

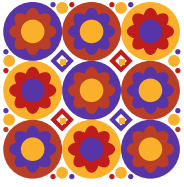


Immigrant Integration Plan

2020-2030

Aurora is open to the world

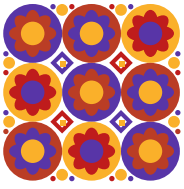




Acknowledgements

On behalf of the Office of International and Immigrant Affairs, we would like to offer a special thank you to the following:

- Mayor Mike Coffman
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- Root Policy
- Aurora Immigrant & Refugee Commission



IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION PLAN

Aurora is open to the world | 2020 – 2030



Mike Coffman, Mayor



Jim Twombly, City Manager

A note from Mayor Mike Coffman & City Manager Jim Twombly

In 2015, the city of Aurora put forward a plan to help better integrate immigrants and refugees into the cultural, economic and civic life of our community, recognizing the increasing size and importance of our international population. We knew even then that Aurora's diversity was among our greatest strengths and that the future of our city was dependent on our ability to work, grow and learn together.

In the intervening years, under the leadership and innovation of our Office of International and Immigrant Affairs, we have seen that plan take root and produce dividends that we could only have imagined just a few short years ago. From the opening of Colorado's first consular office outside of Denver, to the development of a flourishing and award-winning Natural Helpers Program, to the entrepreneurial grants that have inspired new and unique businesses in our city, we are excited by the great strides we've already made.

But we know there is much more to do. The partnerships we have created, the trust we have built, the ideas we have sparked – all of this requires our continued support and nurturing so we can be a city that helps all our residents dream big and achieve even more. This updated strategic plan for the next 10 years (2020–2030) sets the groundwork for how we will be an international business and cultural destination, a welcoming melting pot of people and experiences, and a city of opportunity for residents of all backgrounds.

As the third-largest city in Colorado, and one of the most diverse large cities in the United States, Aurora is ready to show the world how a modern, diverse community can work collaboratively for the benefit of all. In recent years, we have hosted numerous international delegations and led local delegations to key strategic global partners, in pursuit of economic and cultural exchanges that build upon our international population. Our approach, from providing services and outreach at the individual level, to engaging countries and corporations on a macro level, sets up Aurora for being a model 21st century international city.

We are energized and encouraged by Aurora's future, and we encourage all residents, businesses and other local stakeholders to contribute to this 10-year plan and its vision for a welcoming, entrepreneurial and culturally rich community. Together, we embrace our different pasts, celebrate our present successes, and look forward to a future where we work together as one Aurora.

Mike Coffman, Mayor

Jim Twombly, City Manager

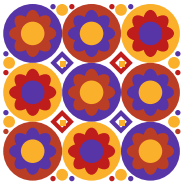
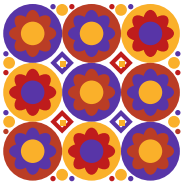


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IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION PLAN

Aurora is open to the world | 2020 – 2030

Executive Summary

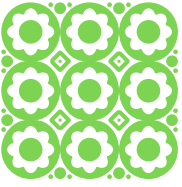
The city of Aurora has completed its first three-year immigrant integration plan and is looking ahead to the next 10 years. This report reviews accomplishments in the city's efforts from the beginning of its three-year plan in 2015 to the present. It then presents an integration plan for the period 2020 – 2030, with planned activities in 12 goal areas. In each goal area, we explain its importance and relate our planned activities to what we learned in our outreach to immigrant and refugee communities, stakeholder organizations, city agencies and departments, and key community leaders. Finally, there is a brief discussion on measuring progress as we go forward.

Aurora is becoming more diverse, as people from around the globe continue to move to our city. Currently, Aurora's foreign-born residents make up 20 percent of the population, and they will make up an increasing fraction of the city's workforce in the future. Immigrants and refugees arrive in Aurora with varying levels of skill and degrees of English proficiency. Given their importance to Aurora's future workforce, as well as their high rate of entrepreneurship, an investment in their integration is a wise choice.

Responding to growing diversity, the city drafted an integration plan, adopted in 2015, and created the Office of International and Immigrant Affairs (OIIA), charged with carrying out that plan with partner nonprofit and faith-based organizations, other city departments and educational institutions. The plan contained a list of activities in each of nine goal areas. Highlights of what was accomplished with the implementation of the first three-year plan include:

- 1 The city won accolades for its innovative programs, including the Natural Helpers program. This recognition came in the form of regional and national awards and outside funding to implement and expand the program, and to create a similar program for high school and middle school youth.
- 2 The city helped expand the capacity of partner organizations to conduct English and citizenship classes. The city promoted citizenship by, among other things, hosting a ceremony once a year in the municipal building.
- 3 With partner organizations, the city fostered immigrant and refugee leadership through the Natural Helpers program, in which more than 150 people from 25 countries have been trained. Trained Natural Helpers are equipped to provide information to newly arriving immigrants and refugees on city services and private assistance that is available to immigrants and refugees.

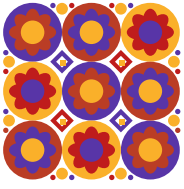




Executive Summary continued

- 4 OIIA worked with the Aurora Police Department to develop and implement community policing programs for immigrant and refugee communities – including the International Teen Police Academy in which teens from the city’s international community built relationships with members of the police force and learned about careers in law enforcement. The work of Aurora and its police department was recognized and highlighted by the Police Executive Research Forum in a special publication dedicated to community policing in immigrant communities.
- 5 OIIA worked with partners to provide education and training to immigrant entrepreneurs as well as startup funding through the Aurora International Impact Fund. The result has been the creation of 143 jobs.
- 6 OIIA hosted international delegations and planned mayoral business missions and city-sponsored international trips, in an effort to persuade governments and international businesses to locate in Aurora. This work paid off with the opening of the Salvadoran Consulate in Aurora and, most recently, the opening of couple Korean restaurant franchise chains.
- 7 OIIA worked with health care organizations to launch the Health Powers Life campaign, which provided information on health care and healthy lifestyles, as well as health screening via a mobile health unit. The campaign won an award for excellence in marketing and communication from the Academy of Interactive & Visual Arts.
- 8 OIIA promoted the arts, culture and sports of immigrant and refugee communities to build community cohesiveness – cosponsoring and promoting ethnic festivals, sports tournaments and, most importantly, helping to organize the annual Global Fest, Aurora’s flagship event for celebrating its cultural diversity. Global Fest now attracts 10,000 people a year.
- 9 The city, under OIIA’s leadership, is beginning to implement a language assistance plan so the city may better communicate with residents in a language they understand. The city conducted a needs assessment study to inform its work, and is currently implementing its recommendations. OIIA, working with the city’s IT department, has set up an online ticketing system for translation and interpretation services for city staff.



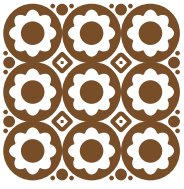


Highlights from the 12 goal areas

In 2019, the city engaged consultants to reach out to the community to assess needs to be addressed in a new immigrant integration plan. Outreach consisted of a series of focus groups with and surveys of the city's residents and representatives of various stakeholder groups – including immigrant- and refugee-serving nonprofits, faith-based and ethnic organizations, city agencies and others. In addition, a select group of key community leaders were interviewed.

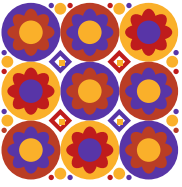
The insights gained from the surveys, focus groups and interviews have informed the 2020 – 2030 immigrant integration plan. The plan consists of 12 goal areas. For each goal area, we provide a brief discussion on the importance of working toward the goal, a reminder of what the city has already done in that area, a summary of relevant information from the community discussions and a list of planned activities. We also provide context from other city long-range planning documents. **Highlights from each of the 12 goal areas in the proposed plan include:**

- 1 Promote immigrant entrepreneurship: Immigrants and refugees are more inclined to start businesses than their native-born counterparts. While the city's first integration plan included a focus on promoting entrepreneurship for immigrants and refugees, there is more work to do.** Foreign-born participants in the focus groups and surveys we conducted in 2019 told us they lacked information on starting a business in Aurora. They also perceive a number of barriers that make starting a business difficult. The city plans to continue and expand some of the work begun under the last integration plan, and will address problems identified in community outreach by, among other things, opening a Small Business Center for Newcomers.
- 2 Housing and Homeownership:** Affordable housing was not a focus of work in Aurora's first integration plan, but in focus groups conducted to get community feedback prior to drafting this plan, we heard repeatedly that affordable housing is becoming an issue of concern. OIIA will support government and private sector programs and policies to construct and preserve affordable housing to prevent displacement, with a focus on immigrant neighborhoods. The office will promote or develop its own programs in which immigrants and refugees can learn about homeownership and where to find resources to help them overcome barriers to homeownership. OIIA will develop and expand programs for renters, as well as homeowners about their rights and responsibilities, and will support efforts to protect newcomers from predatory practices.
- 3 Ensure immigrants and refugees have job skills and certifications they need to thrive:** Even when immigrants and refugees do have higher skill levels, the degrees, licenses, professional certificates or work experience (their professional and educational "credentials") may not be accepted in the U.S. The city will support efforts of the county governments that run workforce development and job training programs, and will partner with private organizations that help immigrants and refugees translate their foreign credentials. OIIA will educate Aurora's immigrants and refugees about available resources and how they can connect with the programs that can help. An international internship program will provide immigrant students with experience working for the city.
- 4 Expand English learning opportunities: Immigrants and refugees arriving in Aurora without knowledge of English have limited economic opportunities.** In surveys and focus groups, immigrants and refugees told us that learning English was their top priority. The city will assist partner organizations to expand their English and citizenship classes. The city will explore partnerships with employers, educational institutions and nonprofit organizations to provide contextualized English language instruction in workplaces. New methods and technologies will be used to deliver lessons to those who may not be able to attend traditional English classes.



Highlights from the 12 goal areas continued

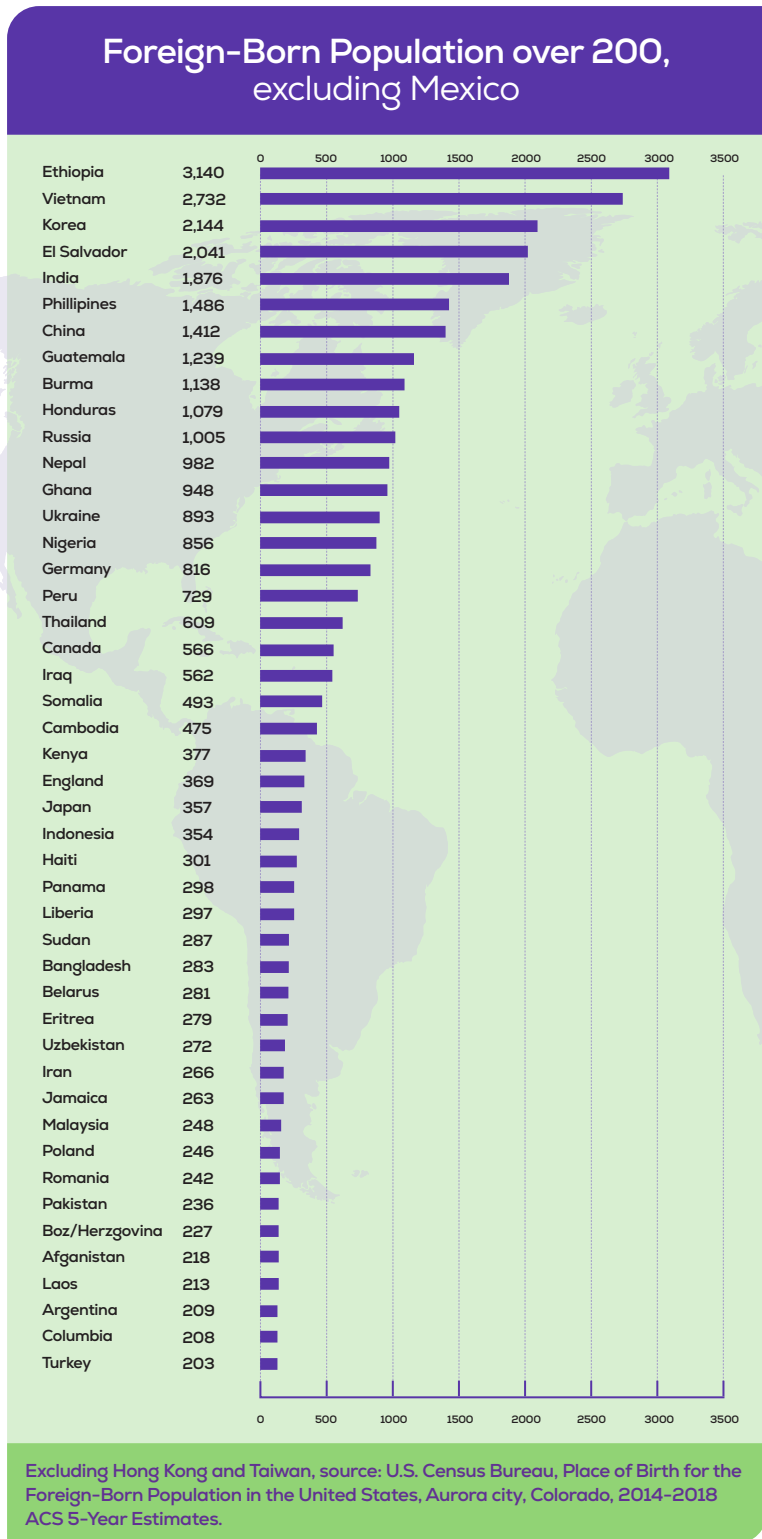
- 5 Ensure city services are accessible to speakers of other languages:** The city will continue to develop and implement its Language Access Plan, so that city staff can interact with and deliver city services to all residents of Aurora, no matter what language they speak.
- 6 Work with the Police and Fire departments to strengthen public safety:** OIIA will continue to work with Aurora Police Department to help build and maintain trust between Aurora's police and the international community. OIIA, working with the Police Department, will relaunch the highly regarded International Teen Police Academy. Similarly, OIIA will work with Aurora Fire Rescue to launch an International Teen Fire Academy. OIIA will assist the departments in crime prevention and fire safety programs targeted to the international community, and in recruiting members of the international community for careers in Fire and Police Department.
- 7 Promote refugee and immigrant leadership:** OIIA, through its partner organizations, will continue training immigrants and refugees through its highly regarded Natural Helpers program. Youth leadership will be promoted through the Youth Natural Leaders program. The city will also work with the Family Leadership Training Institute to train immigrant and refugee leaders. A new Cultural Orientation Program will include a toolkit to help newcomers on their path to integration into the community.
- 8 Promote preventive health care and healthy lifestyles:** The city, with healthcare partners, will continue to provide health-related education to Aurora's immigrant and refugee communities. Surveys and focus groups also identified a need for mental health services, especially for refugee communities, and the city will support mental health programs for immigrants and refugees.
- 9 Promote international business:** OIIA will continue to manage city efforts to promote international trade and investment by hosting international business delegations, organizing trade conferences and coordinating international trade missions.
- 10 Encourage immigrants to become citizens:** The city will continue its efforts to promote U.S. citizenship, including by conducting naturalization campaigns to urge eligible immigrants to apply for naturalization and by hosting citizenship swearing-in ceremonies at city hall. It will also support the expansion of citizenship classes provided by partner organizations.
- 11 Incorporate immigrants and refugees into the cultural life of the city:** OIIA will continue and expand its efforts to support and promote the cultural celebrations and events of its immigrant and refugee communities, and will expand the city's flagship international celebration, Global Fest. The city will also be supporting a new major international festival, the New American Arts Festival, which will stage its premiere in 2020. OIIA will work with other city cultural institutions, such as the library system and the history museum, to develop cultural programs involving Aurora's immigrant and refugee communities.
- 12 Bringing Aurorans together through sports:** OIIA will work with other city departments to expand recreation and sports programs and facilities for Aurora's immigrant and refugee populations, and will organize an International Soccer Cup.



IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION PLAN

I. Aurora Has Become Increasingly Diverse

To measure and evaluate the integration plan as it is being implemented, a set of metrics will be developed, and they will be presented in a way that is accessible to city staff and the public. The plan also includes ideas for “aspirational evaluations” that, if resources permit, could measure, for example, the progress of refugees in the city over time.



Aurora is Open to the World

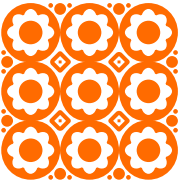
Aurora is a fast-growing city for many reasons. Its favorable climate, business-oriented attitude, natural amenities, transportation infrastructure, as well as a reasonable cost of living, attract people from across the country and around the globe. Today, approximately one in five residents of Aurora has moved here from outside the U.S.

Where have these immigrants and refugees come from? More than half (55 percent) come from the Americas, with the vast majority Mexican in origin. A quarter of our immigrants and refugees are from Asia, with sizeable populations from Vietnam, Korea, India and the Philippines. More than one in 10 of our international residents (13 percent) is from Africa, with Ethiopia, Ghana and Nigeria the three leading nations of origin.

Aurora continues to attract. In 2018, there were more than 9,000 new legal permanent resident immigrants in the Denver/Aurora metro area, with the bulk of them coming from Mexico, Ethiopia, Vietnam, China, India, Nepal, Iraq, Afghanistan and Burma. According to U.S. State Department data, since 2015, approximately 380 refugees – from Burma, Bhutan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Ethiopia and elsewhere – have settled in Aurora.

In 2015, city leaders made the decision to be more intentional in welcoming the newcomer international population and, together with partners in the nonprofit world, the city created a three-year plan to carry out a set of actions to ensure that the international population has the best information and the resources they need to adjust to life in the United States and in Aurora, so they can contribute to our dynamic economy as quickly as possible.

This document presents highlights of those efforts and presents a set of goals and proposed actions for the next 10 years.



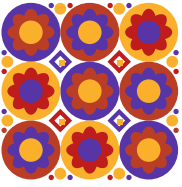
I. Aurora Has Become Increasingly Diverse

Why Are We Doing This?

It's worth a few words to review what is meant by immigrant integration, and why Aurora – as well as cities and towns across America – takes on that task. According to one definition, “[i]mmigrant integration is the process of economic mobility and social inclusion for newcomers and their children.” In other words, it is the process by which immigrants and refugees gain the language and cultural skills to adapt to our society and incorporate themselves into our workforce. In the process, integration builds communities that are more inclusive and economically vibrant. While the national government sets immigration limits, it has little to do with immigrants once they arrive in the U.S. The institutions through which immigrants are integrated are local institutions – schools, adult education and workforce development systems, local governments, community organizations and so on.

The work of integration is important because of the importance of immigrants and refugees to Aurora's present and future. According to the Census, individuals who are foreign-born make up approximately 20 percent of Aurora's population, but there are disproportionately more immigrants in the workforce. Of the 198,000 Aurora residents who are in the civilian workforce, a quarter are immigrants. Immigrants are much more disproportionately represented in certain industries. For example, of the 18,600 Aurora residents employed in the construction industry, half are foreign-born. One-third (33.5 percent) of Aurora residents who work in “arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services” (a Census industry group category) were born in another country. A third (33.3 percent) of Aurora residents who work in manufacturing are foreign-born.





I. Aurora Has Become Increasingly Diverse

Most immigrants and refugees don't arrive with all the skills they need to plug into our workforce right away. For example, 32.8 percent of Aurora's population age 5 and older speaks a language other than English at home. Of these, according to Census data, 44.3 percent speak English less than "very well" – the threshold used to categorize someone as "limited English proficient."

Another challenge is poverty. About one in five (18.3 percent) of Aurora's immigrant and refugee families is living in poverty, compared with 5.5 percent of native families. **The city's work to help immigrants integrate into Aurora's economic, social and political life is an investment** – one that will pay greater dividends over time as foreign-born workers make up an increasingly important part of the workforce. They will also help Aurora's economy grow by starting new businesses. In general, immigrants and refugees are more inclined to be entrepreneurs than the native population. Nationwide in 2015, approximately 9 percent of U.S.-born natives were entrepreneurs, while approximately 11.5 percent of immigrants were entrepreneurs. Refugees had an even higher rate of entrepreneurship – 13 percent – meaning refugees were almost half more likely to be entrepreneurs as were natives.

Aurora is not alone in investing in its international community. By the time our Office of International and Immigrant Affairs began its work, there were two dozen cities across the country with similar offices. Another dozen such offices have come online in the past few years. Aurora is still at the cutting edge of this work, however, and some of its programs serve as models for other communities looking for innovative ways to help immigrants integrate. For example, Portland, Maine, is about to launch a Natural Helpers program modeled after Aurora's program.

Entrepreneurship Rate of Refugees vs. other Immigrants and U.S. Natives

Refugees	13%
Immigrants	11.5%
Natives	9%

Source: National Immigration Forum, Immigrants as Economic Contributors: Immigrant Entrepreneurs 2018

Percent of Aurora Immigrant Resident Employment by Industry

Construction	49.6%
Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Food & Accommodation	33.5%
Manufacturing	33.3%
Other services (Non Public Administration)	28.3%
Professional, Scientific, Management & Administrative	24.1%
Wholesale Trade	22.8%
Agriculture, Forestry and Hunting, Mining	21.6%
Transportation and Warehousing, Utilities	21.5%
Education Services, Health Care & Social Assistance	19.2%
Retail Trade	17.9%
Information	16.2%
Finance & Insurance, Real Estate, Rental & Leasing	13.6%
Public Administration	10.4%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 ACS 5-Year Estimates





IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION PLAN

II. Early Responses

In the late 2000s, refugees from Asia and Africa began arriving in Aurora, and as their numbers grew and the city became more diverse, city leaders realized they needed to have a more systematic response to the ongoing arrival of newcomers. Initially, the city supported its growing international community through several initiatives implemented in 2014 and 2015.

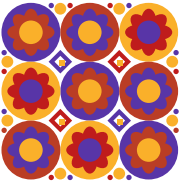
The city supported the creation of the Aurora Welcome Center, partnering with several other groups that shared office space inside the administration building of Aurora Public Schools. The Welcome Center was a “one-stop shop” for immigrants and refugees seeking the information and assistance they needed to help them integrate into our community. (The Welcome Center has since been succeeded by the Village Exchange Center.)

The Aurora Immigrant and Refugee Task Force was formed with the goal of reaching out to immigrant and refugee communities and identifying their needs, in order to provide advice to the city. (It has since been formalized as a city commission.)

The Aurora International Roundtable was created “to assist and collaborate with the city of Aurora in the creation of international business opportunities, to celebrate the economic, cultural and civic contributions of the international community.”

The first Global Fest was organized in 2014, and it is now an annual event celebrating the diverse cultures that make up Aurora’s international community. It now attracts 10,000 attendees.





IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION PLAN

III. A Plan for Integration

In 2015, the city resolved to coordinate its sprouting initiatives to assist the international community through the Office of International Initiatives. That office began the process that led to the adoption of Aurora's first three-year plan for immigrant integration.

In preparing for the plan, the city contracted with researchers to conduct surveys and focus groups to assess the needs of the international community, to find out how the city is perceived by the community and to learn more about the community's interests and motivations. City staff also researched best practices from other cities that have placed a priority on the integration of their international residents.

The input received from service providers and from immigrants and refugees themselves helped shape priorities and recommendations in the first immigrant integration plan. The plan included a set of strategic policy recommendations, as well as a set of nine goal areas and proposed activities under each. The city proposed to work with a range of partner organization to carry out the work.





IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION PLAN

IV. Accomplishments

Coordination and Partnerships to Serve Aurora's Immigrants and Refugees

The plan was ambitious, and it required some restructuring to carry out recommendations efficiently while minimizing duplication of effort. Some of that restructuring was included in the integration plan's recommendations and was quickly implemented. The Office of International and Immigrant Affairs (OIIA) replaced the Office of International Initiatives. OIIA was charged with taking the lead on managing the city's immigrant integration initiatives and international relations (including promotion of the city for international business). OIIA serves as a point of contact for Aurora's immigrant and refugee communities and for international delegations seeking business opportunities with Aurora.

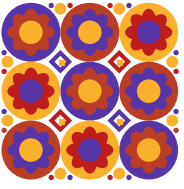
The city's Immigrant and Refugee Task Force was made into a formal city commission, the Aurora Immigrant and Refugee Commission, with staffing responsibilities assigned to OIIA. The commission, composed of 11 members from Aurora's various immigrant and refugee communities, helps the city reach out to and receive feedback from those communities.

The city looked to establish key partnerships with nonprofit organizations, faith-based organizations, schools and the private sector to work together with OIIA to achieve the goals of the integration plan. Among the city's partners early on were:

- 1 The Village Exchange Center (formerly the Aurora Welcome Center).** The Village Exchange Center is a nonprofit serving immigrant and refugee communities in the Aurora/Denver area, now located in donated space in the former St. Matthew's Lutheran Church. The Exchange Center provides a community center, multi-faith worship space and office space for other nonprofits with similar purposes. Among other things, the Village Exchange Center manages the city's Natural Helpers program.
- 2 The International Roundtable** partnered with the city to increase international business opportunities, to celebrate the contributions of Aurora's diverse communities and to organize the annual Global Fest. (The Roundtable has since ceased to exist under that name, with many of its members instead having joined the Immigrant and Refugee Commission and the Global Fest Community Advisory Committee.)

OIIA was also the point office within the city to create partnerships with community organizations and other city departments to accomplish integration plan goals.





IV. Accomplishments

Accolades for the city of Aurora

- 1** The implementation of the immigrant integration plan quickly attracted attention, with the city receiving awards and outside funding for its work.
- 2** The National League of Cities awarded Aurora one of its City Cultural Diversity awards for 2017. Aurora was one of six cities to receive the award, given to cities for promoting “cultural diversity in community governance through citizen and community participation.”
- 3** That honor was followed soon after by a Metro Vision Award from the Denver Regional Council of Governments. The Metro Vision Award recognizes “exemplary projects, plans, and initiatives that significantly improve the quality of life in the Denver region.” The award was given in recognition of the city’s Natural Helpers program, conducted in partnership at the time with the Aurora Welcome Center (now the Village Exchange Center). Aurora’s Natural Helpers program also garnered an honorable mention in the U.S. Conference of Mayors 2018 City Livability Awards.
- 4** In 2018, the Health Powers Life Campaign won an award for excellence in marketing and communication from the Academy of Interactive & Visual Arts.
- 5** In August 2019, for its work promoting international business opportunities for Aurora, OIIA was awarded the 2019 Public Service of the Year award from the Global Chamber Denver.
- 6** In December 2019, the city was awarded the 2019 Outstanding Government Resources Award from World Denver, on behalf of the U.S. State Department International Visitor Leadership Program. In presenting the award, World Denver recognized Aurora for its “commitment to making the city a welcoming place for international businesses, government delegations and visitors.”
- 7** Aurora has also been recognized for its public safety initiatives with immigrant communities. In September 2019, the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), a research organization that focuses on critical issues in policing, put out a report profiling the OIIA and Aurora Police Department for outstanding work in building positive relationships with immigrant communities while at the same time maintaining open lines of communication with federal immigration authorities.
- 8** The city’s innovative programs also attracted outside funding. In 2017, the Natural Helpers program was awarded a \$50,000 grant from the Colorado Health Foundation to expand the program to provide training for two additional groups of 15 to 20 volunteers, and to develop and implement a youth curriculum. The program attracted another \$60,000 in grant money in 2019 from a fund managed by the Denver Foundation. The Village Exchange Center was awarded \$30,000 for continuation of the program, and an additional \$30,000 was awarded to expand the program with a focus on Spanish-speaking communities, through Aurora Community Connection. Meanwhile, the Colorado Health Foundation followed up its grant to develop the Natural Helpers spin off youth curriculum with a \$210,000 grant awarded in 2019 to implement the program – Youth Natural Leaders – in Aurora Public Schools.



IV. Accomplishments

Below are highlights of OIIA's accomplishments in the nine goal areas listed in the 2015 immigrant integration plan.

English, Citizenship and Civic Engagement

The Natural Helpers Program

The basic idea of the Natural Helpers program is to take volunteers who have already gone through the experience of moving to the U.S. and learning its language and customs, and pair them with newly arrived refugees and immigrants. Volunteers receive training to effectively connect members of their community with services and assistance that is available to help immigrants and refugees adapt to their new home. Volunteer Natural Helpers learn about signing up for health insurance, navigating the public school system, legal services, and other information that newcomers may need to thrive in our city.

Aurora is one of a handful of cities using this program, and it has attracted awards and funding from outside sources.

The provision of English as a Second Language and citizenship classes is not a direct function of the city, but according to surveys and focus groups conducted prior to drafting the integration plan, this education was a high priority for immigrant and refugee communities, and it was perceived as a city responsibility. OIIA supported the expansion of English and citizenship classes with grants to community and faith-based organization partners – including the Queen of Peace Catholic Parish, with parishioners from more than 60 nations; EnglishCorner, offering free English classes to adult refugees; and Aurora Community Connection, focusing on Spanish speakers. More than 1,000 students across the city have taken these classes in the past few years.

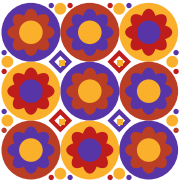
Partnering with the Aurora Public Library system and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, OIIA ensured that every library branch in Aurora system set aside space for a “Citizenship Corner,” with information on applying for U.S. citizenship and learning materials to help prepare for the naturalization test.

For the past four years during Aurora International Month celebrations in August, the city promotes citizenship by hosting a naturalization oath ceremony at the municipal building where, on average, about 75 to 85 Aurora residents from 30 countries are sworn in as U.S. citizens.

In focus groups conducted in 2015, immigrants and refugees expressed a strong desire to give back to the community, and one of the recommendations from the report on focus groups and surveys was to “[e]stablish programs that allow immigrants and refugees to participate in giving back to the community.”

Some immigrants and refugees had already been volunteering to give input to the city through the Immigrant and Refugee Task Force. As part of the implementation of our three-year integration plan, the Task Force was made into a formal city commission. Immigrants and refugees now serving on the Immigrant and Refugee Commission give voice to others in their community while providing their unique perspective to the city. The commission helped the city collect information from immigrant and refugee communities that was helpful in developing the city's 10-year comprehensive plan, Aurora Places. The commission meets monthly, and is composed of 11 members.

Another way immigrants and refugees have been able to give back to their communities is through the Natural Helpers program (see above sidebar). OIIA brought the Natural Helpers program to the city in 2016 and recruited the first cohort of volunteers for training. Once the program got off the ground, implementation was passed on to the Aurora Welcome Center. The Village Exchange Center, which inherited the functions of the Welcome Center in 2017, continues to provide trainings, with OIIA providing administrative support and connections. More than 150 people from 25 countries were trained as Natural Helpers in the first three years, and the seventh Natural Helpers cohort graduated in September 2019.



IV. Accomplishments

“I am very happy to attend this training because it will help to work with people in South Sudanese community and bring our community to work with city of Aurora.”
– Natural Helper, 2019

“I wish more people in the community would take this training.”
– Natural Helper, 2019

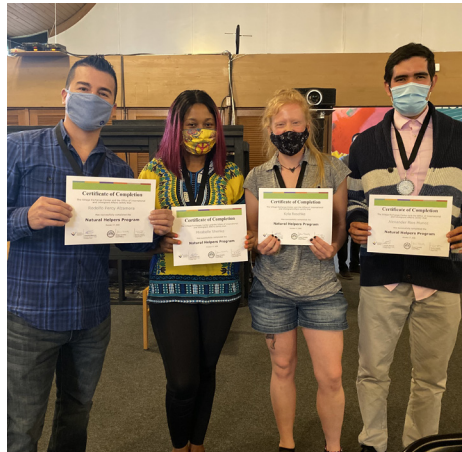
“Today I learned about an Ethiopian instrument called a krar. I would like to learn more about the foods of Uganda. I wish I could travel to North and South Sudan.”
– Natural Helper, 2019

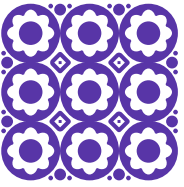
The Natural Helpers program is expanding (thanks to the grant from a Denver Foundation-administered fund) through a partnership with Aurora Community Connection, which launched the program in October 2019, targeting the Spanish-speaking community. The first cohort of Natural Helpers trained through Aurora Community Connection graduated in early December 2019.

Nohemi, Natural Helpers: I’ve been able to share what I’ve learned in Natural Helpers in a variety of places: not just within my own community but also at other organizations, at my children’s schools, church, and even stores. When I don’t know something, I talk with other members of the class, to find out who might have more information. It’s easy to want someone else to solve your problems. Lots of parents look to schools, for instance, to solve everything. But we have the power to create change ourselves. We can’t just bring up problems and not look for solutions. That’s what I really like about the class. It’s teaching me how to find the solutions, and also model that for my children.

Another leadership program, for young people, is the New American Citizens Academy, run in collaboration with Aurora Public Schools. Using a curriculum developed by the National League of Cities, this civics education program taught high school students about local government functions, city services, public safety and city finances, among other things. The program has since transitioned into a series of workshops and trainings covering such topics as accessing city services, how to open a small business and how to obtain a business license, crime prevention, fire prevention and other topics.

OIIA has partnered with the Aurora Immigrant and Refugee Commission and the Community College of Aurora in the “ThankYouAmerica” campaign. The campaign focuses on the positive role of immigrants within the local community, to showcase their integration, to challenge anti-immigrant extremism, and to highlight America’s tradition of embracing immigration. The campaign recognizes leaders of the local immigrant and refugee communities for their outstanding efforts in their communities.





IV. Accomplishments



Public Safety

In surveys of immigrant and refugee communities prior to developing the first three-year plan, public safety was a priority for Aurora's immigrants and refugees. At the same time, police officers were among the most trusted voices of authority mentioned in several of the immigrant and refugee focus groups conducted to inform the three-year plan.

OIIA partnered with the Aurora Police Department in a number of ways to engage the international community. OIIA and the Police Department designed the International Teen Police Academy, in which teens from the city's international community learned about careers in law enforcement during the summer. On the one hand, it provided teens who went through the program with an understanding of how the police work, and built relationships between the teens and members of the police force. For officers, the program provided insight into the needs and attitudes of the international community – all leading to greater trust between Aurora's immigrants and refugees and the Aurora Police Department. That trust is essential for Aurora's overall public safety.



The International Teen Police Academy was recognized as a best practice by the Strong Cities Network, an international organization of municipal leaders supporting policies that build social cohesion and prevent violent extremism.

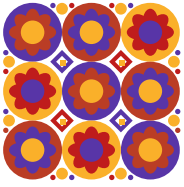
OIIA works in other ways to help the Aurora Police Department engage the international community, providing strategic advice on how best to reach out to immigrant and refugee communities, as well as contacts of

community leaders who might be willing to serve on the Chief's New Citizen Advisory Board, or who could facilitate meetings between the international community and police.

The Aurora Police Department has many ongoing initiatives that are targeted to or at least include the city's immigrant and refugee population. For example, the Community Policing Advisory Team (CPAT) has members from Aurora's immigrant and refugee communities, Asian community, Latino community and Muslim faith community. Meeting monthly, CPAT is a key vehicle for exchange of information between community members and the APD. The department's Police Area Representative teams are assigned to specific neighborhoods and are charged with working with residents of their assigned areas to develop unique solutions to public safety problems in the assigned area (among other things).

The Aurora Police Department also works with a community nonprofit, Project Worthmore, which provides cultural sensitivity training for new police recruits. Another initiative is the Aurora Police Explorers, a program for youth and young adults interested in a law enforcement career. These young people volunteer with the police at community events and in other ways. Many who enter the Explorers program are immigrants, and a good number are recruited from the International Teen Police Academy (discussed above).

As part of an effort to diversify the force, in July 2019 APD began taking applications from non-citizen immigrants and refugees who are on the path to citizenship. In 2019, the Police Executive Research Forum highlighted the work of the OIIA and Aurora Police Department for best practices in community policing in immigrant neighborhoods. Aurora was one of two cities in the U.S. highlighted for its best practices.



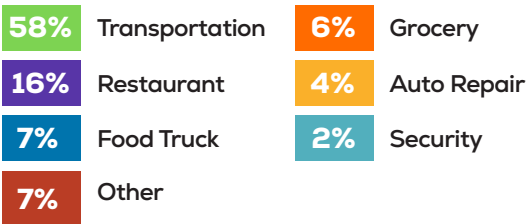
IV. Accomplishments

Promoting Entrepreneurship

In 2017, OIIA partnered with Community Enterprise Development Services and the Community College of Aurora to promote entrepreneurship in the international community. Prospective business men and women entered a year-long entrepreneurship training program at the Community College of Aurora. Those who qualified had access to incubator space on the college campus, with computers, design equipment, meeting space and other benefits. Entrepreneurs received a year of coaching and guidance.

Startup loans were available through the Aurora International Impact Fund to launch a new business.

**Allocation of Loans by Amount
Aurora International Impact Fund**

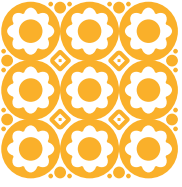


“In partnering with the City of Aurora’s Office of International and Immigrant Affairs, we’ve invested \$1.5 million into the local economy. The AIIF has been impactful to the Auroran community at large and the specific borrowers. The long-term impacts will be felt in the economic success of the communities we serve.” **Alex Wise, Executive Director, CEDS Finance**

Funding for the Impact Fund came largely through a grant from the Colorado Community College System. As of Dec. 31, 2019, there had been 57 loans issued, totaling \$1.5 million, with a total of 143 jobs created or retained, with the majority of those jobs (58 percent) in transportation (including trucking, delivery and ride sharing).

In 2019, OIIA helped the Colfax Aurora Community Organization (‘FAX Aurora) and other partners launch a series of workshops and trainings on starting a home-based business. OIIA has been a key sponsor of FAX Aurora programs for local immigrants and





IV. Accomplishments

Opening Doors to Global Business

Part of the responsibility of OIIA is to make the case that Aurora's refugee and immigrant communities make Aurora a logical choice for international trade and investment. In 2016, OIIA helped organize a delegation led by then-Mayor Steve Hogan to San Salvador, El Salvador. Later in the same year, Aurora hosted a delegation from that Salvadoran city. In 2017, OIIA played a key role in persuading the government of El Salvador to locate a new consulate in Aurora in 2017. In deciding to locate its consulate in Aurora, the government of El Salvador took into account Aurora's diversity and the integration of the Salvadoran community into the city. The consulate opened in May 2017 – the first consulate in Colorado to be located outside of Denver.

Ever since the opening of the Salvadoran consulate in Aurora, OIIA has been hosting business leaders and high-level government delegations from El Salvador. Soon after the consulate opened, OIIA worked with the consulate and other partners to organize a business luncheon at Global Fest that was attended by 120 business leaders, city officials and representatives of the Salvadoran government. In 2018, OIIA organized a one-day conference, "Discovering Business Opportunities between Aurora, Colorado, and El Salvador," with the participation of more than 150 business leaders from across Colorado.

In 2019, OIIA, the Consulate of El Salvador and other partners organized a business and trade mission to El Salvador, led by then-Mayor Bob LeGare. Aurora's delegation included the president of the Global Chamber of Commerce and several business leaders from the Denver and Aurora area. The delegation had a series of meetings with business leaders and government officials, including the mayor of San Salvador and the vice minister of foreign affairs.

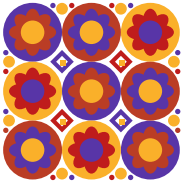
The 2019 trade mission was reciprocated in January 2020, when the Salvadoran vice minister of foreign affairs visited Aurora to announce expansion of El Salvador's consular services in Aurora. The vice minister was joined by El Salvador's director of international trade, business and investment, and senior staff.

Thanks to the work of OIIA, Aurora has been accepted into the U.S. State Department's International Visitors Leadership Program. As a result, Aurora is a regular stop for every delegation the State Department brings to Colorado, and OIIA has hosted delegations from Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America. The program explores the benefits of fostering city-to-city relationships, which can lead to increased investment and tourism, and attract international students.

The cultivation of foreign businesses is paying off. In December 2019, Vons Chicken, a Korean chain, opened its first store in Colorado. In January 2020, the city successfully wooed another Korean business, Tous Les Jours, a bakery chain serving French-style pastries. The bakery will open in the summer of 2021. In October 2020, another Korean restaurant franchise, Bonchon Chicken, opened its store in Aurora. These new businesses identified Aurora as a place to expand thanks in part to the city's strong ties with the local Korean community and the active international municipal exchange with Seongnam City, Korea.

While not a global business, City Lending is a Latino-owned residential mortgage banking institution that has "pioneered efforts to streamline the mortgage process from origination to closing." In January 2020, the city reached an agreement with the Virginia-based company to expand into Aurora. City Lending chose Aurora due to the city's diversity, friendly policies and programs toward immigrants and refugees, and the company's desire to expand beyond the Latino market to serve the whole international community.





IV. Accomplishments

Health and Wellness

In 2017, OIIA launched a joint effort with Tri-County Health Department and other partners – including Aurora Health Access, the Colorado Refugee Wellness Center, CREA Results and others – to provide education on the benefits of a healthy lifestyle. In a six-month period, with the help of a small grant from OIIA, the Health Powers Life campaign provided health screening to approximately 1,300 people through a mobile unit and preventive health care information to approximately 4,000 people at 44 events.

Building Community Through Culture and Sports

One goal listed in the 2015–2018 integration plan was to bring together Aurora residents from different walks of life with the hope of creating greater understanding across ethnicities and greater social cohesion among Aurora residents. This relates to what was learned in focus groups prior to formulating the 2015 integration plan. Participants in all focus groups expressed a desire for more integration and participation in the community, and there was great interest in information about and opportunities to participate in recreation and sports programs. There was also great interest in participating in and learning more about services related to art and culture.

Sports is one way to achieve the goal of greater participation in the community. OIIA has worked with Aurora’s international community to plan and sponsor sporting events – among them, soccer and volleyball tournaments.

Throughout the year, OIIA provides mini-grants to local immigrant and refugee organizations that arrange and host cultural events and festivals important to their communities – a “Mosaic of Cultures” celebration for the Salvadoran community; the annual Refugee First Thanksgiving organized by the African Community Center of Denver; Parol lantern making organized by the Philippine-American Society of Colorado; World Day of Migrants and Refugees; Ethiopian Day; Central America festival; Nigeria Day; Taiwan National Day; and many more. Each of these festivals exposes Aurorans to one of the many cultures that make up our diverse community. OIIA promotes all of these festivals and events on social media.





IV. Accomplishments

The flagship event for celebrating Aurora's cultural diversity is the annual Global Fest, organized by OIIA in collaboration with other city departments and partners. In 2019, approximately 10,000 people came to watch more than 250 performers from around the world and to experience the food, art, music and dance from Aurora's diverse cultures. The 2019 event included the first International Marketplace, with 15 international vendors. In addition to the community-building opportunity that Global Fest provides, it also provides a chance for dissemination of information about city services.

Language Assistance for Residents with Limited English Proficiency

Though not in the original list of goals and activities of Aurora's first immigrant integration plan, OIIA has taken the lead on developing and implementing a plan to ensure that city staff can communicate in the many languages that are spoken in our city.

In August 2018, an inter-department team was created consisting of representatives of the Human Resources Department, the Communications and Marketing Department, the Office of International and Immigrant Affairs and the Assistant City Manager, to develop and implement a Language Access Plan for the city.

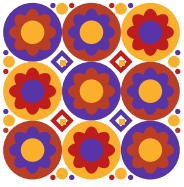
The city engaged Root Policy Research, a Denver-based firm, to conduct a language access needs assessment. The study consisted of a survey of city staff, and a separate survey and focus groups of departmental leadership. The surveys provided information on the frequency of staff encounters with limited English proficient (LEP) individuals, and how those interactions are handled. Through the surveys and focus groups, staff identified issues regarding city communications with LEP individuals. The assessment also identified where resources were insufficient to meet the need for interpretation and translation. The report, issued March 2019, made recommendations for implementing a language access plan, and asked that the Office of International and Immigrant Affairs take the lead.

Meanwhile, OIIA had been working with the city's Information Technology Department to set up an online ticketing system for translation and interpretation services. By January 2019, the system was up and running. The city first engaged the services of Voiance International Line, an interpretation/translation service. Through the ticketing system, city staff can submit a request for translation and interpretation (including for American Sign Language). In addition, there is now Spanish interpretation available for City Council meetings and, upon the request of a council member, Spanish interpretation services are available for ward meetings. Aurora residents speaking any language (including American Sign Language) may request language interpretation services for City Council meetings with 48 hours' notice.

In March 2019, the city sent out a "Request for Quote" for interpretation and translation services for Spanish, Korean, Amharic, Mandarin and Vietnamese, with American Sign Language also specified in the RFQ. Five vendors have been selected to work with the city in 2020. In addition, OIIA, working with the city's Human Resources and other departments, has overhauled the city's Second Language Program and identified staff positions where second language skills are necessary. Bilingual staff who are part of the Second Language Program are tested for proficiency, using a professional language testing service. Those who are certified are eligible for additional pay.

"The city of Aurora's Office of International and Immigrant Affairs has done a tremendous job making information accessible to its non-English speaking residents during the difficult and even scary times of COVID. The immigrant community has been particularly hard hit by both the health and economic impacts of COVID, so we have been grateful to the city and our donors for allowing donors for allowing Spring Institute to translate key documents to keep communities informed and better able to navigate city communications and resources. Keep up the good work, Aurora!"

**Paula Schriefer, President and CEO,
Spring Institute**



IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION PLAN

V. Planning for the Next Ten Years

Communicating with the International Community

In the surveys and focus groups conducted in preparation for the development of the first integration plan, one of the chief needs identified was better understanding of the role of the city in the lives of immigrants and refugees, and a greater awareness of services offered by the city.

In response, OIIA has been active on a number of communications channels with the international community. OIIA staff frequently are interviewed on local Spanish TV and radio stations, and are quoted in Korean, African, Asian and other international and ethnic publications read by local immigrants and refugees. There are also regular appearances by OIIA staff on AuroraTV, the city's government access channel, and in the mainstream media.

In social media, OIIA's Facebook posts advertise not only city events related to the international community but also the events and festivals of the diverse Aurora immigrant and refugee communities regardless of direct city involvement.

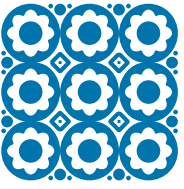
OIIA also directly communicates news and updates through a variety of listservs and through an email list with approximately 3,500 contacts across the city. Staff also regularly attend community meetings in immigrant and refugee communities.

In the summer and fall of 2019, the city took a number of steps to collect information from immigrants and refugees in the city, as well as other residents, staff of service provider organizations and city agencies, to guide the city's thinking on a new plan for work on immigrant integration over the next 10-year period. The city contracted with Root Policy Research and with Community Campus Partnership (CCP), based at the Anschutz Medical Campus, to design survey instruments, develop discussion guides, disseminate surveys and conduct focus groups.

Surveys were filed online and in paper form from a total of 337 Aurora residents, including 214 foreign-born residents. The resident survey was translated into 11 languages. In addition, there were 56 responses to a separate survey of stakeholders – professionals and volunteers who serve Aurora's immigrant and refugee communities. CCP conducted 11 focus groups with different refugee and immigrant communities (African, Latino, refugee youth) plus faith leaders, the Community College of Aurora, the CCP Resident Leadership Council, the Aurora Asian Pacific Community Partnership, Aurora Police Department and Aurora Fire Rescue and with small-business owners. Supplementing the focus group were interviews with 12 key community leaders, including the mayor and select council members, representatives of the fire and police departments and others. Discussion guides for the focus groups and interviews were prepared by Root Policy Research. These guides focused discussion on employment and workforce development; education, English language learning and citizenship; and sports and culture. Participants were also asked for their opinion about priorities for the city in this work.

The vast majority of participants agreed that Aurora is an immigrant- and refugee-friendly city. Nevertheless, there is much more that can and should be done to help immigrants and refugees learn about resources available from the city and to develop new ideas and programs that will help resolve challenges identified in the focus groups and surveys.

Aurora is not unique in facing some of the overarching challenges identified. For example, gentrification is raising the cost of housing, and some are leaving the city for less expensive places. The activity of Immigration and Customs Enforcement in recent years has created a climate of fear in some immigrant and refugee communities, and this is affecting the sense of safety that some feel.



V. Planning for the Next Ten Years

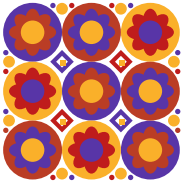
Other challenges raised in the focus groups are more amenable to solutions through the work of OIIA and its partners. Where specific problems were identified, these will be discussed under the relevant category below.

Overall, focus group participants noted that priorities for immigrants and refugees in the city were: 1) employment and jobs, and 2) English language learning. This makes sense, given that immigrants and refugees must immediately provide for themselves and their families, and those whose English skills are limited will also be limited in the opportunities they find in the job market. This also aligns with the city's philosophy toward immigrant integration. As the head of the city's Office of International and Immigrant Affairs, Ricardo Gambetta, said, "We make a commitment that, as a city, we will provide immigrants with the tools to learn English and become active in the economy."

Health and wellness were also important, but there was confusion about the distinction between wellness programs and access to health care in general. The fact that refugees often come here after suffering from trauma, and thus in need of mental health support, was an important point raised in discussions.

Based in part on the input received in the focus groups, surveys and interviews, the office anticipates working in the following areas over the next 10 years. Much of the proposed work is a continuation of our award-winning programs and other programs that have attracted outside funding for work over the coming years.





V. Planning for the Next Ten Years

Small Business, Financial Literacy and Economic Growth

Goal: Promote entrepreneurship in immigrant and refugee communities by providing information and training and by lowering barriers to entry for starting a business; promote economic integration for immigrants who do not own businesses.

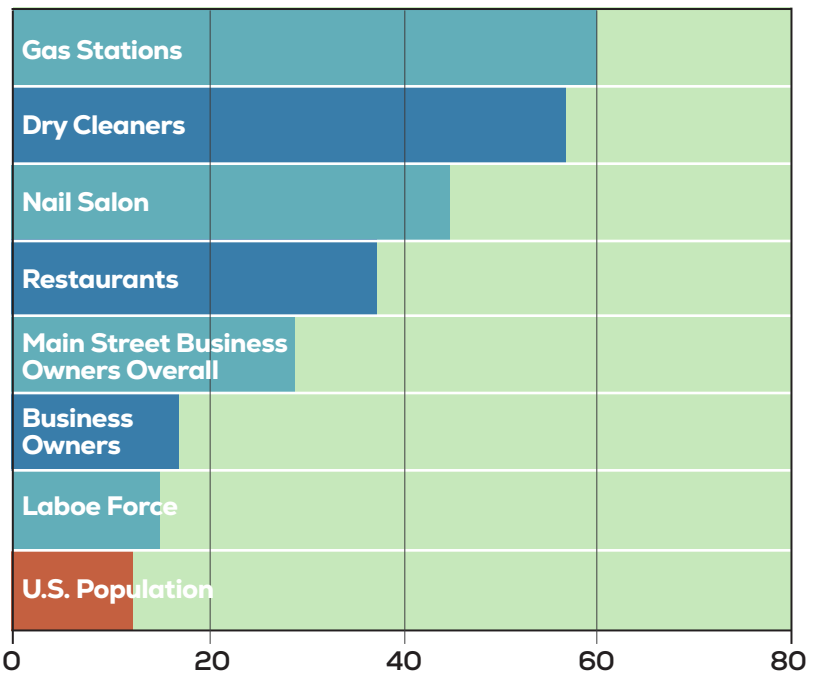
Why this is important

For communities seeking to boost their economies and create a more welcoming environment for immigrants, entrepreneurship is an integral and perhaps even a critical entry point. It brings together existing tools, immediate desires and needs, and tangible payoffs.

Immigrants tend generally to be more inclined to start new businesses than native-born Americans. Refugees are even more likely to start a business than the foreign-born overall. Immigrants and refugees are even more over-represented among owners of so-called “main-street” businesses. These are small businesses in retail, accommodation and food services, and neighborhood services that anchor neighborhood-level economic growth and revitalization. Nationwide, 28 percent of “main-street” business owners are foreign-born. “Main street” businesses have become more important to local economies as the large manufacturing businesses, with their demand for workers, have declined. These types of businesses are especially important in a city like Aurora, which receives over half its revenue from sales tax. As Aurora seeks to create more places within the city that have their own unique character, our immigrant and refugee entrepreneurs are good candidates to help the city achieve this goal.

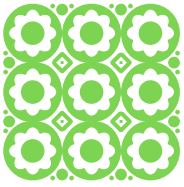
Cities across the U.S. are trying to figure out how to tap in to this entrepreneurial spirit to strengthen their economies. There are many good programs to help immigrants set up businesses by lowering barriers to entry, providing access to capital and providing information and mentorship among other things. To cite one example, the city of Chicago created a New Americans Small Business Series, creating one-stop centers where immigrants could find information they need for starting a business, including information about licensing, taxes and accessing capital. The city also streamlined the business licensing process, a move that helped not only immigrant entrepreneurs, but entrepreneurs across the board.

Composition of Immigrant Business Owners, Labor Force and U.S. Population



Source: Paul McDaniel, “Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Welcoming Cities,” American Immigration Council, 3/3/2016





V. Planning for the Next Ten Years

What the city has done

As noted above, the initial three years of the city's integration efforts focused on promoting entrepreneurship. The city partnered with the Community College of Aurora and with Community Enterprise Development Services to provide entrepreneurship training for selected immigrant entrepreneurs. These entrepreneurs had access to capital by way of the Aurora International Impact Fund.

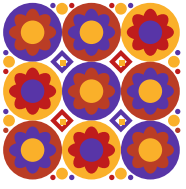
What was learned from the focus groups and surveys

Participants in the focus groups conducted in the fall of 2019 said that the process of starting a business in Aurora was difficult. They lacked general information about what is needed to start and run a business, including information about loans and credit, insurance, taxes and access to capital. They suggested that programs/instruction led by people of the same background as the prospective entrepreneurs would be useful.

In surveys of residents and stakeholders, we learned that foreign-born residents were, on average, more interested in programs and services to start or expand a business than were native-born residents. Immigrant and refugee respondents expressed interest in marketing and public relations, while stakeholders thought help with marketing, access to capital and development of business plans would be useful. Both native-born and foreign-born residents expressed interest in having the city help with business instruction, access to affordable commercial space, access to loans and the licensing process.

"Abdirizak Farah, owner of Priomh Security, Inc., launched his security business in August 2017 with one part-time and two full-time employees. The AIIF provided two rounds of financing to assist the launch and growth of the business, and that growth has been extraordinary. Within two years, the company hired 8 part-time and 10 full-time employees, and profits have increased by 65%. Abdirizak, a Somali immigrant, channeled his vast experience in security, including managing a team of 30 employees at a large refugee camp in Kenya, into developing a strong Business."

- 1 In response to the for information about starting and operating a business, conduct a series of business seminars and educational trainings and workshops to promote entrepreneurship and small business among immigrants and refugees with topics such as "How to Open a Business," "How to Access Capital," "Licenses and Permits" and related topics.
- 2 Launch a phone app in different languages to help immigrants and refugees develop a business plan.
- 3 Open the first citywide Small Business Center for Newcomers in a location accessible to the immigrant community. Prospective refugee or immigrant business owner will find information about permits, licenses, zoning, financial services, access to capital and other information needed to open a business. The Office of International and Immigrant Affairs (OIIA) will partner with the city business development office, Community Economic Development Services and the Aurora-South Metro Small Business Development Center (SBDC) to provide information in their own language. OIIA will have a presence at the center, to coordinate language and interpretation services for other agencies working there.
- 4 Work with the Aurora Chamber of Commerce and other ethnic groups to develop business and workforce training programs for immigrants and refugees.
- 5 Expand the successful Aurora International Impact Fund providing more immigrants and refugees with micro-loans and access to capital for small businesses
- 6 Create a small business resource guide
- 7 Develop educational programs and workshops in different languages to promote financial literacy (how to use the banking system, how to build credit, obtaining loans and credit cards, paying taxes, saving for retirement, obtaining insurance, learning to avoid financial predators, etc.) as well as homeownership and access to city resources.
- 8 Support government and private efforts to promote the establishment of Start-ups and Co-Op business model in the immigrant and refugee communities.
- 9 Work directly with local, regional and statewide ethnic chambers of Commerce to support the expansion of multicultural products and services on main street.
- 10 Support efforts to protect newcomers from predatory practices targeting these vulnerable communities.



V. Planning for the Next Ten Years

Planned activities

Building on what we've done, and responding to needs found through community engagement, the following activities are planned to promote small business and economic development in our immigrant and refugee communities:

Housing and Home Ownership

Goal: Make sure the needs of immigrants and refugees are included in policies and initiatives concerning housing affordability in Aurora. Help immigrants and refugees find the information and financial assistance they need to become homeowners. Help foreign-born renters understand their rights and responsibilities.

Why this is important

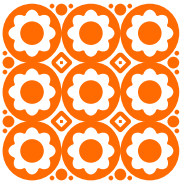
While affordability was often cited in our focus groups and surveys as a reason many initially settled in Aurora, a lack of affordable housing is becoming an increasing problem, making it more difficult for some to stay in the city.

The median sale price of a home in Aurora has increased 140 percent in the last 10 years, from \$146,000 in April 2010 to \$351,000 in March 2020. Overall monthly housing costs, however, have risen more steeply for renters compared to owners. From 2010 to 2018, median monthly housing cost for owners increased 8.8 percent, while for renters, these costs increased 54.5 percent over the same period.

To put this in context, the increase in the overall consumer price index for the Denver-Aurora-Lakewood metro area during the same period was 23.3 percent.

Meanwhile, the median household income in Aurora has been growing more slowly. Between 2010 and 2018, according to the Census Bureau, median household income increased from \$50,358 to \$63,128, a 25 percent increase. Median household income for the foreign-born (\$49,259) was just 74 percent of household income for native-born households in 2018. There is a large disparity in home ownership between Aurora's native-born households (62.2 percent of which are owner-occupied) and foreign-born households (47.5 percent owner-occupied). More than half (52.5 percent) of foreign-born households are renting, and nearly 61 percent of those households are cost burdened, meaning they are spending more than 30 percent of their household income on housing costs.





V. Planning for the Next Ten Years

Another indication of a lack of housing affordability is overcrowding. In Aurora, 14.1 percent of foreign-born households were overcrowded (more than one person per room). This compares with 2.4 percent of native households.

As noted in Aurora Places, the city faces a supply and demand gap that is most acute for both the lowest and highest income households. That plan lays out a number of strategies for retaining existing housing stock and encouraging the development of affordable housing throughout the city, including “work with partners to identify demand and development opportunities for affordable housing throughout Aurora.”

Moving more residents into home ownership can play a key role in stabilizing the community. While mortgages remain relatively stable over time, rents can be increased year after year, with the result being that families move more frequently, to find more affordable rent. What was learned from the focus groups and surveys

Some participants in the focus groups expressed concern that gentrification is pushing people out of Aurora; that the city was becoming unaffordable, and that some people are moving out of the city. While housing affordability was not included in the focus group facilitator’s discussion guide as a priority topic, housing, gentrification, and lack of rent control and tenant rights were brought up repeatedly in several focus groups.

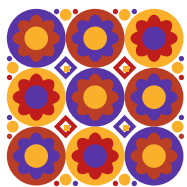
On the other hand, for Aurora residents who were surveyed by our consultants, one of the top reasons cited by both foreign-born and U.S.-born residents for choosing Aurora as a place to live in the first place was its affordability.

Planned activities

From the responses to the stakeholder and community surveys we conducted, it is clear that moving forward the city must include a focus on our international population when grappling with the growing problem of affordable housing.

- 1 Develop educational programs and workshops in different languages to promote financial literacy (how to use the banking system, how to build credit, obtaining loans and credit cards, paying taxes, saving for retirement, obtaining insurance, learning to avoid financial predators, etc.) as well as homeownership and access to city resources.
- 2 Develop and expand educational programs for tenants and homeowners, including new renters, about their rights and responsibilities.
- 3 Support efforts at protecting newcomers from predatory practices targeting the immigrant and refugee communities.
- 4 Engage in partnership programs to promote non-discrimination in housing regulations and tenant protections.
- 5 Support federal, state, and local government programs and policies that promote affordable housing to encourage social and economic stability and mobility.
- 6 Work with government and nonprofit partners to provide funding for home preservation programs for families, to ease the burden of preserving housing stock for low-income families to reduce the likelihood of displacement.
- 7 Support government and private sector programs and policies to construct and preserve affordable housing and prevent displacement in the community, with a focus on immigrant neighborhoods that are gentrifying or threatened with gentrification. OIIA will support key initiatives in the City of Aurora’s Housing Strategic Plan.
- 8 Reach out to other cities facing similar problems, and learn from policies they are developing to solve them. (For example, the City of Phoenix, Arizona, has issued its “Reinvent Phoenix” report, with information that can serve as a first step towards addressing some of the same housing affordability issues faced by Aurora).





V. Planning for the Next Ten Years

Employment and Workforce Development

Goal: Ensure that immigrants and refugees have the job skills and certifications they need to thrive in our city.

Why this is important

As noted above, in its prior integration plan, the city focused on encouraging entrepreneurship and training entrepreneurs. It is still true, however, that most immigrants and refugees, like the native-born, work for others.

As noted above, nearly one in five Aurora immigrant and refugee families lives below the poverty line. Surveys commissioned by OIIA to anchor this plan in the context of community need found that more than half of the foreign-born survey respondents said they lacked the English proficiency, education or appropriate credentials to obtain a better, higher-paying job.

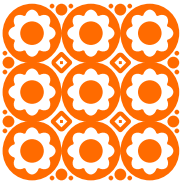
Another challenge for immigrants and refugees is that even for those who arrive with higher skill levels, under-employment or employment in an occupation below their skill level is common. This may be due to lack of English proficiency, but it may also be due to lack of proper credentials – educational qualifications, such as degrees or diplomas, or professional qualifications, such as professional certificates, licenses or work experience. Nationally, in recent years, almost half of immigrants arriving in the U.S. have college degrees. However, they do not necessarily find work appropriate to their skill level. Analysis of Census data from 2009 to 2013 found that approximately 19 million college-educated immigrants in the U.S. were either unemployed or employed in jobs below their skill level. The economic impact of this “brain waste” was estimated to be \$39 billion in lost annual earnings, and \$10 billion in lost federal and local tax revenue.

Workforce development and job training programs are managed at the county level. The city will support these programs and will play a role consistent with that laid out in other planning documents. For example, Aurora Places calls for connecting “immigrant and diverse ethnic communities to education, training resources and accepted credentials to integrate their skills and ambitions into the local workforce.” The Smart City Playbook recommends that the city “design programing to improve digital access and literacy among diverse communities ... to address the digital divide,” with digital literacy now an essential component of the workplace.

For the city, improvements in the skills of and opportunities for our immigrant and refugee workers will pay off in greater disposable income for them, and more tax revenue for the city.

What the city has done

In the area of assisting immigrants and refugees to integrate into Aurora's economy, the city's initial immigrant integration plan focused on encouraging entrepreneurship and helping immigrant and refugee entrepreneurs start businesses. As mentioned, workforce development programs are run at the county level.



V. Planning for the Next Ten Years

What was learned from the focus groups and surveys

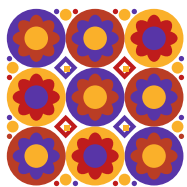
For focus group participants, programs relating to employment and jobs were ranked highest in priority when discussing how the city might help the international community. Participants said that while it is easy to obtain a job in Aurora, the quality and pay of the jobs available to refugees and immigrants were a concern. Some come here with degrees, titles or other credentials, but translating these credentials into what is required in the U.S. is difficult. The focus group report recommended that the city partner with the Community College of Aurora to increase access to vocational education programs.

Survey respondents, including the foreign-born and stakeholders, were very interested in programs or services in which immigrants and refugees could learn about job training opportunities and getting a job. Programs to provide job training to increase income, learning job search skills, learning computer and internet skills and learning or improving English were all highly rated by foreign-born survey respondents. The survey also found that more than half of foreign-born residents said they would change the type of work they do if given the chance. When asked what was keeping them from pursuing the work they wanted, foreign-born respondents cited lack of English proficiency, lack of proper certifications and licenses and issues with education.

Planned activities

- 1 Support state and county initiatives in the areas of job training and workforce development for immigrants and refugees.
- 2 Support state efforts to help immigrants and refugees obtain professional certification and licenses appropriate to their training. Where appropriate, the city will partner with nonprofit organizations that focus on helping skilled immigrants and refugees translate their educational and professional credentials (such as the World Education Service's Skilled Immigrant Integration Program).
- 3 Work with the Community College of Aurora and professional development organizations that assist immigrants and refugees to promote technical career and trade opportunities and support efforts to help immigrants and refugees transition into professional careers.
- 4 Develop the international internship program, providing immigrant students from the Community College of Aurora with experience working for the city. The intention is to pilot the program with the Office of International and Immigrant Affairs and to eventually expand the internship program to other city departments.
- 5 Promote culturally competent educational efforts to ensure newcomers easily adapt to U.S. work policy and culture and help employers understand cultural differences.
- 6 Organize city-sponsored job fairs to recruit international talent to work for the city. In the survey conducted to get input for this plan, foreign-born residents said they were very interested in programs that would help them learn about job opportunities with the city of Aurora.
- 7 Work with employers, educational institutions and nonprofit partners to expand workforce educational opportunities customized to employer needs – for example, English language classes that are customized for specific employers or job sectors. An example of such a program is the National Immigration Forum's Skills and Opportunity for a New American Workforce.





V. Planning for the Next Ten Years

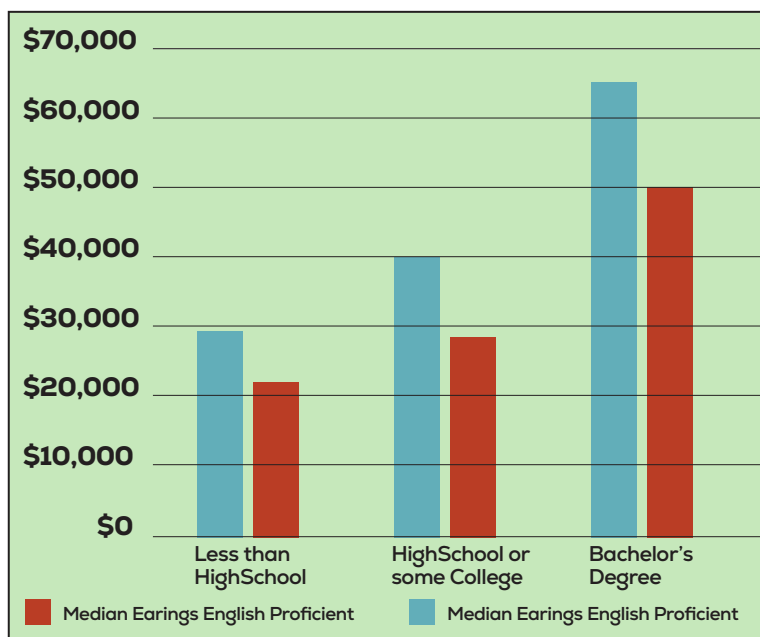
Education and English Language Acquisition

Goal: Expand efforts to promote language acquisition for Aurora's English language learners.

Why this is important

In the U.S., English is the language of opportunity. Researchers have quantified that self-evident concept. At all levels of educational attainment, workers who are proficient in English earn more than their counterparts who are not proficient in English, and individuals who are English proficient are less likely to be in poverty.

Differences in earnings between English proficient and non-proficient workers differ by educational attainment. For those with a high school degree or some college, an English proficient worker will earn, on average, 39 percent more than someone with limited proficiency. For workers without a high school degree, there is less of a difference, but limited English proficient (LEP) workers still earn 24 percent less than their English proficient counterparts. LEP workers are more likely to be living in poverty (25 percent) or just above the poverty level (31 percent) than English proficient workers (14 percent and 16 percent, respectively).



Source: Jill Wilson, "Investing in English Skills: The Limited English Proficient Workforce in U.S. Metropolitan Areas," Brookings, September 2014.

Currently, approximately 15 percent of Aurora's working-age population (age 18 to 64) is limited English proficient. Given the income gains associated with English proficiency, it is in the city's interest to ensure that our international newcomers are given the opportunity to learn English. More than half of Aurora's revenue is generated by sales tax, and sales tax revenue is largely driven by the disposable income of Aurora residents.

For many immigrants and refugees, however, traditional language classes are not a practical option. Job schedules and family obligations may make it impossible for some to set aside time when traditional classes are offered. There are other ways to deliver instructional content to those who need more flexibility. For example, there are programs that team employers with educational institutions and nonprofit organizations that deliver English and workforce training to deliver English instruction that is contextualized for the specific workplace. Instruction can take place at the worksite, either before a shift or during a break, so that immigrant workers do not have to carve out special time for class at a different location. This contextualized English instruction may be delivered – at least in part – online.

There are programs that combine classroom time or online live sessions with a teacher with recorded online material that can be accessed at a time convenient to the student. The student can go through this material at his or her own pace. The free website USA Learns, developed by the Sacramento County (California) Office of Education, is one example of instructional material that is available on the internet. The website teaches English and citizenship to adults using multimedia content.



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Another promising practice for delivering English instruction is through the use of smartphones and “non-smart” mobile phones. Not everyone has high-speed internet access at home, and this is particularly true of low-income households. Nearly half of households with incomes below \$30,000 do not have high-speed internet service. While smartphone use is also lower among low-income households, nearly three-quarters of U.S. adults in households with incomes below \$30,000 have smartphones. There are solutions, however, even for those who have “non-smart” mobile phones. For example, Cell-Ed is a company that has developed English and workforce education micro-lessons that are delivered through mobile phones. The use of apps to enhance English language instruction is a rapidly evolving field.

OIIA will use available tools to increase the scale of English language learning in our city. Where appropriate, we will seek to develop our own learning tools and apps.

What the city has done

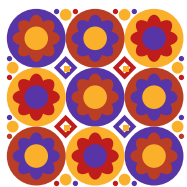
As noted above, in carrying out its initial integration plan, OIIA supported the expansion of English and citizenship classes provided by community and faith-based organization partners.

What was learned from the focus groups and surveys

In the focus groups conducted in the fall of 2019, participants emphasized that learning English and finding employment were the two top priorities of Aurora’s immigrants and refugees. Participants felt that more could be done to partner with Aurora Public Schools and other educational institutions to provide more and better English language instruction. The cost of classes was a concern, as well as quality of instruction. Participants prioritized English over citizenship classes, because while not everyone is eligible for citizenship, everyone must learn English to better communicate with fellow Aurorans and to improve their employment prospects.

The surveys also found great interest in learning about ESL and citizenship classes among the foreign-born. More than half of foreign-born residents and two-thirds of residents who were foreign-language speakers said they would change their occupation given an opportunity. The commonly cited reason for not doing so was a language barrier.





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Planned activities

In the coming years, OIIA will go beyond supporting our partners who provide ESL classes by exploring and supporting promising practices related to workplace English and the use of technology to help immigrants and refugee learn English.

- 1 Work with employers, educational institutions and nonprofit service providers to support and promote English language training contextualized for the workplace. Work with employers to promote English language learning at employment sites.
- 2 Launch new ESL initiatives using new technology, English language software and innovative learning tools.
- 3 Explore the expansion of ESL in terms of funding and number and location of classes in partnership with local nonprofits and faith-based organizations across the city, as well as Aurora Public Schools.
- 4 Produce ESL/Civics micro programs on AuroraTV.
- 5 Expand the English Conversation Group at Aurora Central Library to provide non-English speakers with the opportunity to practice and improve their conversational English language skills, but also provide an opportunity for participants of the international community to learn more about the U.S. and its culture.
- 6 Promote online resources and services offered at the Aurora Library system, including U.S. Naturalization / Citizenship Test preparation.

Language Access and Services

Goal: To provide meaningful and quality language services for Aurora's residents so that no matter what language they speak, they may access city services and engage in Aurora civic life.

Why this is important

According to Census data, approximately 15 percent of Aurora residents age 5 and older have limited English proficiency. Aurora embraces its diversity, and city planning documents call for making city services accessible to all residents and to engage all residents in decision-making processes. For example, in Aurora Places, there is a recommendation to "communicate planning, development and city services matters in multiple languages and manners to promote accessibility by all Aurorans." Translation services and technology solutions will be valuable tools to ensure that the voices of all of Aurora's diverse communities are engaged in the city's civic decision-making processes.

What the city has done

The city contracted with a consultant to conduct a survey to assess translation and interpretation needs, and the city is in the process of developing and implementing a Language Access Plan. Interpretation and translation services have been contracted to help city agencies communicate with the city's non-English speakers. The city has implemented an online ticketing system through which city staff may request interpretation and translation services. Interpretation services are now available for City Council meetings.

"Kudos to the City of Aurora for taking the lead serving our international community during the COVID-19 pandemic. Being able to access critical health and safety information in different languages made the difference among newcomers across the city. Having the opportunity to create professional public service announcements in several different languages has been very important for our communities that do not speak English and do not have access to local information in the middle of the pandemic. Partnering with the City of Aurora's Office of international and Immigrant Affairs has been key, not only for the production but also for the distribution of these PSAs"

Diana Higuera
Executive Director
Rocky Mountain Welcome Center



V. Planning for the Next Ten Years

What was learned from the focus groups and surveys

While translation and interpretation was not a subject of the focus groups and surveys, participants did express their perception that there is a lack of information about existing city services and resources. Part of this perception is due to language. The focus group report included recommendations to “increase and improve ... multi-cultural communications strategies to promote and connect people to existing ... resources” – including resources available to promote entrepreneurship, personal and business finances, English classes and other resources. The survey report noted that fewer than 60 percent of Aurora’s foreign-born residents had heard of the Office of International and Immigrant Affairs.

Planned activities

The city will continue to streamline and align current policies to improve language services provided to city residents. The city will increase its efforts to engage language minorities in a variety of languages and with a variety of communication methods. Activities will include:

- Continue development and implementation of the citywide Language Access Plan.
- Further expand language access services to local residents.
- Increase the number of participants in the city’s Second Language Program, which gives bilingual staff the opportunity to be certified as proficient in a second language, making them eligible for additional pay.

Public Safety

Goal: Work with the Aurora Police Department and Aurora Fire Rescue to engage the international community in public safety efforts, and ensure that all members of the community feel safe.

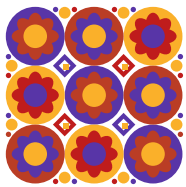
Why this is important

To keep the community safe, police rely on cooperation from the community they are sworn to protect. In places where there are significant numbers of immigrants, the job of building and maintaining trust includes having policies to delineate the role of local police as separate from that of federal immigration enforcement, and communicating those policies to the immigrant community. Failure to do that may lead to distrust between the community and police. If immigrants believe that their contact with the police may lead to deportation, or deportation of a loved one, they may be reluctant to report crimes or serve as witnesses, and that has an impact on the safety of all community members. A paper by the Major Cities Chiefs summarized the problem for law enforcement:

“Without assurances that contact with the police would not result in purely civil immigration enforcement action, the hard-won trust, communication and cooperation from the immigrant community would disappear. Such a divide between the local police and immigrant groups would result in increased crime against immigrants and in the broader community, create a class of silent victims and eliminate the potential for assistance from immigrants in solving crimes or preventing future terroristic acts.” There is some data to support

this concern. A survey of Latinos conducted in 2012 found that increased involvement of police in immigration enforcement made them significantly more distrustful of law enforcement and less likely to report a crime.





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What the city has done

As mentioned above, OIIA has been working with the Aurora Police Department to help the department build trust with the immigrant and refugee community. That work includes providing advice and contacts for reaching out to leaders in the community. OIIA helped APD develop the International Teen Academy, cited as a best practice by the Strong Cities Network. In 2019, the Police Executive Research Forum highlighted the work of the Aurora Police Department in a report about community policing best practices in immigrant neighborhoods.

What was learned from the focus groups and surveys

Despite the exemplary efforts of the Aurora Police Department, an issue raised in focus groups with immigrants and refugees is fear. Some immigrants may be afraid to leave their homes due to the activity of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). A lack of understanding of the separate missions of ICE and Aurora Police may lead to a reluctance to report crime. Foreign-born survey respondents were interested in the city's Neighborhood Watch program, and expressed the need for programs or services related to crime prevention. The survey report noted that the International Teen Academy was highly regarded and should be considered for reinstatement.

Planned activities

OIIA will work with the police and fire departments to help them reach out to Aurora's immigrant and refugee communities and implement initiatives targeted to these communities.

- 1 Launch the International Teen Fire Academy, in collaboration with Aurora Fire Rescue. In this program, teens from Aurora's immigrant and refugee communities will learn about Aurora Fire Rescue and about careers in the department.
- 2 Re-launch the International Teen Police Academy in collaboration with the Aurora Police Department. The program received high marks from immigrants and refugees in our survey of Aurora residents. Teens from Aurora's international community learn about the structure and functions of the Police Department and about careers in law enforcement.
- 3 Support police and fire minority, immigrant and refugee recruitment efforts.
- 4 Support efforts of Aurora Fire Rescue to recruit immigrant and refugee teens for its Camp Spark, a leadership and skills development program for young women.
- 5 Support car seat education programs for immigrant and refugee families in collaboration with Aurora Fire Rescue.
- 6 Support community policing and crime and fire prevention efforts in immigrant and refugee communities.
- 7 Develop and implement a public safety citizens academy for new immigrants and refugees. The intent of the academy is to improve the relationship between law enforcement, Aurora Fire Rescue, and immigrant and refugee communities by providing immigrants and refugees with a greater understanding of the operations and policies of the police and fire departments. The academy will also promote career opportunities in the police and fire departments.
- 8 Expand the collaboration with the Aurora Office of Emergency Management (OEM) to develop a list of immigrant and refugee leaders to be contacted during citywide emergencies so they can assist the city to disseminate the emergency information to the community. Translate OEM's community presentations for community knowledge and understanding of hazards and preparation.
- 9 Expand the emergency notifications to reach out to residents from immigrant and refugee communities across the city.



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Leadership Development

Goal: To encourage members of the immigrant and refugee communities to become leaders in their communities so they may be better able to support others in their community and become more effective advocates.

Why this is important

One way the city has been trying to get information into the hands of newcomers is through the Natural Helpers program. The Natural Helpers program is a force multiplier for the city. The program provides training to those who have already gone through the ordeal of moving to the U.S., learning English, learning new customs and figuring out how to navigate life in this country. They are in the best position to provide those who are following with the information they need to make a smoother transition to their new home. With training, they can connect immigrants and refugees with the resources they need to integrate into city life.

The program offers training to leaders in immigrant and refugee communities who already have experienced the integration process. Training these leaders to help newcomers navigate life in the U.S. and inform them of services available at the city, state and national levels is crucial, as city staff simply cannot reach everyone.

What the city has done

As mentioned above, OIIA brought the Natural Helpers program to Aurora in 2016. The Village Exchange Center manages the program with city support, and in 2019 the program was expanded with a focus on the Spanish-speaking community through Aurora Community Connection. The city has obtained funding to continue the program, as well as funding for a related program for high school and middle school students – the Youth Natural Leaders program – that has been launched in the 2019-20 school year.

What was learned from the focus groups and surveys

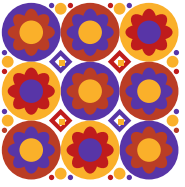
One of the issues that came up in the focus groups was a lack of awareness of city services and resources, and a lack of awareness about legal information and services. There was great interest among survey respondents for more information about existing city services and programs, including city libraries, arts and cultural programs, citizenship classes, government services for residents, and other services and programs. The Natural Helpers program was highly regarded. However, survey respondents suggested that the city could do more outreach to support the integration of immigrants and refugees. Fewer than 60 percent of foreign-born survey respondents had heard about the Office of International and Immigrant Affairs. “Increase outreach” was a top recommendation in the survey report, and several respondents to the survey, both foreign-born respondents and stakeholder representatives, urged expansion of the Natural Helpers program.

Aurora Community Connection (ACC) family resource center is proud to partner with Aurora’s Office of International and Immigrant Affairs. Their support allowed ACC to offer the first-ever Natural Helper cohort in Spanish; they have provided invaluable help to ACC’s FLTI community leadership class; and they have made possible ACC’s class preparing Aurora residents to become US Citizens. Our partnership reflects a deeply shared vision for supporting Aurora residents of diverse backgrounds to truly help shape Aurora and make it the outstanding community that it is, today and on into the future!

Dr. Robin Waterman
Executive Director
Aurora Community Connection
Family Resource Center

“Village Exchange Center owes much of its current and ongoing success to the support and partnership of the City of Aurora, Office of International and Immigrant Affairs. Our partnership on the Natural helpers program and now Natural Leaders program has empowered our newcomer community members with resources and opportunities that will have years of impact on the larger Aurora population. We are excited and proud to continue this partnership for years to come.”

Amanda Blaurock
Executive Director
Village Exchange Center



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Planned activities

- 1** Expand the Natural Helpers program, beginning with the training of an additional 120 people in the coming year. The work is facilitated by a grant from a Denver Foundation-managed fund, made to the Village Exchange Center (which will train immigrants and refugees from around the world) and to Aurora Community Connection (which will provide training to members of the Latino community).
- 2** Implement the Youth Natural Leaders program. Over the next three years beginning with the 2019-20 school year, 220 young people will be trained in three Aurora high schools and two middle schools. Youth selected for the program will receive information about community services and receive training in anti-bullying and coping and leadership skills over the course of two months of twice-a-week training sessions. Participants in the program will create their own Aurora “integration story,” thanks to a partnership with Storyvine, an online video production platform. Implementation of the Youth Natural Leaders program is made possible by a grant from the Colorado Health Foundation.
- 3** Launch the Cultural Orientation Program for Newcomers. This program will develop a toolkit to assist new immigrants in their paths to integration. It will include curriculum and activities designed to both increase access to city services, as well as contextual information about American culture and how to live successfully in a new community.
- 4** Help recruit immigrants and refugees for the Family Leadership Training Institute, which promotes increased civic participation and greater collaboration between individuals, families, institutions, civil servants and elected officials in order to solve problems in communities.
- 5** Continue the “ThankYouAmerica” campaign in partnership with the Aurora Immigrant and Refugee Commission to recognize champions working with the local immigrant and refugee community.

Health and Wellness

Goal: To educate immigrants and refugees about the health care system, to promote healthy lifestyles and to extend mental health services to vulnerable populations.

Why this is important

The U.S. health care system is complex. Having health insurance is critical, yet how to get it and obtain health care when needed is complicated. Some employers provide insurance; some don't. Many people cannot afford to buy insurance on their own, but, depending on income, some may qualify for subsidies to purchase insurance or for government-provided insurance. Some clinics provide low-cost or free care for those without insurance. There is added complexity when immigration law is layered on top of that system. Immigrants with different statuses are eligible or not for different health services. It is likely to get even more complex if new regulations regarding “public charge” survive court challenges. These new regulations will cause some immigrants to suffer negative immigration consequences if they avail themselves of certain health benefits. Others who are eligible for health resources may avoid them out of confusion.

On top of all of that, there is the challenge of communicating health information with people of varying cultural and language backgrounds.

In addition, there are health issues that arise out of the process of migration itself. Refugees, in particular, are likely to have suffered traumatic experiences related to their forced displacement. They are more likely to need mental



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health services to help them overcome the trauma they have experienced. In the broader immigrant and refugee population, there is a need for education to connect lifestyle, including diet, with health, in languages that can be understood. Encouraging healthy living in the international community dovetails with a principal goal in the city's long-range plan – a healthy community – toward which the city will support programs that improve access to healthy food and food security, and will invest in or support the development of infrastructure that will increase access to health care and make it easier for Aurorans to get exercise.

What the city has done

As noted above, thousands of people received preventive health care information and more than 1,000 received health screenings through the Health Powers Life campaign.

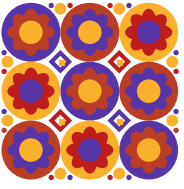
What was learned from the focus groups and surveys

From the focus groups, we learned that there is confusion in the international community about the health care system and what is available for members of the community. Specifically, participants in the focus groups expressed confusion about the distinction between the wellness programs the city promoted and their own access to health care. We also learned that, especially with refugee populations, there is a need to treat post-traumatic stress disorder that is not currently being met. Foreign-born survey respondents were very interested in programs to improve their health. When asked to specify what other health, financial or safety-related programs or services they would like to see, foreign-born residents mentioned suicide prevention.

Planned activities

- Re-launch the Health Powers Life campaign, using the city's existing health care infrastructure and partner organizations to provide education to immigrant and refugee populations on the benefits of maintaining healthy lifestyles and on the health care system and how to gain access to it. The campaign will also provide health screenings using a mobile health unit.
- Expand collaboration with the Tri-County Health Department, DAWN Clinic and other local health services providers in their community outreach efforts toward immigrant and refugee families and support local and state public health efforts and initiatives targeted toward these populations.
- Work with the Aurora Mental Health Center (through its Colorado Refugee Wellness Center) and with other providers to support public education campaigns and other efforts addressing the mental health needs of immigrants and refugees, particularly immigrant and refugee women.





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International Trade and Business

Goal: To promote Aurora as an attractive place for international business investment.

Why this is important

Part of OIIA's charge is to promote Aurora as a destination for international business. Aurora's international community provides leverage that works for the city to attract international business. As noted above, Aurora's welcoming environment for the Salvadoran community was a major factor in the government of El Salvador choosing Aurora to open a consulate. International businesses can play an important role in keeping Aurora economically vibrant, and the city's long-range plans include efforts to attract international business. For example, among the "recommended practices" suggested in Aurora Places for strengthening and expanding the economy are to "support Aurora's multicultural and global influences" and to "attract businesses that connect Aurora to the global marketplace."

What the city has done

As noted above, the city, in addition to persuading the government of El Salvador to open a consulate in Aurora, has hosted many international business delegations and has participated in several international trade missions. The city was recently successful in luring Vons Chicken, a Korean chain, and Tous les Jours, a Korean bakery/café, to open restaurants in Aurora. The city has revitalized its municipal exchange program with Seongnam City (sister city in Korea) to exchange ideas and best practices.

What was learned from the focus groups and surveys

International trade was not a topic discussed in resident and stakeholder focus groups or surveys.

Planned activities

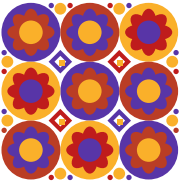
- Continue to promote Aurora as a destination for international business by supporting city trade and business missions and by hosting business and government delegations from other nations. The city will continue to host delegations organized by the U.S. State Department's International Visitors Leadership Program.
- Develop workshops and training materials on the subjects of international business, trade, and exports and imports.
- Organize additional conferences for Aurora and area business leaders to promote international trade and tourism, such as the conference organized by the city for Colorado business leaders to promote business opportunities between Aurora and El Salvador in 2018.

Citizenship and Naturalization

Goal: To encourage eligible immigrants and refugees to become citizens, and to support partners offering citizenship classes and providing other citizenship assistance.

Why this is important

Research has shown that immigrants who become citizens experience, on average, a boost in their income. This helps immigrants and their families thrive. But it is also important for the communities in which they live. For example, research by the Urban Institute in 2015, examining immigrant populations in 21 large and small U.S. cities, found that



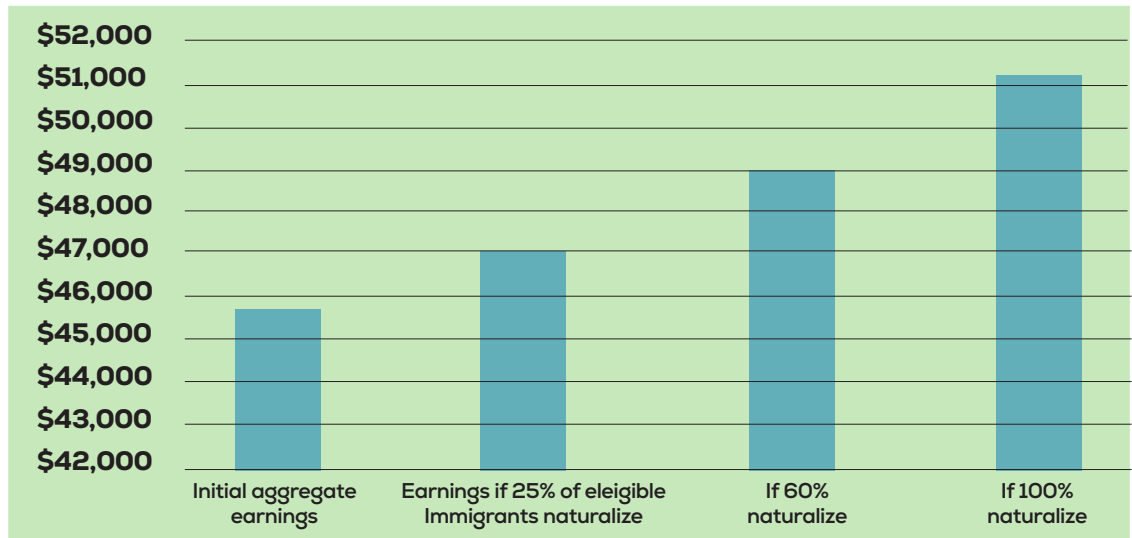
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naturalization boosted individual annual earnings by 9 percent, or approximately \$3,200 per year. For the cities, that increase in income translates to an increase in tax revenue. If eligible immigrants in the 21 cities were to become citizens, overall tax revenue would increase between 1 percent and 2 percent (depending on the city). The study also found that naturalization would also increase the rate of homeownership by about 6 percent in the aggregate. There is other research concluding that naturalization provides a fiscal benefit both to the immigrant and to society. For example, a report done by the University of Southern California estimates that an effort to naturalize half the immigrants eligible for naturalization in a five-year time frame would boost the nation's GDP by between \$37 billion and \$52 billion over 10 years.

In addition to an economic benefit, naturalization allows immigrants to participate fully in the civic life of the community with the right to vote, and is a concrete sign that immigrants have established deep roots in the community. From a city's perspective, naturalization provides a slight economic boost (due to the higher earnings, on average, experienced by immigrants after they naturalize), as well as a boost to overall civic engagement. Across the country, municipal leaders are working with community groups and the private sector to promote naturalization, and to provide English and civics classes and legal assistance to facilitate the acquisition of citizenship.

In 2016, there were an estimated 38,000 immigrants eligible to naturalize in Arapahoe, Adams, and Douglas counties, the three counties in which Aurora sits.

Increase in Aggregate Income in 21 Select Cities if Some or All Eligible Immigrants Naturalize
(Millions of 2012 Dollars)



Source: Maria E. Enchautegui and Linda Giannarelli, *The Economic Impact of Naturalization in Immigration and Cities*, Urban Institute, December 9, 2015





V. Planning for the Next Ten Years

What the city has done

As noted above, the city has partnered with community and faith-based organizations to expand English and citizenship class offerings. It has promoted citizenship by hosting public naturalization ceremonies in the municipal building. Additionally, it has partnered with Aurora Public Libraries and, working with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, placed a “Citizenship Corner” in each library with all of the information needed to prepare for and apply for U.S. citizenship.

In January 2020, the Aurora City Council voted to have the city join Cities for Citizenship, a “national initiative aimed at increasing citizenship among eligible U.S. permanent residents and encouraging cities across the country to invest in citizenship programs.”

What was learned from the focus groups and surveys

In our research through community focus groups, participants who were eligible for citizenship felt there was a need for more English and citizenship classes. The report from the focus groups recommended more and better “multi-cultural communications strategies to promote and connect people to existing training resources for learning English and Citizenship.”

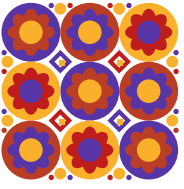
Surveys of residents found that, for foreign-born residents, citizenship classes ranked among the programs they thought would be most helpful to them. The report found a need for more English and citizenship classes, and the consultants recommended the city apply for an integration grant from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (which would provide funding for work related to promoting citizenship or assisting immigrants eligible to apply).

Planned activities

The promotion of U.S. citizenship for those who are eligible will continue to be an important component of our integration plan in the coming five years.

- 1 Continue to help our partners expand their citizenship class offerings.
- 2 Continue to sponsor naturalization ceremonies at city hall during August, and sponsor additional ceremonies on significant national commemorative days, such as Citizenship Day.
- 3 With Aurora Public Libraries and other partners, sponsor programs to educate eligible immigrants about the citizenship process and about materials available to help eligible immigrants prepare for naturalization – including the materials available in the “Citizenship Corners” at Aurora Public Libraries.
- 4 Conduct outreach campaigns to encourage naturalization. In the coming months, the government is proposing to raise fees for the naturalization application by 83 percent. This provides an opportunity to urge eligible immigrants in our community to stop putting off applying for citizenship.
- 5 Work with the Cities for Citizenship and Welcoming America networks to implement best practice strategies for creating a more inclusive and prosperous community.
- 6 Support local innovative efforts to assist immigrants and refugees to access to financial products aimed to cover the cost of the USCIS application fee and naturalization process, such the “Dreamer Loan” from Fitzsimons Credit Union.





V. Planning for the Next Ten Years

Arts and Culture

Goal: To achieve greater immigrant and refugee participation in the cultural life of the city, to enrich the city's cultural life, fostering the diversity of places within the city that contribute to making Aurora a vibrant community.

Why this is important

Arts, crafts and cultural events present an opportunity for curious Aurorans of all backgrounds to come together and explore one another's culture. Our flagship cultural event, Global Fest, has grown to 10,000 attendees. However, there are many other cultural events celebrating immigrant and refugee cultures in Aurora that can also provide us with a greater understanding of our fellow Aurorans.

The city has included the celebration of cultural differences among its planning principles for the coming years. By promoting inclusion and by celebrating cultural differences, the city strengthens trust between the city and its diverse communities.

What the city has done

As noted above, the city has been promoting and co-sponsoring cultural events with various Aurora ethnic communities, with Global Fest being the flagship event.

What was learned from the focus groups and surveys

While focus group participants indicated that sports and recreational activities were not a priority for immigrants and refugees who prioritize learning English and making a living, we did learn that there was a desire for more culturally relevant arts and crafts activities. Foreign-born survey respondents expressed greater interest, listing "cultural events" among the most useful programs for supporting the integration of immigrants and refugees into the Aurora community. In fact, foreign-born survey respondents ranked "Aurora's cultural celebrations/arts initiatives" second among programs that would be most helpful.

Planned activities

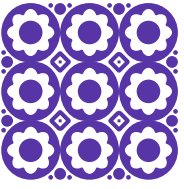
- Expand the annual Global Fest, our premier international event, including the International Marketplace giving artisans an opportunity to show off their crafts.
- Partner with Roshni to support the New American Arts Festival. This festival will bring together all genres of art, artists and art lovers to raise awareness of the vibrant diversity that exists in and around our thriving Cultural Arts District, both on professional and community levels.
- Expand the annual Day of the Dead Celebration.
- Promote and co-sponsor, the many cultural celebrations and arts-related events of our local immigrant and refugee communities.
- Develop joint cultural programs with Aurora Public Library, the Aurora History Museum and other cultural institutions in the city.



"In 2017, we performed at Global Fest. The festival gave us a platform to showcase our work. We were pleased to return in 2018 and grateful for the support and encouragement by OIIA"

Roshni





V. Planning for the Next Ten Years

Sports and Recreation

Goal: To bring Aurora residents of different backgrounds together through sports.

Why this is important

Sports can be an important tool of integration. Participation in sports not only promotes physical health, but it builds self-esteem and self-confidence. For refugees and immigrants, it can also help with language acquisition and foster social inclusion. Assuming the sport activities involve the community as a whole, it helps increase community cohesion. One of the recommended practices included in the city's current plan is to "support community events and activities that foster community building".

What the city has done

As noted above, OIIA has worked to organize and sponsor certain sporting events, including soccer and volleyball tournaments.

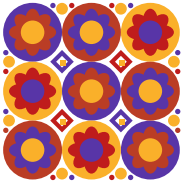
What was learned from the focus groups and surveys

Recommendations coming out of the focus groups included creating more soccer fields to meet the high demand, and ensuring affordability of city recreation facilities and programs. Foreign-born respondents to the surveys mentioned "sports leagues" among the programs they said the city could do better to support the integration of immigrants and refugees.

Planned activities

- Organize the Mayor's International Soccer Cup, bringing together various international soccer clubs for a weekend tournament.
- Expand the number of city-sponsored recreational and sport programs for immigrants and refugees.
- Work with the city's Parks, Recreation & Open Space Department to expand the number of soccer facilities in areas with a high concentration of immigrants and refugees.





VI. Metrics and Evaluation

For all the activities to be undertaken for the various goals in this strategic plan, how will we know if we are succeeding? Measuring activities and evaluating performance always comes at an administrative cost.

At the outset, each goal area will have something that can be measured through existing data collection methods. More thought will be given to what the final metrics and methodologies will be, but some examples might include:

GOAL AREA	METRIC	METHODOLOGY
Economic Advancement	Business Startups	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Permits Issued• Micro loans originated
Educational Advancement	Professional Licensing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• License applications• Training enrollments
Civic Participation	Citizenship Applications	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Naturalizations applications• ESL class attendance

All the goal areas and their primary metrics (and quarterly progress) will be reported on the OIIA website as uniformly formatted dashboards. Dashboards are information management tools that visually track key performance indicators to monitor the vitality and progress of programs and processes. Measuring progress toward our goals using clear metrics presented in an accessible format is recommended elsewhere in city planning documents, namely the Smart City Playbook, which calls in part for the city to “designate key performance indicators... for all citywide goals” and to “adopt tools such as dashboards for internal and external sharing of progress.”

While such output metrics are meaningful, and can be achieved within existing resources, there is also the possibility of obtaining new resources for larger scale and more “aspirational” evaluations. Since the overarching goal of OIIA is the support of immigrant integration, there are many opportunities for a deeper evaluation of integration from the perspective of both arriving and receiving communities. One example of such a deeper evaluation arises from an opportunity the city has to work with the Technical University of El Salvador (UTEC) in the summer of 2021 on a joint study of the Salvadoran community in Aurora, which would include, among other things, a demographic profile, a survey of Salvadoran-owned businesses, and the level of integration of Salvadorans in Aurora. A joint report will be presented in Aurora in early 2022.

Another example of a deeper evaluation, measuring the success of integration over time, is the Refugee Integration Survey and Evaluation (RISE) project, an internationally cited project conducted in Colorado that engaged many refugees in Aurora over five years ending in 2015. The project provides a good example of what is possible with longitudinal research, if resources permit. Longitudinal research observes the same group of individuals over an extended period of time.

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FOUNDERS:



THE DENVER FOUNDATION

PROJECT TEAM:



Office of
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**AURORA IMMIGRANT AND
REFUGEE COMMISSION**



KEY PARTNERS:



KEY PARTNERS:



GLOBAL PARTNERS:



COMMUNITY PARTNERS:

- African Chamber of Commerce
- African Leadership Group
- Asian Pacific Development Center
- Asociacion CentroAmericana Unida (ACAUNIDA)
- Aurora Asian Pacific Partnership
- Aurora History Museum
- Aurora Sister Cities International
- Aurora Together Community Champions
- Colorado Chinese Language School
- Colorado Ethiopian Community
- Colorado Ivorian Organization
- Colorado Korean Association
- Colorado Korean Senior Association
- Colorado Muslim Society
- Colorado People's Alliance
- Colorado Taste of Africa
- Community College of Aurora
- Congolese Community of Colorado
- CREA Results
- Dayton Street Day Labor Center
- Denver Chinese School
- ECDC African Community Center
- Eco Folklorico Cuscatlan
- El Grupo VIDA
- EnglishCorner
- Eritrean Community Civic Center
- Eritreans Unite Colorado
- FAX Aurora
- Friends of Mexico
- Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Colorado
- Iglesia Lutheran Jesus de Nazaret
- Interaction Christian Outreach Mission
- International Rescue Committee
- International Cross Cultural Network of Aurora
- International Youth Fellowship
- Japanese Business Association of the Rockies
- Korean Pastors Association of Colorado
- Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains
- Mexican Cultural Center
- Mi Casa Peru Colorado
- Oromo Community of Colorado
- People's Building
- Philippine American Society of Colorado (PASCO)
- Queen of Peace
- Roshni, Step into the Light
- Salvadoreños Residiendo En Colorado (SARCO)
- Servicios De La Raza
- The Flores Foundation
- The National Unification Advisory Council Denver Chapter (NUAC)
- The Rocky Mountain Chinese Calligraphy Association
- Tigray-Ethiopian Community Association in Colorado
- Together Colorado
- Town Center at Aurora
- United States Rwanda Community Abroad
- VUELA for Health



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