

**Building Community and
Growing our Economy:
A Welcoming Plan for
New Americans**



Bowling Green, Kentucky
January 2020



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LETTER FROM CITY OF BOWLING GREEN

The City of Bowling Green has made significant gains over the last 12 years in the integration of our newest Americans in areas such as accessing city resources and services, removing language barriers, and various leadership initiatives through our International Communities Division in the Neighborhood and Community Services Department. These pioneering immigrant integration initiatives--many of which were the first within any city in Kentucky--have expanded the menu of services provided to the City's growing New American population. While some successes have been gained in the realm of enhancing economic development opportunities for New Americans, an organized effort was lacking for the myriad of untapped potential.

In recent years Bowling Green saw unprecedented economic and job growth, marked by a significantly low unemployment rate of 3.5% (Oct. 2019). While there are thousands of job opportunities locally, approximately 6,000 current job openings in the region remain unfilled due to a lack of skilled labor. However, the '**New Americans in Warren County**' research report showed 1 out of every 4 of New Americans are working at jobs located outside of the city; it's locally known that many of these residents are commuting between 2 to 4 hours daily for work. This dynamic created a gap where the community has not been able to maximize the full potential of our existing New American labor force.

In 2018 the City of Bowling Green, in partnership with the South Central Kentucky Workforce Development Board (SCWDB) and the Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce (Chamber), applied for and was awarded the 2019 Gateways for Growth Challenge for the second year in a row to develop a strategic plan that attempts to tackle the above issues.

The plan set forth represents the prioritization of recommendations and strategies developed through a comprehensive strategic process bringing together over 120 stakeholders from multiple sectors and industries. We envision ***Building Community and Growing our Economy: A Welcoming Plan for New Americans*** to be a community wide plan to include New Americans as part of our workforce solution to ensure continued economic growth for years to come.



JEFFERY B. MEISEL, CPA, MPA
City Manager





January 21, 2020

The Gateways for Growth Challenge was created in 2016 to provide communities with demonstrated leadership and commitment to developing an inclusive, accessible, and welcoming environment to all residents the opportunity to receive support for that endeavor. Now in its third round, New American Economy and Welcoming America have awarded more than 50 communities nationwide with tailored economic research on the contributions of immigrants; technical assistance in the development of a multisector strategic plan; and matching grants to bolster this work.

Awardees have ranged from Anchorage, Alaska to Portland, Maine and include communities as small as Grand Forks, North Dakota and as large as Dallas, Texas. Each community receives this award because they have shown a deep commitment from local government, business and civil society to work collaboratively towards concrete, action-oriented recommendations to ensure that city is addressing both the challenges and opportunities facing the immigrant community and is creating pathways for all residents to succeed.

The City of Bowling Green was selected as one of 14 communities in Round III of this award, and one of only six to receive both technical assistance and a matching grant towards developing a strategic welcoming plan. Its selection in 2018 built on its previous G4G award in Round II, when it received research on the economic contributions of immigrants to Warren County from New American Economy. After supporting a year of thoughtful, community-driven, and multi-sector planning, New American Economy and Welcoming America are pleased to endorse the recommendations included in this plan and look forward to continuing to support the City of Bowling Green as it strives to become an even stronger community.

Kate Brick, Director of State and Local Initiatives, New American Economy
Jordyne Krumroy, Regional Manager, Welcoming America



RECENT HISTORY OF IMMIGRATION IN BOWLING GREEN AND WARREN COUNTY, KENTUCKY

The City of Bowling Green is located in Warren County in South-Central Kentucky along Interstate 65. It is the commercial and industrial hub of South-Central Kentucky. As of 2017, the City had a population of 67,067 spread over 40 square miles, while Warren County has a total population of 128,845. Bowling Green is the third most populated city in Kentucky, following Louisville and Lexington.

Bowling Green has experienced a significant demographic shift in the last twenty years – until the 1990's the percentage of New American residents in the city remained relatively flat, representing only 1% to 3% of the total population. In the 1990's that number began to accelerate steadily and by the 2010 US Census the city's New American population accounted for 11%. The American Community Survey for 2012-2016 shows Bowling Green's New American population now accounts for 14% of the overall population, the largest percentage of New American residents in any city of Kentucky.

Bowling Green is the fastest growing city in Kentucky with a 21% growth rate from 2000-2010 with an additional 15% growth between 2011 and 2016. The New American

population has contributed substantially to this growth. A 2018 'New Americans in Warren County' Gateways for Growth report from New American Economy found 32.3% of the County's growth from 2011 to 2016 was attributed to New Americans. During that time, there was an 86.6% increase in New American residents with a New American population of 11,274, representing 9.3% of the entire Warren County population in 2016. New Americans come to Bowling Green from all over the world with the top six regions of origin being Bosnia (14.7%), Mexico (11.3%), Myanmar (10.3%), Sub-Saharan Africa (6.8%), Iraq (5.6%), and El Salvador (5.5%).



Much of this growth is due to Bowling Green's ongoing efforts in refugee resettlement. While refugee arrivals have declined nationwide, arrivals continue in Kentucky with 773 from October 1, 2017 to August 31, 2018, ranking ninth nationally. During this time period 30% of the entire state's new arrivals were in Bowling Green and 47% in Louisville; an astounding comparison considering Louisville has two resettlement centers and Bowling Green has only one. Situated between gateway cities Nashville, TN and Louisville, KY, Bowling Green/Warren County also experiences a substantial amount of secondary migration, including an estimated 1,000 refugees settling in the jurisdiction since 2007.



The demographic shift across Bowling Green and Warren County can also be seen in the two public school districts in Bowling Green/Warren County. In 2017 Warren County Public Schools was the 11th largest school district in the state of Kentucky and 19% of its student population was either being served in English Learning (EL) programs or had a

history of being served in EL programs. That is nearly one in five (3,000) students in Warren County Schools. International students speak 59 languages and dialects and come from more than 30 countries. Likewise, Bowling Green Independent School District had 990 students speaking 47 different languages.

Bowling Green is also home to Western Kentucky University and students from foreign countries have more than doubled in enrollment in recent years. In Fall 2015, there were nearly 1,400 international students at WKU compared to 679 in Fall 2011. Students from Saudi Arabia, China, and India accounted for over 63% of all international enrollment in 2015. Since then we've seen a drop in enrollment.

NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

You may wonder what we mean by 'New Americans'. When we say 'New Americans', we are referring to any foreign-born persons who currently lives in Bowling Green and Warren County, regardless of their immigration status.



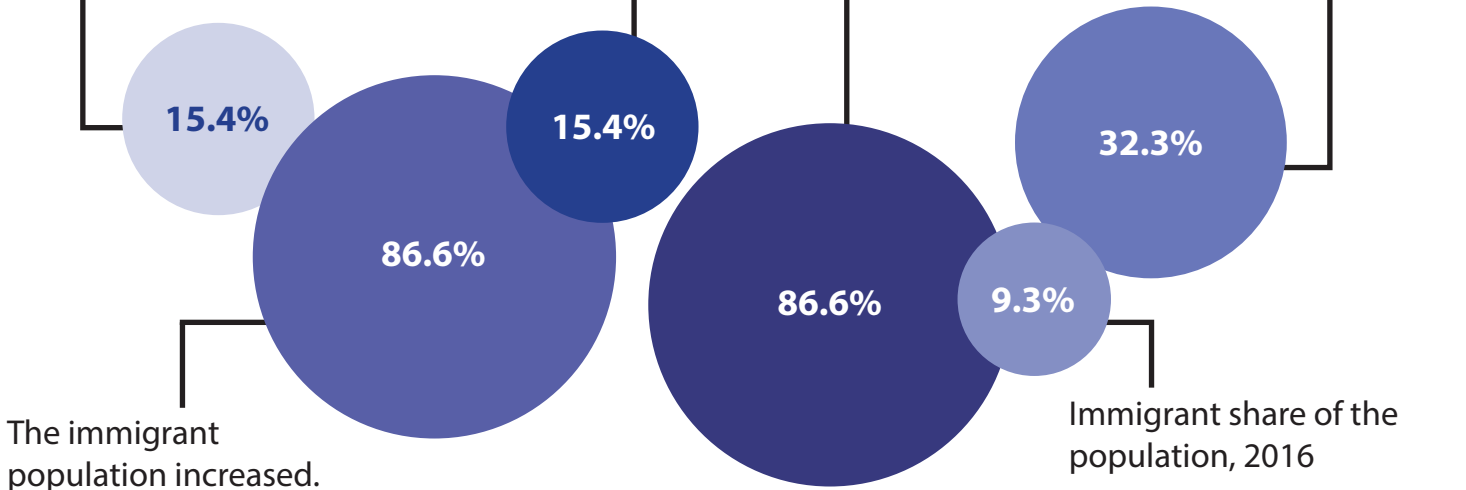
POPULATION GROWTH

Between 2011 and 2016, the overall population in the county grew.

Total population
104,792 → 120,978

Immigrant population
6,041 → 11,274

Share of total population growth in the county attributed to immigrants.



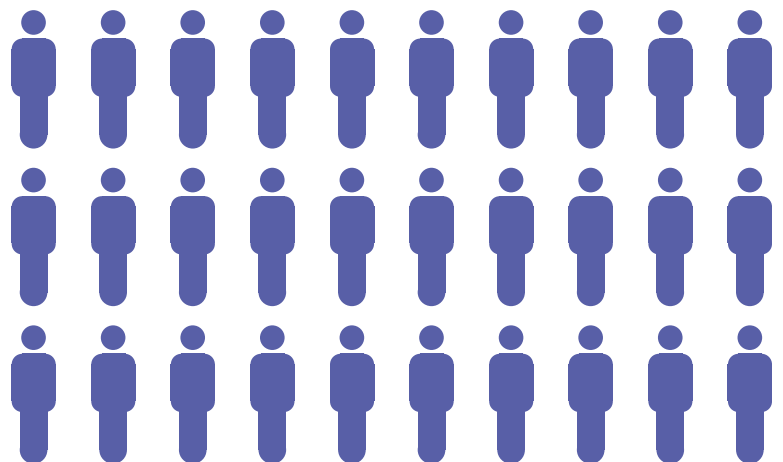
Number of immigrants living in Warren County, Kentucky in 2016:

11,274

Top six countries/regions of origin for immigrants living in the county:

Bosnia.....	14.7%
Mexico.....	11.3%
Myanmar.....	10.3%
Sub-Saharan Africa*	6.8%
Iraq.....	5.6%
El Salvador.....	5.5%

*This includes Ghana, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Kenya

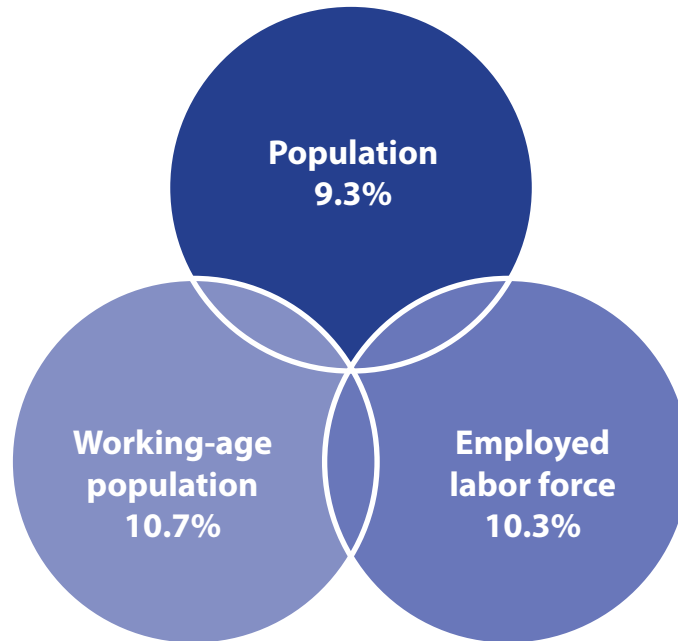


Other countries of origin - **45.8%**

Bosnia - **14.7%**

POPULATION GROWTH

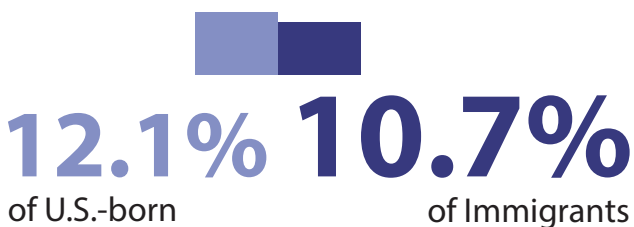
Immigrant shares of the...



* Working-age refers to people ages 16 - 64 years old.

EDUCATION

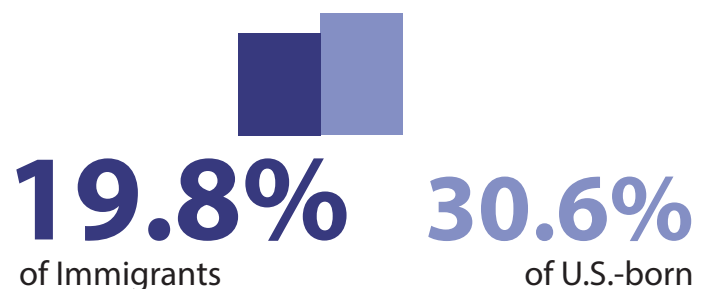
Share of the Warren County population over age 25 with an **advanced degree** in 2016:



1,356

students enrolled in colleges and universities in the county during the fall of 2015 were international students.

Share of the Warren County population over age 25 with a **bachelor's degree or higher** in 2016:

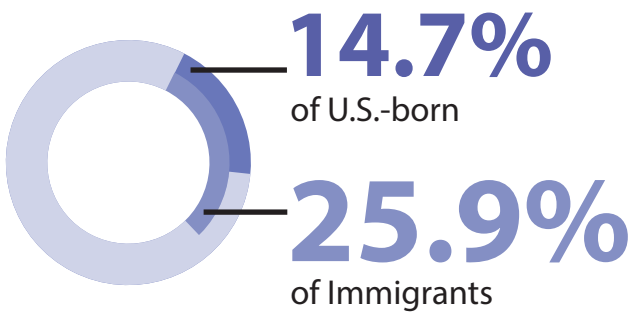


Immigrants made up **10.0%**

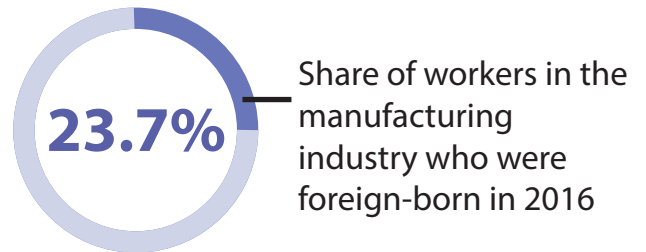
of students under age 18 who attended public schools in the county in 2016.

ECONOMIC IMPACT - LABOR FORCE

25.9% of the employed immigrants living in Warren County commuted outside the county for work in 2016, compared with **14.7%** of employed U.S.-born residents.



Immigrants made outsized contributions to several **key industries** in the county. This includes:



ENTREPRENEURSHIP



Immigrants represented **8.1%** of the entrepreneurs in Warren County in 2016.

Share of the **foreign-born** population that was self-employed in 2016:

5.2%

Share of the **U.S.-born** population that was self-employed in 2016:

6.8%

ECONOMIC IMPACT - SPENDING, HOUSING WEALTH & TAXES

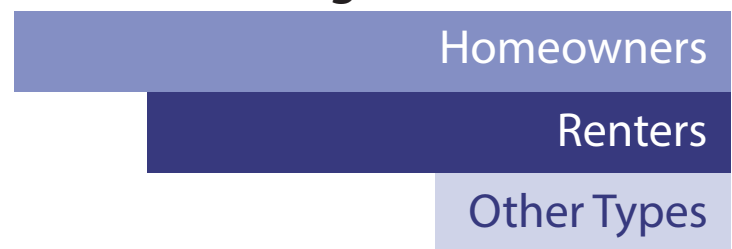
In 2016, New Americans in Warren County contributed **\$564.3 million**, or **9.5%**, to the county's GDP directly through their wages and spending, but also indirectly through additional economic activity created by their consumer behaviors.

In 2016,

40.3%

of immigrant households in the county owned their own homes, compared to 51.9% of the U.S. born.

Immigrant households



54.9%

of immigrant households were renters.

The total property value of immigrant households was

\$279.5M.

Their total annual rent was

\$15.2M.

Amount earned by immigrant in 2016: **\$234.7M**

\$43.0M

went to federal taxes.

\$21.1M

went to state and local taxes.

Leaving **\$170.6M**
in spending power.

GATEWAYS FOR GROWTH STEERING COMMITTEE

The City of Bowling Green was selected for the Gateways for Growth award, a competitive opportunity for local communities to receive support from New American Economy (NAE) and Welcoming America (WA) for the development of multi-sector plans for welcoming and integrating New Americans. The City of Bowling Green applied and received funding for two levels of support: Technical Assistance and Matching Grant Funds. The City of Bowling Green received the former over the course of the development of the welcoming plan that you are now reading, while the latter was used to secure consultants with expertise in strategic planning, economic development, and working with a diverse labor force to assist in the development of this welcoming plan. The consultants are from Cincinnati Compass, an organization dedicated to advancing cultural and economic inclusion of New Americans in the Cincinnati, OH region.

The City of Bowling Green then created a steering committee consisting of individuals from various organizations representing multiple sectors across Warren County. The committee represented sectors including government, business, social service, non-profit, entrepreneurs, faith-based, education (K-12, post-secondary, and adult education), public safety, health care, refugee resettlement, housing, and workforce development. The consultants worked with the Steering Committee and the City to identify goals, timelines, process, and roles towards creating the various aspects of the strategic plan. The steering committee helped to identify some of the assets, opportunities, needs, and best practices across the City of Bowling Green related to New American cultural and economic integration. It was stressed that the plan should focus on creating a welcoming and safe environment for New Americans, while also enhancing resource access and provision around education, workforce development, and entrepreneurship.



With the help of the City of Bowling Green and the Steering Committee, the consultants then planned, coordinated, and facilitated 12 focused listening sessions over the course of the next several months. The listening sessions provided an opportunity for community members to share their experiences, provide information on the assets within the community, and make recommendations on how to leverage those assets to address the needs across the city to better welcome, support, and retain New American communities. The consultants also heard from employers and service providers on the challenges and best practices relative to supporting New Americans, meeting workforce needs, and enhancing education and job-related skills. Overall, the listening sessions convened representatives from multiple sectors: entrepreneurs, faith-based organizations, the International Community Advisory Council, social services, employment and housing services, law enforcement, post-secondary education, employers, and workforce development.

The information gathered during the listening sessions, particularly the recommendations, formed the basis for the welcoming plan you see now. The steering committee, City of Bowling Green, and consultants compiled all of the information and recommendations and structured them into actionable items by themes:

- 1. Strengthened & Inclusive Economy**
- 2. Connected & Safe Communities**
- 3. Engaged & Informed Families.**





GATEWAYS FOR GROWTH STRATEGIC PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE

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University



STEERING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthened and Inclusive Economies

I. Provide business and entrepreneurial support to business community

1. Create a liaison position that will connect community stakeholders, businesses, workforce, and Chamber of Commerce partners

- a. Liaison will help create a workforce pipeline for local employers by direct engagement with community leaders, faith-based organizations, and the International Communities Advisory Council (ICAC)
- b. Liaison will coordinate community events with community organizations to host workshops around small business development
- c. Liaison will connect individuals to job readiness and workforce related resources

2. Develop mentorship program to connect New Americans to business professionals and entrepreneurs

- a. Connect employees and entrepreneurs to mentors to help navigate career pathways and access entrepreneurial resources
- b. Develop training for mentors
- c. Establish resource and networking groups- employee resource groups, New American affinity groups and consortiums- to connect new hires and potential employees to support services



3. Establish and convene New American entrepreneurial roundtables so existing entrepreneurs can share best practices and connect with content experts across Bowling Green

- a. Convene and host roundtables to connect entrepreneurs to business resources
- b. Build trust with current and aspiring New American entrepreneurs
- c. Host mentoring programs and work with liaison to coordinate additional workshops as identified by entrepreneurs
- d. Provide resources, guidance, and technical assistance to support individuals interested in establishing non-profit organizations

4. Enhance Business Training and Business Recognition

- a. Identify, promote, and replicate best welcoming practices of employers, such as: communication techniques (illustrations, videos, and translated SOP documents) for successful onboarding of new hires; extended vacation/ leave of absence policies; employer referral programs; emergency funds; cultural competency and sensitivity training; employee resource groups
- b. Host regularly scheduled convening of employer roundtables that focus specifically on sharing best practices of recruitment, hiring, retention, and advancement of New Americans
- c. Recognize and celebrate businesses that attract, retain, and advance New American employees, while advancing inclusive and equitable jobsite practices
- d. Train businesses on legal practices and immigration documents relative to hiring and retaining international students and internationally trained talent
- e. Identify and celebrate New American businesses

Resources: Chamber of Commerce, SBA, SBDC, PTAC, WKU accelerator, SBIR, City of Bowling Green, New American community leaders, faith community, financial institutions, legal community, Workforce Development Board



II. Promote workforce development services that lead to sustainable employment while meeting the needs of employers

1. Promote pathways to skilled trades

- a.** Promote existing programs: high school programs in technical schools; apprenticeship and journeyman programs; post-secondary vocational training
- b.** Develop resources and guides to help New Americans learn about and navigate these pathways to skilled trades:
 - 1. Translate existing resources
 - 2. Educate New Americans on pathways by creating one-page guides, translated into multiple languages
 - 3. Train community leaders on how to navigate these pathways so that they can then guide people through the processes
 - 4. Promote pathways through community leaders

2. Enhance the accessibility and visibility of career readiness, workforce, and soft skills training programs

- a.** Encourage and promote the development of language access policies and practices for institutions within workforce development system
- b.** Connect staff within workforce development system to cultural competency training
- c.** Hire and retain more multilingual staff
- d.** Promote training and workshops through faith-based communities, International Communities Advisory Council (ICAC), and the International Center of Kentucky



3. Support foreign- credentialed New Americans with credential evaluation and state licensure pathway navigation

- a. Connect New Americans with foreign-earned credentials to state licensure and credentialing pathways
- b. Develop training for workforce development system staff on licensure/credentialing pathways and how to integrate them into larger career pathway guidance

4. Develop an online workforce development services guide and portal to be used by providers and community members

- a. Conduct a resource mapping project to identify existing resources, programs, experts, and community stakeholders
- b. Collaborate with university students and community partners to build out portal

5. Establish regular meetings with workforce development organizations and employers to identify workforce needs and establish cross-sector strategies to address them

- a. Add agenda item to existing meetings to include discussion of New American workforce needs

6. Promote Adult English Language Learning

- a. Establish resource map of EL providers
- b. Form cross-sector task force to develop resource map of EL providers and create an Adult EL alliance to coordinate service, enhance quality of instruction, and help New Americans navigate the resources.

Resources: Workforce and Career Centers, Chamber of Commerce, SKYCTC Skills U, City of Bowling Green, New American community leaders, faith community, International Center of Kentucky, Workforce Development System Partners, Goodwill Industries, Community Action of Southern Kentucky



Connected & Safe Communities

Create welcoming and safe communities where New Americans are connected to community resources: religious institutions, recreational activities, safety services and housing options

1. Connect New Americans to Community Resources

- a. Promote and grow office of International Communities Liaison as a centralized resource for new Americans
- b. Update and share New American Resource Guide
- c. Utilize International Communities Advisory Council (ICAC) to disseminate information

Resources: United Way of Southern Kentucky, Community Action of Southern Kentucky, City of Bowling Green, SKYCTC Skills U., International Center, Churches, Youth Service Centers, Family Resource Centers, Migrant Education programs

2. Create Coalition of Faith Based Organizations

- a. Identify faith institutions working with New Americans
- b. Connect New Americans to faith institutions and mentors

Resources: Hope House, HOTEL Inc., Refuge BG, Salvation Army, Community Partnership for Immigrant and Refugee Families, religious institutions and local churches

3. Explore the potential for creating a BG ID

- a. Establish a cross-sector task force to research best practices of municipal ID and explore the need for adopting a municipal ID program in Bowling Green

Resources: City of Bowling Green, local Churches, International Center of Kentucky, Bowling Green Police Department, Warren County Sheriff, Bowling Green Fire Department, Warren County Attorney, Legal Aid, Housing Authority of Bowling Green, Refuge BG



4. Create Refugee Advisory Board for the International Center of Kentucky

- a. Convene stakeholders meeting to establish Advisory Board for the International Center of Kentucky

Resources: International Center of Kentucky, Refugee “Alumni”, International Communities Advisory Council

5. Explore options for providing transportation connections for New Americans to employment opportunities

- a. Engage New Americans in development of comprehensive community transport plan
- b. Assist New Americans in passing driving portion of Kentucky driving test

Resources: City of Bowling Green, Community Action of Southern Kentucky, South Central Workforce Development Board, Refuge BG, MPO (Metropolitan Planning Organization)

6. Create affordable and safe housing options for New Americans

- a. Create mechanism for New American tenants to voice concerns concerning substandard housing or predatory practices
- b. Develop a “model” lease to be shared with New American community
- c. Examine regulations around lease-option contracts
- d. Improve outreach to New American residents and landlords on fair-housing resources
- e. Increase homeownership opportunities by:

1. Providing training on mortgages/loans, rent/ utilities payment, taxes and insurance

2. Promoting local housing options via section 8, and nonprofit housing partners

Resources: City of Bowling Green, City’s Housing Division, Habitat for Humanity, Live the Dream Development, HANDS, Hotel Inc, BB&T, Realtors Association, BG Apartment Association, ICAC, Bowling Green Human Rights Commission, Homeless & Housing Coalition



7. Expand Community Cultural Competency

- a. Train uniformed officer as New American community liaison
- b. Recruit New Americans to police & fire trainee classes
- c. Create New American liaison and establish cultural competency training for elementary and secondary schools
- d. Adopt and disseminate “I Speak” cards

Resources: Local Law Enforcement Agencies, City of Bowling Green, Public School Districts, Warren County Medical Society, WKU Student Rural Health Association, Hospitals, Medical Providers

8. Enhance Parks and Recreation

- a. Establish community calendar of cultural events and programming
- b. Enhance the accessibility of parks and recreation centers through translation of park signs, brochures, maps, and marketing materials regarding programs and athletic leagues
- c. Provide workshops and guides to help New Americans understand the process for obtaining recreational licenses (ex: fishing and boating) and permits

Resources: City of Bowling Green Parks and Recreation Department



Engaged & Informed Families

Promote a welcoming environment where New Americans understand how to navigate health care, financial and legal systems while actively engaging in the community

1. Improve access to health services

- a. Provide education on accessing health services, general health care, and navigating the health care systems
- b. Encourage employers to establish employer-based health and wellness programs.
- c. Reduce stigma and raise awareness around mental health needs via communications campaign, support groups, and workplace outreach
- d. Create cultural competency training for medical systems and providers

Resources: Health department, BRIGHT Coalition (Barren River Initiative for Getting Health Together), Life Skills, Community Action of Southern Kentucky, Department for Community-Based Services, Community Partnership for Immigrant and Refugee Families

2. Promote financial well-being and enhance wealth management

- a. Increase knowledge for New Americans on basic finance principles such as personal budgeting, the importance of banking, insurance, basics of establishing and maintaining credit, saving and investment, and preparing tax returns
- b. Identify potential partners to explore options for in-person trainings, to identify and utilize printed/electronic resources, and to engage interpreters and multilingual professionals to assist with training

Resources: Refuge BG, Financial Institutions, Insurance Agencies, Investment Companies



3. Promote and Enhance Civic Engagement

- a. Promote citizenship and naturalization by increasing availability and access to information aimed at assisting eligible New Americans with naturalization process
- b. Increase New American participation and representation on community organizations and boards

Resources: International Communities Advisory Council, City of Bowling Green, International Center of Kentucky, Refuge BG, faith-based community, Public Libraries, legal community, Community Partnership for Immigrant and Refugee Families

4. Enhance visibility, accessibility, and availability of Legal Services

- a. Establish and publish a checklist and resource guide for legal services
- b. Attract lawyers who have experience working with New Americans and who have expertise in immigration law
- c. Increase access to resources and assistance for completing paperwork related to visa processes
- d. Promote Know Your Rights and Responsibilities workshops related to immigration, housing, and health care

Resources: Bowling Green Police Department, Warren County Sheriff, Bowling Green Fire Department, Warren County Attorney, Kentucky Legal Aid, Housing Authority of Bowling Green, Refuge BG, Community Action of Southern Kentucky, BG Human Rights Commission, Homeless and Housing Coalition



CONCLUSION - NEXT STEPS

From the data collected regarding the contributions of New Americans in Warren County, the stories told during the many focus groups in preparing this plan, and the one-on-one meetings with New Americans in Bowling Green, it is obvious that New Americans are contributing greatly to the economy and culture of this community. However, there is still significant progress to be made both in terms of economic and social integration.

The recommendations in this report are intended to build upon the progress already achieved. They are the culmination of many meetings with interested parties across a broad spectrum. However, the success of any plan is measured by its implementation. The big challenges lie ahead.

The adoption and implementation of these recommendations will go a long way in helping Bowling Green to achieve its goal of fully integrating New Americans into the economy and the community. We attempted to identify potential partners when drafting the recommendations and recognize that there may be other community partners willing to engage in the implementation of the recommendations.

We believe it is important not to let this plan sit, but to begin implementation steps as soon as possible. This will involve community partners taking ownership over specific recommendations, identifying both short-term and long-term goals, drafting measurable outcomes, and creating a clear timeline for implementation.

The plan provides a roadmap, one drawn by New Americans as well as long-term residents of Bowling Green. It is a plan that comes from the community and is specifically designed for the community. With its implementation, it will ensure that Bowling Green remains a welcoming home for New Americans for generations to come.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

City of Bowling Green, Board of Commissioners	
City of Bowling Green, City Manager.....	Jeff Meisel
City of Bowling Green, Director Neighborhood and Community Services.....	Brent Childers
City of Bowling Green, Grants Coordinator.....	Nick Cook
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COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Bosnian American Association
Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce
Bowling Green Police Department
Community Partnership for Immigrants and Refugee Families
International Center of Kentucky
International Communities Advisory Council
Refuge Bowling Green
South Central Workforce Development Board
Southcentral Kentucky Community and Technical College
Warren County Jailer
Warren County Sheriff's Department
Western Kentucky University, Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation
Western Kentucky University, Global Learning & International Affairs
Western Kentucky University Police Department
Photography by Zed Saeed for the Kentucky Documentary Project
All focus group participants
The dozens of unnamed key partners who will work with the Lead Agencies to carry out this plan
All long-term residents and all New Americans for contributing to a thriving, welcome community

