional background and career goals.
- Receive three to five professional “connections” from the mentor. Connections include employers or other professionals who can expand the client’s network.
- Receive guidance for submitting job applications and for communicating with employers and professionals.

**MyCity Academy** empowers New American community members in Lincoln to strengthen their ability to advocate, navigate and impact local government services. Over the course of eight weeks, participants meet with leaders from City of Lincoln/Lancaster County departments and tour City-County facilities. In doing so, they gain a better understanding of how their government works and learn how to resolve issues, obtain information, and increase involvement.

Upon graduation, participants will also be able to help their communities understand and navigate community infrastructure. Graduates also have the opportunity to interact with New Americans from other communities through their participation in the alumni network.

MyCity Academy is focused on the long-term goal of growing Lincoln-Lancaster County’s New American leadership, equity and inclusion. This is achieved through structured lessons and hands-on experiences that connect resident leaders with community experts on topics such as Health & Wellbeing, Safety & Safety Response, All About Money, Leadership & Social Capital, City-County Services and Community & Civic Engagement.



*“The goal of My City Academy (MCA) is to provide opportunities for participants to learn how local city and county government functions, what services are provided and how to become engaged in different programs, events and service opportunities. MCA aligns with Mayor Gaylor Baird’s One Lincoln initiative and is a step towards making city hall and the larger community more welcoming and inclusive.”*

**Francisca Beltran**, Community Outreach Coordinator of the Lincoln Commission on Human Rights

## A GROWING DEMAND FOR CHANGE

Immigrants and refugees contribute significantly to state and local taxes, including property, sales, and excise taxes levied by state and local governments. Based on earnings, immigrants and refugees paid almost \$80 million in state and local taxes.

Immigrants and refugees play a critical role in the workforce by helping companies keep jobs on US soil. The New American Economy estimates immigrants and refugees helped create or preserve over 1,200 manufacturing jobs that would have otherwise vanished or moved elsewhere. More recently, immigrants and refugees contributed to keeping our county functioning through the pandemic by serving as essential workers in food service, construction, and healthcare.

With immigrant and refugees' vital contribution to both our workforce and tax contributions, there remains a disproportionate number of immigrants and refugees who live at or below poverty. Thirty eight percent of immigrants live at or below 150% of the federal poverty threshold as compared to 18.4% of U.S. born residents.



*“So many refugees are desperate to use their degrees when they come to the United States. These pathways will help the under-employed former teachers, nurses, and lawyers to navigate the complicated process of degree equivalency and foreign credential evaluations. Working hard and having a strong partnership within the community will make their dreams possible.”*

**Nizar Rasho**, Program Supervisor at Lutheran Family Services and co-chair of the New Americans Task Force Integration Committee.



## SOULINNEE PHAN PROFILE



Soulinnee Phan's parents came to Nebraska from Laos, fleeing the Communists. A few years prior, they'd swum for their lives across the Mekong River and met at a Thai refugee camp. By the time Phan's mother boarded a military plane to America in 1980, she was six months pregnant. Three months later, Phan was born.

Within a year, her father was hired by Store Kraft, a factory in Beatrice that manufactures retail store fixtures. But Phan's childhood wasn't easy. Her parents worked long hours, so she became the main caregiver to her siblings. And despite being born on American soil, she felt like an outsider in the mostly white town. Kids in elementary school bullied her and

made fun of her looks. In high school, a group of boys drove by her home and told her family to "go back home." "I endured a lot growing up," she says. "I didn't see another minority until I was a junior in high school."

When she was 17, she ran away to California. After years of job hopping, she longed for more stability and returned to Nebraska. On a whim, she applied to an entry-level position at Lincoln's City Clerk's office, thinking she didn't have a chance. In fact, she beat out over 100 other applicants. Today, she heads the department.

Over her 16 years at the job, Phan has helped hire a more diverse staff and improved the way the city responds to public complaints. She volunteers as a translator at the Asian Community Center, and helps new immigrants and refugees adjust to life in Nebraska. Through My City Academy, she teaches new arrivals how to navigate different city departments. "I want to give back and be supportive of the first-generation kids who face the same problems I did," she says.

Phan wishes her parents had access to similar support networks when they arrived in America. She also sees how municipal support can change people's views about government in general. "Many refugees have fled corrupt governments and lost faith in public institutions," she says. "By talking to city officials and building relationships with them, they can overcome their fears and learn that not every government person is the same."



*"I want to give back and be supportive of the first-generation kids who face the same problems I did."*

**Soulinnee Phan**



# NEW AMERICANS TASK FORCE IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE SURVEY

In 2019, to better understand the demographics, life experiences, and engagement of our valued immigrant and refugee population, the Lincoln New Americans Task Force (NATF) conducted a first-of-its-kind survey of Lincoln's immigrant and refugee community. The survey gathered feedback on health and wellness, civic engagement, housing, education/English, economic development, and community social spaces.

Over 20 partner agencies and institutions affiliated with NATF participated in the survey creation and distribution in the Lincoln community. More than 500 immigrants and refugees living in Lincoln completed the survey, which was administered both on paper and online in English, Vietnamese, Arabic, Spanish, and Karen.

Overall, the findings affirm that many immigrants and refugees value living in Lincoln and trust many of the city's key institutions. They are eager to learn English, and many bring professional credentials and related skills from their work abroad. However, Lincoln's immigrant and refugee community also faces significant economic and social barriers related to income, housing, access to effective healthcare, and employment.

In particular, the 2019 Lincoln NATF Immigrant and Refugee Survey found:

- **Respondents value and trust components of Lincoln's public infrastructure**
  - 70% of respondents indicate they have trust in Lincoln's schools
  - 74% of respondents attend events that celebrate their own culture
  - 68% of respondents indicate they have trust in police
  - 50% of respondents indicate they utilize and feel part of City parks
- **English acquisition is important to immigrants and refugees and for their long-term goals**
  - Nearly all respondents, 99.8%, agreed or strongly agreed that English is important in their everyday lives
  - 99% of respondents indicated English is important to their long-term goals
- **A majority of respondents have educational and professional experience they are not currently utilizing**
  - 64% of respondents came to the U.S. with a high school degree or higher – of those, 30% have post-secondary education but are not employed in their field of training
  - Nearly 60% of respondents said they do not currently work in and want to return to their professional field of study/expertise.
- **Respondents experience barriers that prevent them from self-sufficiency and economic mobility**
  - 52% of respondents indicated they cannot always pay their monthly expenses
  - 20% of respondents indicated their housing is either unsafe or uncomfortable; health and family obligations are the two largest barriers to workforce participation for respondents
  - 30% of respondents stated they are unable to understand and communicate comfortably with their health care providers



"I couldn't receive my diploma or any paperwork proving I'd earned my degree, but we had to leave the country just to feel safe"

**Maysoon Shaheen**

# GATEWAYS FOR GROWTH

In November 2020, the City of Lincoln and Lancaster County became one of 19 localities to be included in the Gateways for Growth (G4G) program as part of the fourth cohort of the initiative.

Launched in 2016, G4G is a competitive opportunity for localities to receive research support and technical assistance from New American Economy and Welcoming America to improve immigrant inclusion in their communities.

As a G4G awardee, Lincoln and Lancaster County received a customized quantitative research report from New American Economy on the demographic and economic contributions immigrants make in our community. Additionally, we received tailored technical assistance from New American Economy and Welcoming America to help draft, execute, and communicate a multi-sector immigrant inclusion strategy. Both organizations have played an integral role in guiding the development of this welcoming and belonging plan.

New American Economy is a bipartisan research and advocacy organization founded to educate, empower and support policymakers, influencers, and citizens across the country that see the economic and social benefits of a smart approach to immigration reform. New American Economy has created a coalition of civic, business, and cultural leaders who span the political spectrum and represent all 50 states.

Welcoming America leads a movement of inclusive communities from across the world in becoming more prosperous by making everyone feel like they belong. Through a membership network of 200+ local governments and nonprofits, Welcoming America connects and supports place-based initiatives that work to reduce divisions and support greater civic, social, and economic participation among new and longtime residents alike. Through the Welcoming Network, participating members access peer learning opportunities, technical assistance, tools, and training to help transform their communities into more welcoming places.



# PLANNING COMMITTEE

The Gateways for Growth Planning Committee includes representatives of the City of Lincoln, Lancaster County, and the New Americans Task Force. Planning Committee members identified a broad range of community stakeholders.

Planning Committee members include:

**Commissioner Christa Yoakum**

*Lancaster County / Nebraska Appleseed*

**Adelle Burk, Policy Aide**

*City of Lincoln Mayor's Office*

**Sara Hoyle, Director**

*Lancaster County Human Services*

**Lee Kreimer, Program Coordinator**

*Programs Manager, Asian Community and Cultural Center / NATF Co-Chair*

**Nizar Rasho, Program Supervisor**

*Greater Nebraska Refugee Services, Lutheran Family Services / NATF Integration Subcommittee Co-Chair*

**Mindy Rush Chipman, Director**

*Lincoln Commission on Human Rights*

**Jenni Ryan, Administrative Assistant**

*Lancaster County Human Services*

**Steering Committee (See Appendix A for full listing of members)**

In April 2021, the Gateways for Growth Planning Committee convened a larger Steering Committee, representing diverse stakeholders, to provide data and feedback on the community's priorities related to immigrant and refugee inclusion and belonging.

The Gateways for Growth Steering Committee includes 67 members with a wide variety of backgrounds and professions. Group members include those who have been actively involved in the New Americans Task Force and those who have not previously participated in NATF. The completed listing of members can be found in Appendix A.

The full Steering Committee met bi-monthly throughout 2021 to learn about issues impacting the Lincoln/Lancaster County immigrant and refugee communities, identify barriers to equitable access and participation, and create recommendations for policies and programs to ensure full belonging of New Americans in our community. Steering Committee members divided into sub-committees to address six priority areas: Equitable Access; Civic Engagement and Community Connections; Education; Economic Opportunity; Safe and Healthy Communities; and Affordable and Quality Housing.

Steering Committee members reviewed 2019 NATF survey results, New American Economy Research Report, and invited community stakeholders to share their recommendations to create a more inclusive Lincoln/Lancaster County.

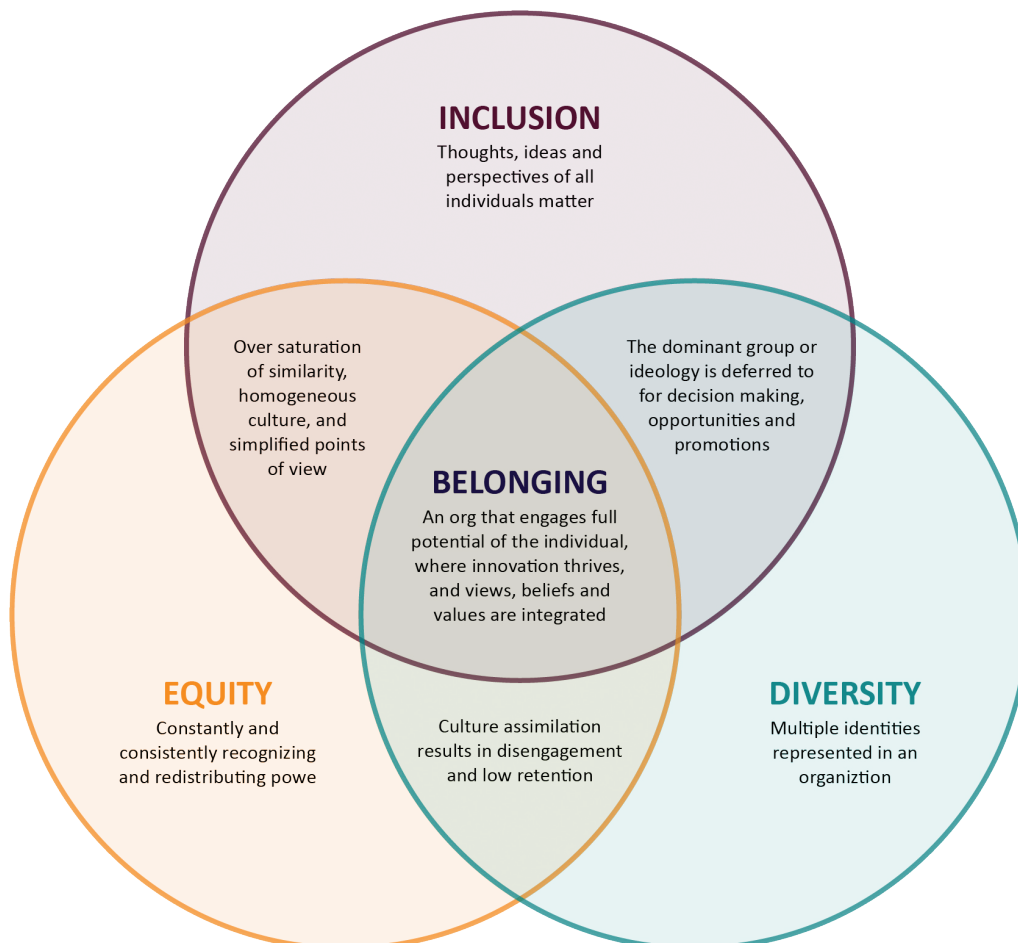
Additionally, the G4G Planning Committee developed a survey to gather in-depth responses from Steering Committee members on their vision, perceived barriers, and recommendations to advance each of the six priority areas of the plan. From this community-driven process, Steering Committee members developed a series of detailed recommendations, summarized below and explained fully at the end of this report.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

The below recommendations are for community-wide policies and programs to better support immigrant and refugee community members in Lincoln/Lancaster County. Specifically, the recommendations are to address issues impacting the Lincoln/Lancaster County immigrant and refugee communities, identify barriers to equitable access and participation, and to ensure the full belonging of immigrants and refugees in our community.

While the recommendations are divided into six focus areas, there are overarching themes that resonate throughout all areas. In particular, the desire for the City of Lincoln and Lancaster County to receive community input and prioritize diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging work throughout the community was highlighted in all six focus areas. Through a technical assistance grant, a City/County Welcoming Community Coordinator will be hired to coordinate recommendations, build capacity, serve as a liaison, and assess the impact of these welcoming recommendations and strategies.

1. Equitable Access
2. Civic Engagement and Community Connections
3. Education
4. Economic Opportunity
5. Safe and Healthy Communities
6. Affordable and Quality Housing










# EQUITABLE ACCESS

**Vision: Our community's services and opportunities are available to all residents, including immigrants.**

## RECOMMENDATIONS

-  Develop a brick-and-mortar Welcoming Center to provide direct assistance and referrals for social, health and other essential resources. In the short term, an online version of a welcoming center would help achieve equitable access.
-  Develop paid outreach and advisory teams to integrate the perspectives of diverse and disproportionately impacted populations, including refugees and immigrants, into public planning processes.
-  Work with community partners to designate and fund a City/County Welcoming Community Coordinator to coordinate efforts, build capacity, implement new initiatives, serve as a liaison, and assess the impact and accountability of these and complimentary welcoming strategies.
-  Increase awareness of MyLink as a resource for newcomers to access services and resources. Ensure this resource is easily accessible in multiple languages and easy for agencies to update. Listing of language services should also be included in MyLink.
-  Continue to partner with Star Tran to ensure transportation is fast, direct, and convenient for commuters.



Collaboration



Policy





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# CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS


**Vision: Our community fosters civic engagement, relationships, and communication among newcomers and longer-term residents.**


## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 

Increase awareness about opportunities to make one-on-one connections with people from different backgrounds, such as dialogue and cultural events happening throughout the community.
- 

Expand connectors program. Map out all opportunities for memberships to effectively partner with existing cohorts.
- 

Promote and increase funding for naturalization programs and access to legal resources.
- 

Support city-wide celebrations and engagement opportunities, such as Lincoln Unites, Crossroads Music Festival, and Emerge LNK and ensure that they honor and include Lincoln's diverse cultural, linguistic, and/or religious groups.
- 

Share civic engagement opportunities (voting, participating on board and public meetings, etc) through block parties, cultural events, and going to where New Americans are located.



Collaboration



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# EDUCATION

**Vision: Our community provides the support that newcomers need to succeed in school and access higher education.**

## RECOMMENDATIONS



Create pathways for older youth and adults seeking high school equivalency, with targeted supports for English language learners and those with limited formal schooling.



Aggregate and share information about scholarships to participate in recreational and educational activities/events. Identify and partner with community organizations to educate students and families about key academic and career strategies, such as curriculum/credits to graduate, dual enrollment, and post-graduation options.



Support Lincoln Littles and other programs to provide expanded subsidized quality preschool/daycare and early childhood programs serving diverse populations, and increase awareness of the benefits of early childhood education among immigrant and refugee residents. Increase awareness about existing parenting and family literacy classes that are available to all parents.



Through partnerships with non-profit organizations, increase the number and consistency of trained volunteer interpreters available to refugee and resettlement agencies in helping newcomer parents understand available community resources for their students.



Engage teachers, staff, and administrators in ongoing high-quality professional development including training on implicit bias, institutional and systemic racism, and cultural competency. Support policy changes and hiring strategies to attract, develop, and retain top administrators, staff, and teachers who reflect students' racial, ethnic, language, and cultural diversity. Continue to use targeted data to improve academic outcomes for diverse learners and address educational disparities.



Collaboration



Policy








Infrastructure

# ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

**Vision: Our community harnesses the skills and assets of newcomers to ensure economic opportunity.**

## RECOMMENDATIONS

-  Create programs to support local minority and immigrant owned business sourcing and contracting in the public and private sectors.
-  Continue to invest in the CareerLadder, Connectors, Bridgeway and other partner programs to assist foreign-trained professionals in navigating local professional requirements and support the career advancement of foreign trained individuals and other immigrant professionals.
-  Work with the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce and other partners to establish one-stop shops where immigrant entrepreneurs can get information on navigating licensing and other processes and provide technical assistance to small and minority-owned businesses to become vendors to bid on City projects.
-  Expand investments in training, coaching, and seed money for immigrants and refugees to start their own businesses and enter the local entrepreneurial ecosystem for support and networking.
-  Partner to provide education on workers' rights and workplace safety and improve access to legal advice on employment and workplace issues.



Collaboration



Policy








Infrastructure

# SAFE AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

**Vision: Our community promotes health care access and equity and fosters relationships of trust between residents and local law enforcement.**

## RECOMMENDATIONS

-  Work with Lincoln-Lancaster County Emergency Management to plan for sharing important community safety and emergency alert information with diverse communities in multiple languages.
-  Partner to provide health literacy and support through trained interpreters for residents to sign up for Medicaid. Work with Medicaid recipients to select and utilize a local Primary Care Provider, share information on health insurance options, and promote access to health insurance. This includes increasing access to community-based primary care clinics throughout Lincoln and Lancaster County, especially in under-served areas with high concentrations of immigrants and racial and ethnic minorities.
-  Invest in programs that provide mental health resources to diverse community members and work to destigmatize mental health concerns.
-  Continue and expand programs to recruit, hire, and retain diverse police officers and sheriff deputies and supplement ongoing cultural competency training for law enforcement with immigrant and refugee guest speakers and trainers. Multilingual skills in hires, promotions, and among all law enforcement staff should be prioritized.
-  Engage in partnerships that create deeper relationships between law enforcement and diverse communities, enhance engagement, and expand partnerships to foster positive youth engagement with law enforcement. This includes proactive interactions with law enforcement through joint community events, recruitment of cultural liaisons and encouraging immigrants and refugees to participate in Citizen Police Academies. It also assists immigrants and refugees in knowing their rights and responsibilities through workshops co-presented by law enforcement, lawyers, and community advocates.



Collaboration



Policy








Infrastructure

# AFFORDABLE AND QUALITY HOUSING

**Vision: Our community ensures access to affordable and quality rental housing and supports homeownership for immigrants.**

## RECOMMENDATIONS

-  Partner to provide information in multiple languages to tenants and landlords about rights/responsibilities/resources (including Tenant Assistance Project).
-  Increase affordable housing stock by continuing to work with developers to include unsubsidized affordable housing units in new housing developments.
-  Strengthen rental property code enforcement and offer incentives to landlords who maintain the quality of affordable housing stock.
-  Support the development of community land trusts to ensure affordable housing in perpetuity.
-  Partner to increase awareness of new home-buyer education and resources for immigrants and refugees.



Collaboration



Policy



Infrastructure

## CALL TO ACTION

The African proverb we've all come to know, "It takes a village . . ." has never been truer than when it comes to this the important work of making everyone feel a sense of welcoming and belonging in our community.

After reading this report, if you are interested in being a part of making this happen in our community, please contact:

### NEW AMERICANS TASK FORCE

(402) 441-4944

[app.lincoln.ne.gov/city/natf/](http://app.lincoln.ne.gov/city/natf/)

[natf@lincoln.ne.gov](mailto:natf@lincoln.ne.gov)

# APPENDIX A: STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

It takes a compassionate and dedicated community to be a welcoming community. A special thank you, to each and every one of you who make this happen. Whether you attended a NATF meeting, completed a survey or participated in a focus group, your input mattered. Below are individuals, agencies, and coalitions that contributed directly to the writing of this plan.

**Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird**

**Lancaster County Board of Commissioners**

**Lincoln City Council**

**New Americans Task Force**

**Cultural Centers of Lincoln**

**Lincoln Public Schools**

**Planning Committee**

**Steering Committee**

**Lincoln Chamber of Commerce**

**Lutheran Family Services**

**Asian Community and Cultural Center**

**Lincoln Commission on Human Rights**

**Lincoln and Lancaster County Human Services**

**Nebraska Appleseed**

## STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Aichin Burns, Kumon Math & Reading Center of Lincoln*

*Allie Christianson, South of Downtown CDO*

*Andy Huls, American Job Center*

*Angela Caldwell, Lincoln Journal Star*

*April Kirkendall, Legal Aid of Nebraska*

*Ari Abdul, Kurdish Community Organization*

*Assistant Chief Michon Morrow, Lincoln Police Department*

*Aubry Hoegemeyer, Goodwill*

*Bernice Afuh, Lincoln/Lancaster County Health Department*

*Bill Gerdes, City of Waverly*

*Bill Vocasek, West A Neighborhood Association (Lincoln)*

*Brad Meyer, Bluestem Health*

*Bryan Seck, Kawasaki*

*Captain Jeri Roeder, Lincoln Police Department*

*Carrie Kuszak, Lincoln Housing Authority*

*Cathy Maestas Graham, First Lincoln Federal Credit Union*

*Charlie Foster, UNL Jackie Gaughan Multicultural Center*

*Chris Funk, Center for People in Need*

*Chris Lamberty, Lincoln Housing Authority*

*Clay Naff, Lincoln Literacy*

*Courtney Gadeken, Lincoln Housing Authority*

*Courtney Lyons, Nebraska Housing Developers Association*

*Cristina Thaut, Southeast Community College*

*Danny Nguyen, Little Saigon Market*

*Dave Miller, Allo*

*David Manzanares, David Manzanares Art*

*David Young, City of Lincoln*

*Donna Stadig, Lincoln Literacy*

*Doug Hanson, Mayor of Hickman*

*Dr. Bob Rauner, Partnership for Healthy Lincoln*

*Dylan Wren, American Job Center*

*Emira Ibrahimasic, UNL Data & Research and Global Studies*

*Faheem Rashidi, Business Owner*

*Gail Ross, United Healthcare*

*Grant Daily, South Salt Creek Neighborhood Association (Lincoln)*

*Gulie Khalaf, Lincoln Mediterranean Market*

*Gwen Easter, African American Commission*

*Haefaa Hasan, Lincoln Commission on Human Rights*

*Haroon Al Hayder, Assistant School Community Coordinator/ Lincoln High*

*Inonge Kasaji, Lived Experience*

*Isabel Salas, South of Downtown CDO*

*Isam Maroo, Lived Experience*

*Jeff Breunig, Community Development Resources*

*Jess Mullins, Walmart*

*Jo Ann Emerson, Center for People in Need*

*Joe Shaw, Lux Center for the Arts*

*Jordan Soliz, UNL Communications Studies Professor*

*Jorge A. Sambataro, Villareal Nebraska Academy*



# STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

**Josh Hanshaw**, *Habitat for Humanity*  
**Josie Rodriguez**, *NE Department of Health & Human Services*  
**Karen Wobig**, *Extension Office*  
**Kelly Ross**, *ECHO Collective*  
**Ken Winston**, *Interfaith Power & Light*  
**Kerry Semrad**, *KZUM*  
**Khenda Mustafa**, *Nebraska Appleseed*  
**Kieran Kissler**, *Civic Nebraska*  
**Kirstie Jeanette Engel**, *First United Methodist*  
**Laila Hesso**, *US Bank*  
**Laila Khoudeida**, *Yazda*  
**Layla Younis**, *NE Department of Health & Human Services*  
**LeeAnn Sergeant**, *Lincoln City Libraries*  
**Lindsey Clausen**, *Lux Center for the Arts*  
**Lisandra Jorge**, *El Centro de las Americas*  
**Liz Standish**, *Lincoln Public Schools*  
**Lori Seibel**, *Community Health Endowment*  
**Lynette Maes**, *Center for People in Need*  
**Maja Cartwright**, *Child Advocacy Center*  
**Maria Cantu-Hines**, *NDHHS - Office of Minority Health*  
**Maria Rowan**, *Nebraska Department of Labor*  
**Mariana Garcia**, *Union Bank & Trust*  
**Marni Newell**, *Lutheran Family Services*  
**Max Graves**, *Center for Legal Immigration Services*  
**Maysoon Shaheen**, *Lived Experience*  
**Megan McGuffey**, *Community CROPS*  
**Megan Meagher**, *Catholic Social Services*  
**Melissa Rice-Griffin**, *Bryan Health*  
**Michaela Young**, *Community Health Endowment*  
**Mike Fitzgerald**, *Catholic Social Services*  
**Miki Esposito**, *Mayor's Office - City of Lincoln*  
**Monica Asher**, *Lincoln Public Schools*  
**Nathan Sheets**, *Rapport International*  
**Nicki Baker**, *Villareal Nebraska Academy*  
**Nyabuoy Chan**, *Asian Community and Cultural Center*  
**Oscar Sinclair**, *Faith Coalition*  
**Pa Naw Dee**, *Karen Society of Nebraska*  
**Pat Leach**, *Lincoln City Libraries*

**Pat Lopez**, *Lincoln/Lancaster County Health Department*  
**Paula Baker**, *Everett Neighborhood Association (Lincoln)*  
**Peggy Struwe**, *Hawley Neighborhood Association (Lincoln)*  
**Pimpicha Tubsuwan**, *Catholic Social Services*  
**Randy Jones**, *Aging Partners*  
**Reshell Ray**, *Belmont Neighborhood Association (Lincoln)*  
**Rev. Brandee Jasmine**, *Mimitzraiem Quinn Chapel*  
**Rich Claussen**, *Olsson Associates*  
**Roméo Guerra**, *El Centro de las Americas*  
**Rose Opbroek**, *Habitat for Humanity*  
**Roy Rivera**, *Lincoln Parks and Recreation*  
**Samia Ayoub**, *Lincoln/Lancaster County Health Department*  
**Seif Mahagoub**, *Lived Experience*  
**Shari McCright**, *Lincoln Literacy*  
**Sheila Dorsey Vinton**, *Asian Community and Cultural Center*  
**Shuai Xie**, *Lincoln Chinese Cultural Association*  
**Spencer Munson**, *Lincoln Calling*  
**Steve Griffith**, *Great Plains UMC*  
**Steve Joel**, *Lincoln Public Schools*  
**Susan Kash Brown**, *Southeast Community College*  
**Susan Tatum**, *Lincoln Housing Authority*  
**Takako Olson**, *Lincoln Public Schools*  
**Tareq Al Shareefi**, *Good Neighbor Community Center*  
**Tim Rinne**, *Hawley Hamlet*  
**Todd Duncan**, *Duncan Aviation*  
**Todd Wiltgen**, *Lincoln Chamber of Commerce*  
**Tom Randa**, *Good Neighbor Community Center*  
**Toni Bonsera**, *DHHS*  
**Tony Rodriguez**, *Hartley Heighorhood Association (Lincoln)*  
**Tut Kailech**, *Lived Experience*  
**Tyler Hale**, *Lutheran Family Services*  
**Vishnu Reddi**, *Near South Neighborhood Association (Lincoln)*  
**Wayne Mortensen**, *Neighborworks*  
**Wendy Birdsall**, *Lincoln Chamber of Commerce*  
**Wendy Hunt**, *Nebraska Wesleyan University*  
**Wendy Sieler**, *Mayor's Office - City of Lincoln*  
**Zainab Al-Baaj**, *Good Neighbor Community Center*  
**Zen Kim**, *Lutheran Family Services*

## BACKGROUND

In November 2020, the City of Lincoln and Lancaster County became one of 19 localities to be included in the Gateways for Growth (G4G) program as part of the fourth cohort of the initiative. Launched in 2016, G4G is a competitive opportunity for localities to receive research support and technical assistance from New American Economy and Welcoming America to improve immigrant inclusion in their communities.

As a G4G awardee, Lincoln and Lancaster County are receiving tailored technical assistance from New American Economy and Welcoming America to help draft, execute, and communicate a multi-sector immigrant inclusion strategy.

To create this strategic plan, representatives from the City of Lincoln, Lancaster County, and the New Americans Task Force (NATF) convened a Steering Committee to provide data and feedback on the community's priorities related to immigrant and refugee inclusion and belonging. This Steering Committee includes 67 diverse stakeholders with a wide variety of backgrounds and professions.

The full Steering Committee has met throughout 2021 to learn about issues impacting the Lincoln/Lancaster County immigrant and refugee communities, identify barriers to equitable access and participation, and create recommendations for policies and programs to ensure full belonging of immigrants and refugees in our community. Steering Committee members divided into sub-committees to address six priority areas: Equitable Access; Civic Engagement and Community Connections; Education; Economic Opportunity; Safe and Healthy Communities; and Affordable and Quality Housing.

In August through October of 2021, the G4G Planning Committee surveyed Steering Committee members and other community members in their networks to gather additional data on their vision, perceived barriers, and recommendations to advance each of the six priority areas of the plan. This survey was intended to supplement existing data, including the 2019 NATF survey of 500 immigrant and refugee residents.

## RESULTS

The survey received 110 individual responses. Respondents were asked to identify as one or more of the following: A refugee; An immigrant; Someone who provides direct services to the immigrant/refugee community; Someone who supports welcoming and inclusion in our community. Below is a breakdown of those responses:

A refugee: 18

An immigrant: 24

Someone who provides direct services to the immigrant/refugee community: 28

Someone who supports welcoming and inclusion in our community: 67

**Respondents were also asked to identify their country of origin:**

Afghanistan: 1  
Angola: 1  
Bosnia-Herzegovina: 2  
Burma: 3  
Brazil: 1  
Chad: 1  
Democratic Republic of the Congo: 1  
Honduras: 1  
Iraq: 14  
Kurdistan: 1  
Mexico: 4  
Myanmar: 1  
South Sudan: 1  
Thailand (in a refugee camp): 1  
United States: 61  
Venezuela: 1  
Vietnam: 3  
Zambia: 1

**Below is a breakdown of years lived in the United States, for those who identified as an immigrant or refugee:**

0 - 4 years: 6  
5 - 9 years: 11  
10 - 19 years: 12  
20+ years: 11

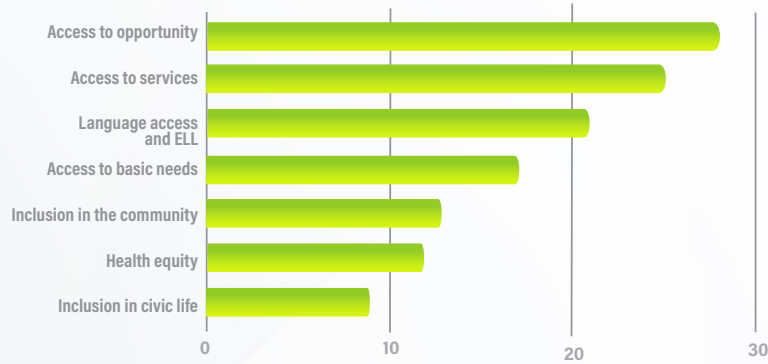
**Responses to the survey provided rich, detailed answers to a series of open-ended questions. For each priority area, respondents were asked to answer three questions:**

1. What does [priority area; e.g. equal education] for refugees and immigrants look like?
2. What challenges stand in the way of achieving this goal?
3. Your ideas to support achieving this goal.

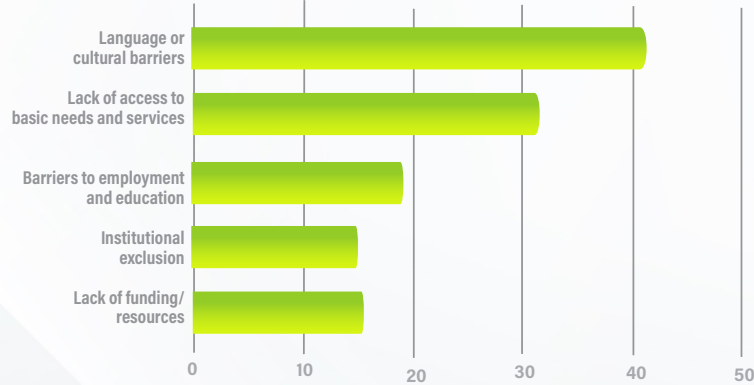
Respondents had the option to answer only questions that were significant to them, and many respondents did not complete the entire survey.

The following is a high-level summary of responses to these questions, grouped by theme. A more detailed summary of responses is available in the Appendix.

“What does equitable access for refugees and immigrants look like?”



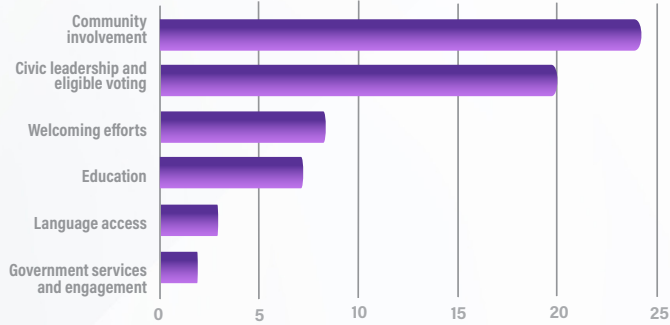
“What challenges stand in the way of achieving this goal?”



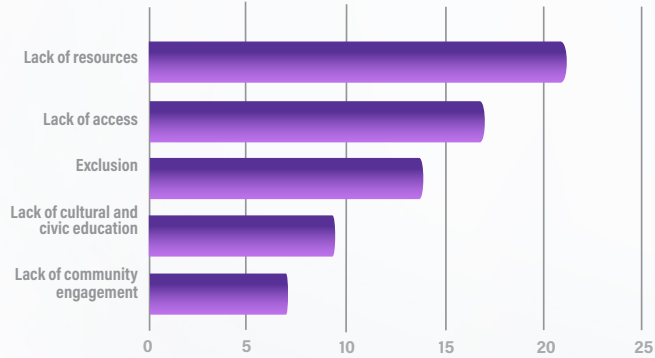
Your ideas to support this goal



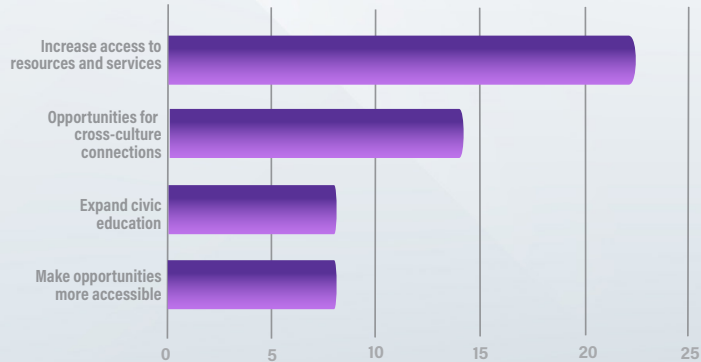
“What do civic engagement and community connections for refugees and immigrants look like?”



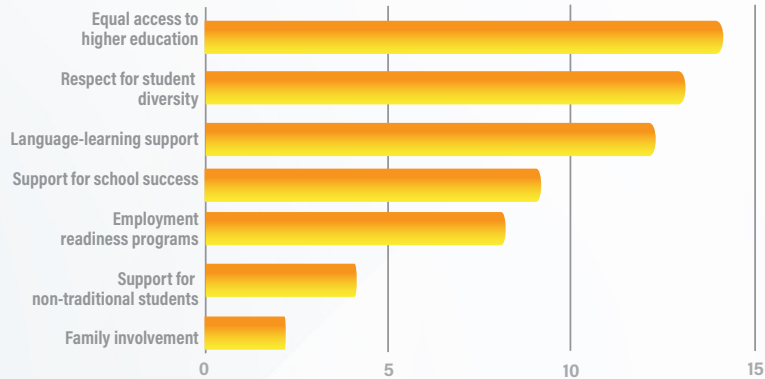
“What challenges stand in the way of achieving this goal?”



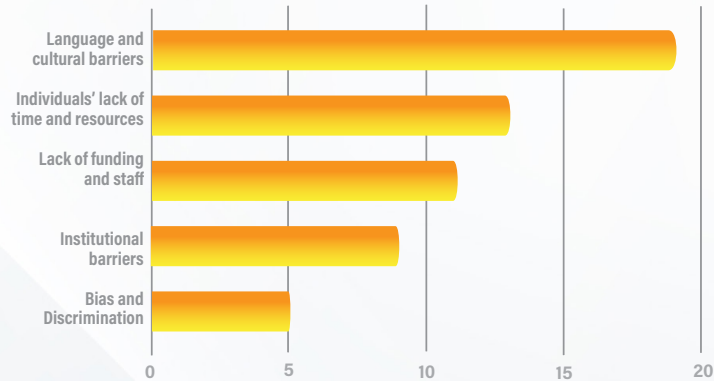
Your ideas to support this goal



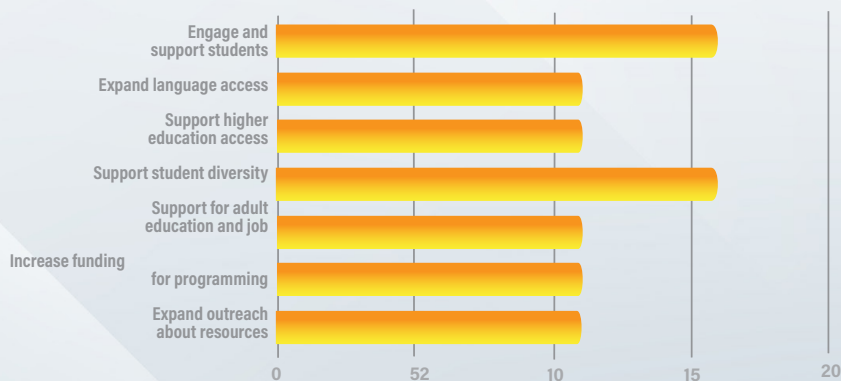
## “What does equal education for refugees and immigrants look like?”



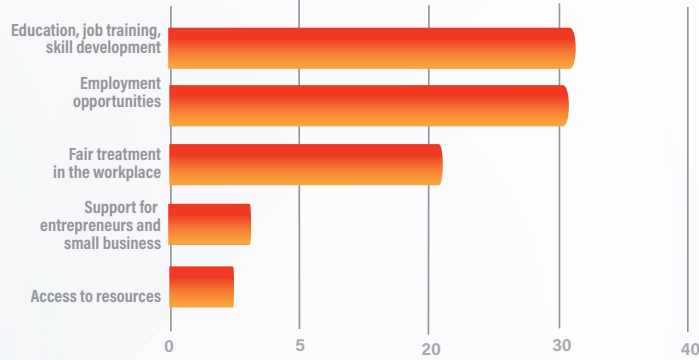
## “What challenges stand in the way of achieving this goal?”



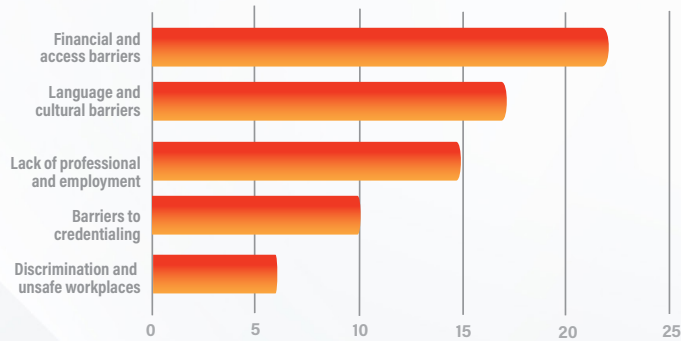
## Your ideas to support this goal



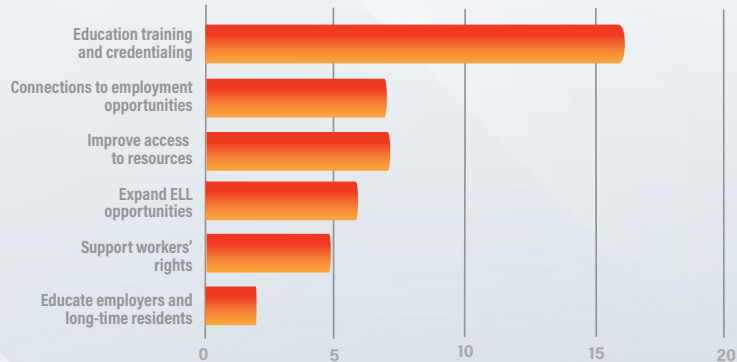
"What does economic opportunity for refugees and immigrants look like?"



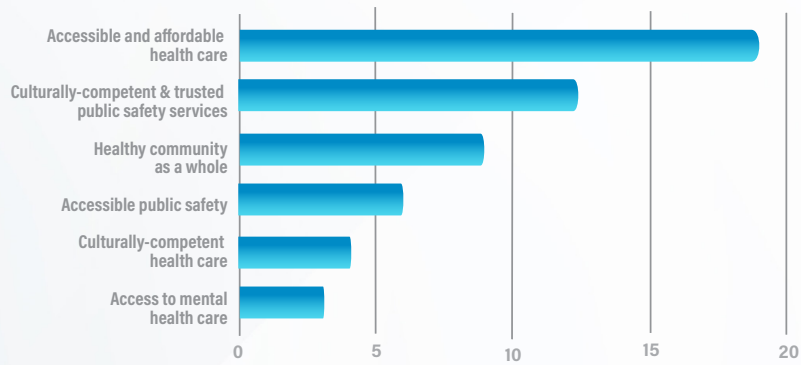
"What challenges stand in the way of achieving this goal?"



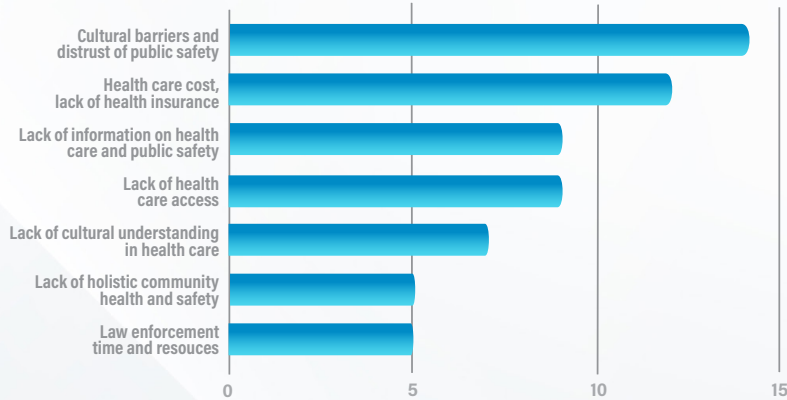
Your ideas to support this goal



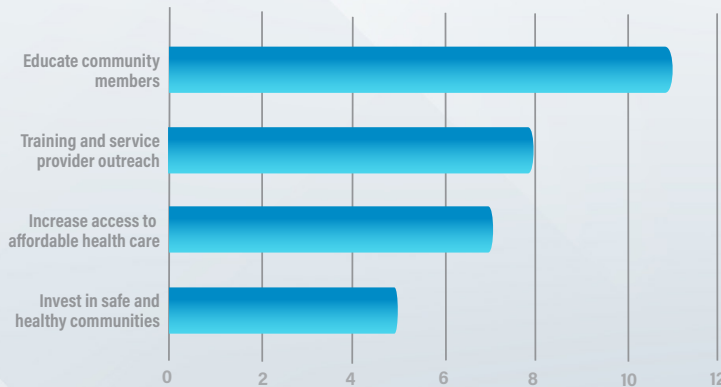
## "What does a safe and healthy community for refugees and immigrants look like?"



## "What challenges stand in the way of achieving this goal?"

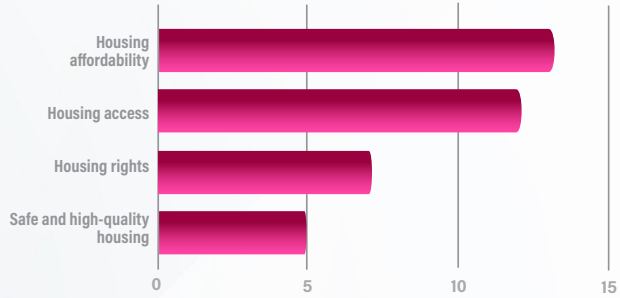


## Your ideas to support this goal

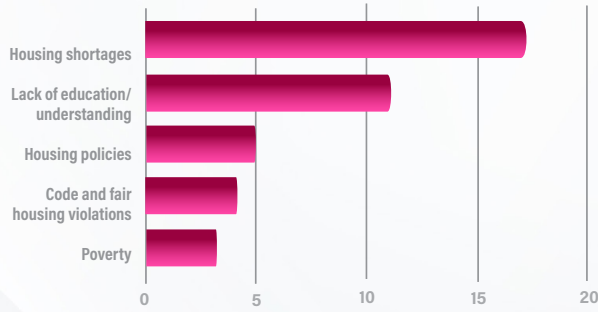




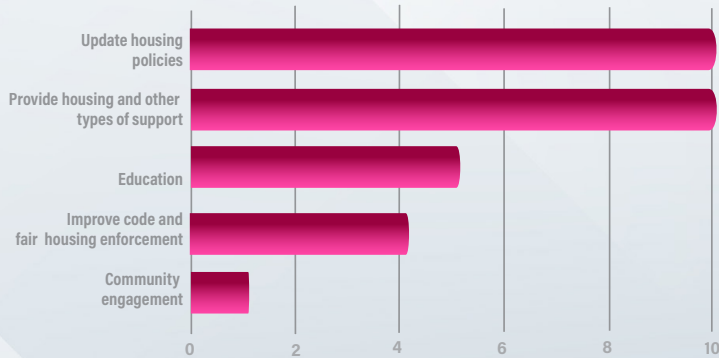
“What does affordable and quality housing for refugees and immigrants look like?”



“What challenges stand in the way of achieving this goal?”



Your ideas to support this goal



# New Americans in Lancaster County

The Demographic and Economic Contributions of Immigrants in the County<sup>1</sup>

MARCH 2022



## Population

**25,600**

immigrants lived in Lancaster County, Nebraska, in 2019.

Immigrants made up



of the total population in the county in 2019.

Between 2014 and 2019, the total population in the county increased by



The immigrant population increased by



during the same time period.



of the total population growth in the county was attributable to immigrants.

## Demographics



of immigrants in Lancaster County are recent arrivals, with no more than 5 years of residency in the United States, meaning



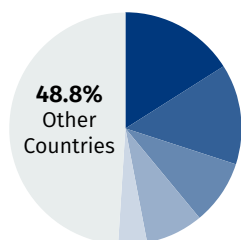
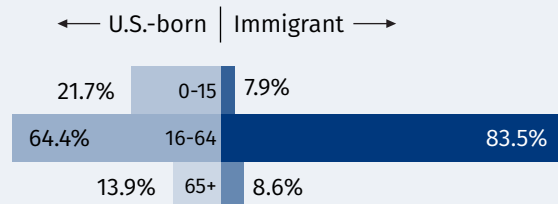
of immigrants in the county have resided in the United States for longer than 5 years.

In the county, immigrants are



more likely to be of working-age than their U.S.-born counterparts, allowing them to actively participate in the labor force and contribute to the economy as taxpayers and consumers.<sup>2</sup>

### Shares of population by age groups:<sup>3</sup>



The top five countries of origin for immigrants living in the county:

- Mexico (15.9%)
- Vietnam (13.5%)
- China (9.4%)
- Iraq (8.4%)
- Sudan (4.0%)

1 Unless otherwise specified, data comes from 5-year samples of the American Community Survey from 2014 and 2019 and figures refer to Lancaster County, Nebraska.

2 We define working age as 16-64 years of age.

3 Totals may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

## Demographics

**5,600**

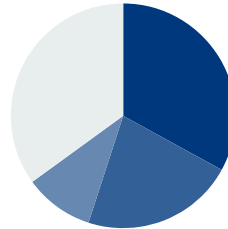
immigrants living in the county had limited English language proficiency, making up



of the immigrant population.

The top languages spoken at home other than English were:

- Spanish (33.4%)
- Vietnamese (21.9%)
- Chinese (10.4%)
- Other (34.3%)



**180,800**

immigrant workers worked in the county in 2019.

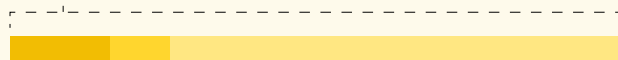


or **15,900** immigrant workers in the county were foreign-born.

## Spending Power & Tax Contributions

Given their income, immigrants contributed significantly to taxes, including property, sales, and excise taxes levied by state and local governments.

In 2019, immigrant households in Lancaster County earned **\$605.1 million**



■ **\$89.2 million**

went to federal taxes<sup>4</sup>

■ **\$60.1 million** went to state & local taxes<sup>5</sup>

■ **\$455.7 million** left in spending power

This means that foreign-born households held



of all spending power in the county.

In 2019, foreign-born residents in the county contributed

**\$1.5 billion**

to the county's GDP, or **7.8%** of the total.<sup>6</sup>

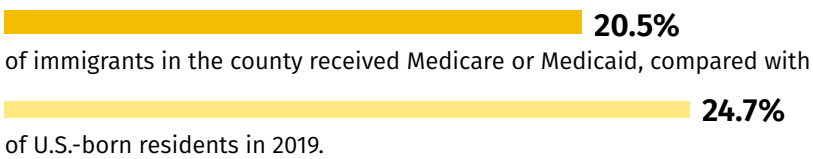
<sup>4</sup> U.S. Congressional Budget Office. 2020. "The Distribution of Household Income and Federal Taxes, 2017."

<sup>5</sup> Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. 2018. "Who Pays? A Distributional Analysis of the Tax Systems in All Fifty States."

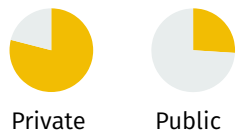
<sup>6</sup> These figures derive from our calculations based on immigrants' share of wage income and self-employment income in the 5-year ACS sample from 2019 and the statistics of GDP from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

## Spending Power & Tax Contributions *(continued)*

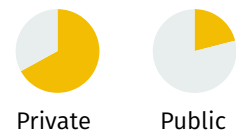
Immigrants in the county also supported federal social programs. In 2019, they contributed



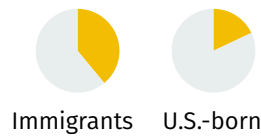
About **79.1%** of U.S.-born had private healthcare coverage, while **25.6%** had public healthcare coverage.<sup>7</sup>



About **66.5%** of immigrants had private healthcare coverage, while **20.6%** had public healthcare coverage.



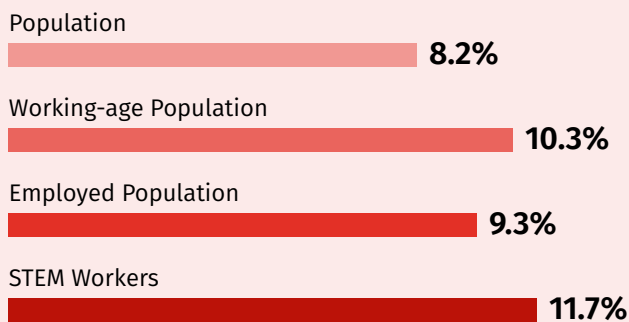
Given their household incomes, **38.8%** of immigrants live at or below 150% of the federal poverty threshold as compared to **18.4%** of U.S.-born residents.



## Workforce

Although the foreign-born made up **8.2%** of the county's overall population, they represented **10.3%** of its working-age population, **9.3%** of its employed labor force, and **11.7%** of its STEM workers in 2019.<sup>8</sup>

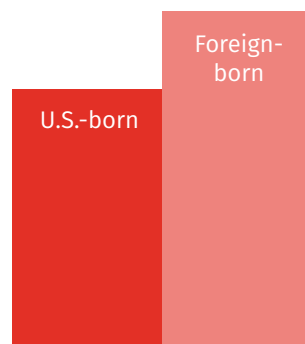
### Immigrant shares of the...



Immigrants in the county are

**29.7%**

more likely to be working age than their U.S.-born counterparts.



<sup>7</sup> Including people who have both public and private healthcare coverage.

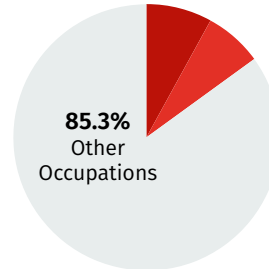
## Workforce

The immigrant working-age population was **48.8%** female and **51.2%** male.



Immigrants tended to work in these occupations in Lancaster County in 2019:

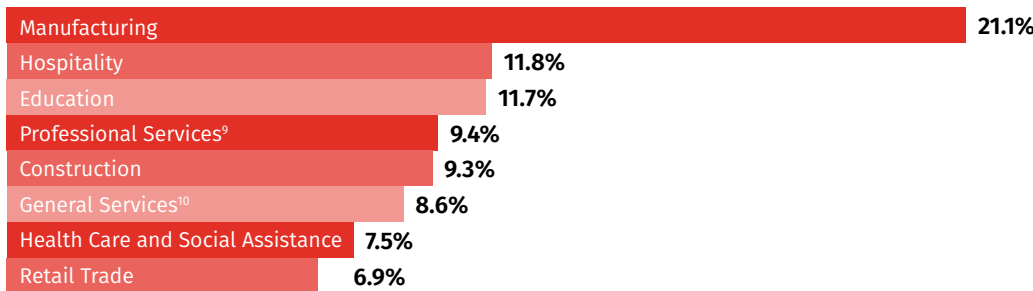
- Postsecondary Teachers (**7.8%**)
- Janitors and Building Cleaners (**6.9%**)



The employed immigrant population was **43.4%** female and **56.6%** male.



Immigrants played a critical role in several key industries in the county. This included:



### SPOTLIGHT ON Immigrant Essential Workers

Immigrants have also been playing vital roles in critical industries that have kept the country functioning throughout the Covid-19 crisis. Immigrants in the county continue working in these frontline and essential industries:

#### Food Service

Immigrants made up



#### Construction

Immigrants made up



#### Healthcare

Immigrants made up



Due to the role immigrants play in the workforce helping companies keep jobs on U.S. soil, we estimate that immigrants living in the county had helped create or preserve

# 1,200 manufacturing jobs

that would have otherwise vanished or moved elsewhere by 2019.<sup>11</sup>

8 STEM refers to occupations that require background or expertise in Science, Technology, Engineering, and/or Math.

9 General services include personal services (e.g. laundry services, barber shops, and repair and maintenance), religious organizations, social services, and labor unions.

10 Professional services mostly include industries that require a degree or a license, such as legal services, accounting, scientific research, consulting services, etc.

11 Vigdor, Jacob. 2013. "Immigration and the Revival of American Cities: From Preserving Manufacturing Jobs to Strengthening the Housing Market." *New American Economy*.

## Workforce *continued*

### SPOTLIGHT ON Job Demand In Lancaster County In 2021

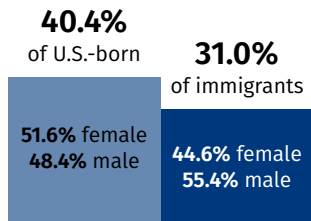
Not only are immigrants more likely to be of working age in the county, but they are also a crucial part of the county's economy, and could help us meet the needs of its fastest growing and most in-demand fields, especially as the need for bilingual and culturally competent public services and healthcare increases.

#### The top 5 industries with the highest demand for bilingual workers:<sup>12</sup>

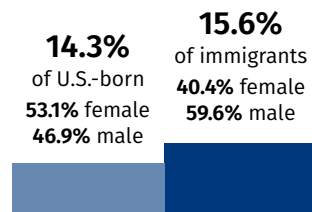
1. Public Administration
2. Information
3. Finance and Insurance
4. Health Care and Social Assistance
5. Accommodation and Food Services

## Education

Share of the county's population aged 25 or above that held a **bachelor's degree or higher** in 2019:



Share of the county's population aged 25 or above that held an **advanced degree** in 2019:



of K-12 students in the county were foreign-born in 2019.



of K-12 students in the county were children of immigrants in 2019.

### SPOTLIGHT ON University Population

**2,638**

students enrolled in colleges and universities in Lancaster County in fall 2019 were temporary residents.<sup>13</sup>

**308**

international students graduated with STEM degrees from colleges and universities in the county in the 2018-19 academic year.

**982**

jobs in higher education were supported by international students in the 2019-2020 academic year. International students contributed

**\$98.6 million**

during the same year.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Data on total student enrollment in the city is derived from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System maintained by the National Center for Education Statistics. Temporary residents refer to people who are not U.S. citizens or permanent residents.

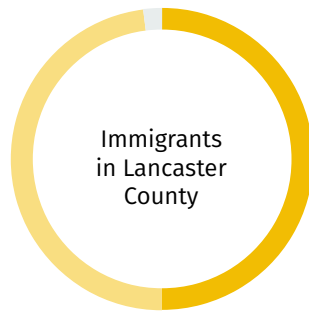
<sup>14</sup> Economic data is derived from the International Student Economic Value Tool maintained by NAFSA, the association of international educators.

## Housing

In 2019, **40.0%** of immigrant households in Lancaster County owned their own homes, compared to **62.1%** of U.S.-born households.



Immigrant U.S.-born



- Lived in Houses **5,300, or 50.0%**
- Lived in Apartments **5,100, or 48.0%**
- Lived in Other Types of Housing **2.0%**

The total property value of immigrant households was

**\$719 million**



**60.0%** of immigrant households were renters. Their total annual rent paid was

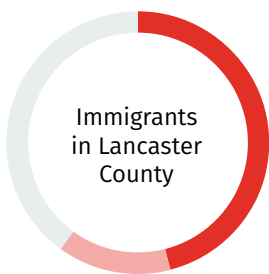
**\$50.1 million**

**77.0%** of immigrant households in the county had access to broadband connection in their homes as compared to **87.9%** of U.S.-born households.



Immigrant U.S.-born

## Naturalization



- **46.2%** Naturalized Citizens (11,800)
- **14.3%** Likely Eligible to Naturalize (3,700)
- **39.5%** Not Eligible to Naturalize (10,100)



Nationally, **48.7%** of immigrants are naturalized citizens, **15.9%** are likely eligible to naturalize, and **35.4%** are not yet eligible.



of households in Lancaster County had at least one foreign-born resident in 2019.

If all immigrants who are eligible to naturalize became U.S. citizens, their earning potential would increase by

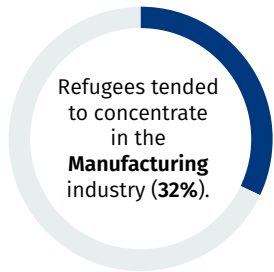
**+8.9%**<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Enchautegui, Maria E. and Linda Giannarelli. 2015. "The Economic Impact of Naturalization on Immigrants and Cities." Urban Institute.

## Refugees

**7,300**

residents, or **28.4%** of the foreign-born population in Lancaster County, were likely refugees.<sup>16</sup>



**70.6%**

of refugees in the area were **naturalized U.S. citizens.**

**17.9%**

of refugees held at least a **bachelor's degree.**

In 2019, refugee households in the county earned **\$185.5 million**

■ **\$24.6 million**

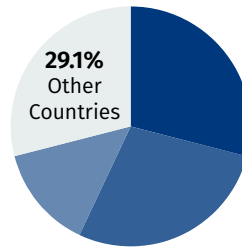
went to federal taxes<sup>17</sup>

■ **\$18.5 million** went to state & local taxes<sup>18</sup>

■ **\$142.4 million** left in spending power

The top countries of origin for the refugee population in the county:

- Vietnam (28.8%)
- Iraq (28.1%)
- Sudan (14.0%)



## Undocumented Immigrants

**5,000**

undocumented immigrants in Lancaster County in 2019. They made up

**19.6%**

of the immigrant population.

Undocumented immigrants are highly active in the labor force. About

**82.7%**

are of working-age in the county.

In 2019, undocumented immigrant households earned **\$78.5 million**

■ **\$4.2 million**

went to federal taxes<sup>19</sup>

■ **\$4.0 million** went to state & local taxes<sup>20</sup>

■ **\$70.2 million** was left in spending power

The top country of origin for undocumented immigrants in the county was **Mexico (36.9%).**

<sup>16</sup> *New American Economy*. 2017. "From Struggle to Resilience: The Economic Impact of Refugees in America."

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Congressional Budget Office. 2020. "The Distribution of Household Income and Federal Taxes, 2017."

<sup>18</sup> Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. 2018. "Who Pays? A Distributional Analysis of the Tax Systems in All Fifty States."

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Congressional Budget Office. 2020. "The Distribution of Household Income and Federal Taxes, 2017."

<sup>20</sup> Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. 2018. "Who Pays? A Distributional Analysis of the Tax Systems in All Fifty States."



# New Americans in the City of Lincoln

The Demographic and Economic Contributions of Immigrants in the City

## Population

**23,300**

immigrants lived in Lincoln, Nebraska, in 2019.

Immigrants made up



of the total population in the city in 2019.

Between 2014 and 2019, the total population in the city increased by



The immigrant population increased by

**+15.7%**

during the same time period.

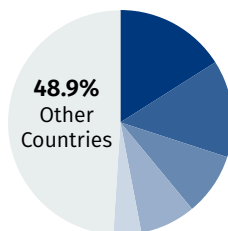


of the total population growth in the city was attributable to immigrants.

## Demographics

The top five countries of origin for immigrants living in the city:

- Mexico (16.0%)
- Vietnam (13.6%)
- China (9.6%)
- Iraq (8.3%)
- India (3.6%)



## Spending Power & Tax Contributions

Given their income, immigrants contributed significantly to taxes, including property, sales, and excise taxes levied by state and local governments.

In 2019, immigrant households in Lincoln earned **\$546.3 million**

■ **\$80.3 million**

went to federal taxes<sup>21</sup>

■ **\$54.3 million** went to state & local taxes<sup>22</sup>

■ **\$411.7 million** left in spending power

This means that foreign-born households held



of all spending power in the city.

<sup>21</sup> U.S. Congressional Budget Office. 2020. "The Distribution of Household Income and Federal Taxes, 2017."

<sup>22</sup> Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. 2018. "Who Pays? A Distributional Analysis of the Tax Systems in All Fifty States."

**SPOTLIGHT ON**

## David Manzanares

In 2017, David Manzanares moved to Lincoln with his Nebraskan-born wife and two sons, then ages 3 and 1. Manzanares is a mural and sculpture artist whose work often revolves around his Oaxacan heritage. He hoped America would help expand his audience and provide more job opportunities.

But Manzanares found it difficult to navigate the bureaucracy of the immigration process. “Many people don’t realize how long it takes,” he says. “It was a stressful time.” While waiting for his work permit and green card, he wasn’t allowed to earn a paycheck or get a driver’s license. That essentially stranded him at home and put the burden of supporting the family on his wife, a biologist. He also struggled to find his footing as an artist. Back home in Mexico, he was well established. In Lincoln, curators and museums seemed unwilling to give him a chance.

Over time, he began doing public art installations and gained recognition. A recent mural reflects the disproportionate toll Covid has taken on communities of color and features portraits of pandemic victims, including Manzanares’ father. “It helped me cope with my grief,” he says. He finished it a few days before Dia de Los Muertos when dozens of community members placed “ofrendas” or offerings in front of the mural to honor the dead. “Art is related to the community, and it’s important for me to address the things I want to see changed,” he says.

For instance, Manzanares believes there should be more teacher diversity at local public schools, given the large non-white student population. He has advocated for this, along with more ESL classes and services in Spanish at schools like Everett Elementary in South Lincoln, where he teaches art through an after-school program. “It’s important for students to see people in authority who look and talk like their parents,” he says.

One thing Lincoln has done well is My City Academy. Through the program, Manzanares has been able to advocate for his community: helping immigrants get driver’s licenses and requesting more Spanish signs and instructions around the city. “It’s an opportunity for city officials to look beyond their bubble,” he says.

**SPOTLIGHT ON**

## Maysoon Shaheen

Maysoon Shaheen fled Iraq in 1998 during Saddam Hussein’s regime, a move that likely saved her life. In order to receive her bachelor’s in education, Shaheen was required to sign a form saying she supported Saddam. She refused and escaped to Jordan. “I couldn’t receive my diploma or any paperwork proving I’d earned my degree, but we had to leave the country just to feel safe,” she said.

During her two and a half years in a refugee camp, Shaheen met her husband, a former math teacher from Iraq. They married a few days before they left for America as refugees. But the transition wasn’t easy. Shaheen had left behind family, friends, culture and language – and each day presented new challenges. Her husband found work as a machine operator at a mail sorting center. Catholic Services connected her to a job agency, but they didn’t have placements for anyone with a higher education. Instead, Shaheen worked at the same mail sorting center as her husband. But through volunteering to translate for friends at their doctor appointments, she was hired as a medical interpreter a year later. She returned to school, graduating from University of Nebraska at Omaha in 2017 with a master’s in ESL teaching.

Today, Shaheen works as an interpreter at the local company LanguageLinc, teaches ESL online through Southeast Community College, and is a doctoral student of education at Doane University. She often advises immigrant women with higher education degrees from their home countries on how to navigate the American job market. “I want them to feel confident in their educational journeys,” she says. “Once a woman decides to start this journey, nothing can stop her.”

Over the years, she’s seen Lincoln offer more services to newcomers. She’s particularly impressed with a program called My City Academy, which is run by the City of Lincoln Commission on Human Rights and teaches immigrants how to utilize local government services. Through the program, she became an ambassador for her local Arabic community, connecting people with education, job assistance and healthcare. “We had to do everything ourselves when we arrived,” she says. “I only wish we had this back then.”