The Kansas City region is home to more than 60,000 foreign-born persons, representing about 5 percent of the total population. The region, like many metropolitan areas across the nation, benefits from the contributions immigrants make to the area’s economy. Recent studies by the Brookings Institution show that immigration is a key factor for metropolitan regions that have experienced population growth, as well as increased entrepreneurship and growth in STEM talent during the past decade. Just as important, immigrants add richness to our community through social and cultural diversity. Many cities and counties are examining their policies, programs and resources to become more welcoming to immigrants.

The following steps and best practices have been identified by two leading national organizations working with communities across the country – Welcoming America and New American Economy. They set the precedent for this work, and they have provided ongoing technical support to the Kansas City region.

The steps and best practices fall into six key areas and should be considered for implementation by area communities:

- Government Leadership
- Communications/Connected Communities
- Economic Development
- Equitable Access
- Civic Engagement
- Safe Communities

Sources: Welcoming America and New American Economy
Overall Principles

An important step that a community, business or organization could take is to adopt a set of principles or values around becoming more welcoming to immigrants.

Welcoming cities and counties could adhere to the following principles:

• It is essential to engage the receiving community in ways that build greater understanding, particularly among people who may have concerns about or are unaware of the changing demographics of their community.

• People of all backgrounds – socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, religious, etc. – have unique talents and perspectives that can be brought to bear to make our communities vibrant. Welcoming should be as inclusive as possible to all groups.

• Programs intended to help immigrants navigate the community and learn about local norms should also be respectful of and leverage the cultural and leadership assets of immigrants.

• Leaders can play a catalytic role by recognizing, rewarding and investing in community partners who are essential to building a community’s capacity for this work.

• The voice of both immigrants and the broader community are critical to defining a welcoming agenda.

GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP

Increasingly, local governments across the country are creating city or county offices to house efforts to welcome new residents, facilitate their integration, and make local government more accessible, equitable and responsive to the needs of everyone. Traditional gateway cities like New York and Boston have had such offices (commonly referred to as an Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs or an Office of New Americans) for decades. Cities like Atlanta and Nashville that have seen significant demographic change in recent years have established them more recently.

Although each office prioritizes issues based on its unique local context, common areas of focus include:

• Improving access to city information and services.

• Supporting immigrant entrepreneurs.

• Attracting and retaining a talented workforce.

• Promoting naturalization and civic engagement.

• Enhancing public safety.

Many communities have chosen to create such an office in recognition of the need to adapt, be resilient to, and capitalize on the reality of ongoing demographic change and populations that will be diverse in new ways over time. Cities and counties interested in elevating their international profile through the creation of such an office within municipal government can draw upon a variety of existing models and best practices.

Nashville has quickly risen as a national leader in innovative strategies to welcome, include and integrate its international communities. The city government established the Mayor’s New Americans Advisory Council made up of representatives from diverse immigrant communities to meet with city staff monthly and
discuss issues of importance to Nashville’s international population. The city launched MyCityAcademy, a seven-month educational and training program that gives new residents direct access to city government to learn about how the city works and empowers them to participate and engage with the government that serves them. The mayor established Nashville’s Office of New Americans, whose mission is centered around four primary objectives:

• Engaging and empowering immigrants to participate in their local government and in their communities.

• Fostering a knowledgeable, safe and connected community.

• Expanding economic and educational opportunities for New Americans to the benefit of all residents.

• Working with community organizations and other Metro departments to empower and support New Americans.

Initial Steps by Local Government Leaders

Institutional Process for Establishing an Office: Formally creating an office within city government to oversee immigrant integration has been accomplished through a variety of different measures — from a mayoral announcement to establishing the office within the city’s charter, which is one of the most formal mechanisms to ensure continuity across administrations. Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago and Houston created their offices through mayoral announcements. In New York City, where the office has existed for more than three decades, the mandate for the office was eventually written into the City’s charter through popular referendum. Other cities have established their offices through executive order (Nashville and Philadelphia), by passing a city council resolution (Los Angeles, San Francisco and Seattle), or by issuing a city ordinance (Denver).

Staff: Staffing models for these offices vary depending on the size of the city and its foreign-born population, the placement of the office within local government and the city’s budget for this work. Newer offices often start with a small full-time staff of one to two people and grow over time as they demonstrate value and/or shift priorities. Most offices have around two to three full time staff members. Often these offices also employ the skills of college and graduate student interns, fellows (in particular AmeriCorps and VISTA fellows) and volunteers to support their work. Staff functions typically include external affairs and community engagement, program management, research and policy analysis, and legal expertise.

Function: City or county offices serve multiple functions that make them critical to ensuring the local government is accessible and responsive to all residents. These include:

• To serve as an institutional home for information, programs and engagement between the city/county and immigrant communities. Local government offices serve a virtual, physical and institutional role as a central, one-stop location where a range of information is available to all immigrant groups in

Advisory Bodies

Many offices were created at the recommendation of an advisory body or taskforce, or have an advisory body that informs their priorities and work. These advisory bodies can range from 15 to up to 40 or 50 people and often include representatives from the business community, nonprofit and community-based organizations, and other local officials. Cities that have engaged an advisory body to inform their work include Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, Denver, Nashville and Seattle.
multiple languages. Websites, published documents and community events produced by the office should provide information and education on city/county policies, how to access specific services, upcoming events and activities, resources available in the community and news.

• To serve as an educator, communicator and capacity-builder for other city/county departments. Local government departments sometimes engage with and serve immigrant communities without communicating their efforts across agencies. Immigrant integration offices help to create communication channels across agencies, as well as educate departments on the importance of responsiveness to demographic change within the context of providing high-quality customer service to all residents. Offices improve the capacity of city/county agencies to respond to the needs of a diverse constituency, while also helping to effectively and efficiently coordinate service delivery.

• To serve as a convener of stakeholders across sectors. Offices often provide much needed space — both physical and conceptual — for stakeholders from the community, immigrant-serving organizations and the private sector to engage with one another, communicate on various projects and initiatives, and form partnerships.

• To serve as a symbol of an inclusive, welcoming community. Creating an office at the executive level, housed within the mayor’s or county commission/executive office, sends a message that the city/county values the cultural and ethnic diversity that international communities bring.

• To serve as a messenger. In addition to highlighting the importance of being diverse, these offices play a critical role in shaping the narrative around immigrant integration, the critical contributions of immigrant communities, and what it means to be a welcoming community. Offices often make a concerted effort in their messaging and outreach to emphasize that their work benefits all residents, resulting in a city/county that is more accessible and accountable to all.

• To serve as an advocate for state and national immigration policy. The role and influence of a city/county office often extends beyond the city/county limits. With the support of the chief elected official, it can be an important mouthpiece to influence state policies that affect immigrant communities and federal comprehensive immigration reform.

**Key Areas of Focus**

The way city/county offices prioritize areas of focus varies, often depending on community feedback, available resources and partnerships. Generally, however, most communities have programming that falls into the following five key areas, which are typically identified during the strategic planning process.

1. Leadership and Communications: Offices serve as a platform for shaping the narrative of immigration — emphasizing the positive role that immigrants play, the value of multiculturalism and why it’s
important for all residents to feel welcome and supported. Within this context, the city or county will often work with local partners to host cultural events that celebrate the diverse communities.

2. Equitable Access to Services: Offices ensure all residents have access to city/county services and opportunities by reducing barriers and encouraging participation. Many local governments work towards this goal by:

   » Establishing broad language access policies that require all city/county documents and activities are accessible in multiple languages.

   » Hosting town halls in immigrant communities that bring information directly to residents on various services and initiatives offered by the city/county.

   » Employing outreach coordinators whose job is to be present in the community to share information on what the city or county is doing.

3. Economic Opportunity and Education: Offices harness the full potential of all residents by working to ensure that newcomers have the skills, training, and education to thrive, and that workforce, education, and economic development systems are prepared to better serve and leverage the talents of all residents. This can often include programs to support small business owners, workforce development initiatives, and efforts to attract and retain international students and companies.

4. Civic Engagement: Offices work to ensure that newcomers fully participate in civic life, including increasing access to leadership, citizenship, and civic participation. This can include initiatives that promote citizenship and leadership development opportunities.

5. Safe and Connected Communities: Offices work to foster trust and build relationships between immigrants and receiving communities, as well as focus on building connections with specific institutions, such as local law enforcement.

Building Support

• **Making the economic case.** A large and growing body of research demonstrates that immigrants play a critical role in a community’s economic success, repopulating and revitalizing neighborhoods, stabilizing and growing the tax base, and spurring entrepreneurship and innovation everywhere from Main Street to the halls of major colleges and universities. Local governments can use this research — and the narrative that being inclusive has an economic impact — to bring key stakeholders to the table and generate buy-in.

• **Get multi-sector buy-in early on through strategic planning and community outreach.** Essential to the successful creation of an office is obtaining support and engagement for the initiative from the business sector, the community, and other city or county agencies. Engaging stakeholders in the initial conversations that develop the mandate and areas of focus of the office help ensure the focus reflects the needs of the community, as well as identifies existing resources and areas for collaboration and partnership early on. This is often done through a strategic planning process, which can incorporate different elements of community engagement such as a listening tour, surveys, or interviews.

• **Mayoral or county executive leadership counts.** The mayor or county executive’s leadership and commitment to supporting immigrant integration is critical both in elevating the stature of the office to the public, and in ensuring that its work is taken seriously and implemented fully. In many
communities, designating a chief or head of the office at the executive level, reporting directly to the mayor or chief elected county official, is an essential piece of making immigrant integration a priority.

- **Defining the narrative.** Local governments that embrace diversity and inclusion are more attractive to international newcomers as well as long-term residents, making them more competitive on the global stage. More directly, cities and counties have a responsibility to provide quality customer service to all of their residents, and it is advantageous to ensure that everyone have access to information about public health and safety, emergency preparedness, education and economic opportunity, and other key priorities. Additionally, offices dedicated to facilitating immigrant integration can create efficiencies and reduce duplication across agencies and help front-line staff carry out their responsibilities more effectively and uniformly, improving equity and access for everyone.

### Maximizing Resources

- Integration offices are designed to enhance collaboration across agencies, saving time and resources. Despite the up-front investment, local governments are likely to save money in the long run by leveraging resources across agencies and maximizing their impact through collaboration. The role of the office as a convener and communications hub can be accomplished with a lean staff and a greater focus on partnerships with other agencies, community organizations, foundations and the private sector.

- Mapping existing assets in the community helps identify opportunities to increase impact without creating entirely new programs and initiatives. Assessing what the city/county and community-based organization partners are already doing that can be immediately leveraged in support of immigrant integration efforts can help maximize impact with minimal investment. Often the first step is providing populations with information about existing programs and services that they may not know are available.

- Don't re-invent the wheel. With the number of offices and models that already exist, there is no need to start from scratch when thinking through how to start a new office or initiative. Local governments have launched programs across a variety of areas, including citizenship, entrepreneurship, language access, workforce development, and other key local priorities, that can serve as models for replication in new communities.

- Partnerships make the most of limited resources. Many offices have limited staff and budgets, and rely heavily on collaborating with other organizations and city or county agencies to maximize resources and reach.

### Maintaining Accountability and Transparency

- Ongoing community engagement is key. Creating open lines of communication with organizations serving immigrant and refugee communities is central to ensuring that the work of the office is effective and reflects community needs. For example, local governments can hold standing community engagement forums allowing residents to provide feedback on local priorities or establish an advisory committee representative of the community to meet with office staff on a regular basis.

- Office staff should have connections to and build relationships with immigrant community leaders and target constituencies. Building trust with immigrant communities is key to the success of offices dedicated to facilitating immigrant integration. Staff that represent or have connections to the communities they serve, who know community leaders and who understand cultural norms and languages are likely to be the most effective.
Communications

Communities around the nation are establishing offices or programs to communicate with the general public, including immigrants, on their welcoming policies and practices. These communication strategies allow cities and counties to project a welcoming culture and encourage businesses, civic organizations and others to follow their lead.

A planning process often underpins sustainable efforts, such as Dayton, Ohio’s Welcome Dayton Plan. Government, nonprofit, and business sectors engaged in a series of extensive community conversations regarding immigration in the region. Because of the conversations, the City of Dayton Commission created and unanimously adopted the Welcome Dayton Plan. The Plan and its ongoing implementation rely on commitments and engagement by the broader community and is not just the work of government.

A number of cities have sustained their efforts both through the creation of an office that enables better coordination of services and the ability to leverage private resources in support of welcoming immigrants. For example, in 2014, Atlanta established the Office of Multicultural Affairs and Nashville created the Mayor’s Office of New Americans.

In another example, the Office of Civic Engagement & Immigrant Affairs (OCEIA) in San Francisco promotes civic participation and inclusive policies that improve the lives of San Francisco’s residents, particularly immigrants, newcomers, and underserved and vulnerable communities. OCEIA seeks to bridge linguistic and cultural barriers to ensure that San Francisco’s diverse residents have equal access to city services and opportunities to participate and contribute in meaningful ways to the success of the community. The office also provides funding to nonprofit organizations serving immigrant communities, thereby building the capacity of community partners as crucial service providers as well as advocates.

A number of communities have focused on the important role of communications through concerted media and public outreach to present a positive and inclusive vision for immigrant welcome — ranging from the Immigrants Contribute campaign, which featured posters throughout the Metro system in Washington, DC, to programs bringing community members together through volunteerism and the arts during National Welcoming Week.

The City of Philadelphia hosted a citywide celebration of immigrant heritage and bridge-building programs during 2014 National Welcoming Week through its XCultural Passport to PHL week featuring more than 40 events throughout the city.

St. Louis seeks to become the fastest-growing U.S. metropolitan area for immigration by 2020, bolstered by a business case developed by a local economist with Saint Louis University who showed how immigrants were key to the city’s future prosperity and economic growth.

The report led to the formation of a regional task force and ultimately the creation of the St. Louis Mosaic Project, which works toward “regional prosperity through immigration and innovation.”
Most cities and counties have economic development organizations or offices within their local governments to encourage economic development. These organizations and offices offer services to support existing businesses, particularly focusing on business retention and expansion. These organizations and offices often promote new business startups and new business location within their communities. The focus of these economic development efforts could be bolstered to better support economic development for new immigrants.

**Economic Opportunity and Education**

Welcoming cities and counties place emphasis on ensuring that immigrant residents have the skills, assets, and education they need to succeed in school and in the workforce. Welcoming plans could include:

- Supporting English language and workforce development initiatives to build skills and ensure access to high-quality programs.
- Creating new or adapting current economic development initiatives to support immigrant entrepreneurship and small business development.
- Partnering with local community organizations and financial institutions to support financial literacy and inclusion and support asset development.

Chicago opened its city-funded internships, volunteer and job opportunities to undocumented students, providing young DREAMers with experiences and opportunities that can enrich their education and career pathway. Through Chicago’s broad-reaching New Americans Plan, the City is also working with Chicago Public Schools to increase access to summer enrichment programs and ensure early childhood education sites are well placed and equipped to serve immigrant children across the city.

Philadelphia has taken a number of steps to support immigrant entrepreneurs, including adapting existing services and tools to ensure they are accessible for immigrant entrepreneurs, including manuals on starting specific types of businesses, licensing and permitting. Using federal Community Development Block Grant funding and AmeriCorps volunteers, the city has also provided substantial support to organizations that provide technical assistance and small business loans to immigrant entrepreneurs through an existing Business Technical Assistance Program (BTAP). In addition, the city’s Department of Commerce launched a lending circle model that connects immigrant entrepreneurs to the financial mainstream, linking the micro loan process to credit building.

Oakley, California’s You, Me, We = Oakley! initiative partnered with its local school district to help immigrant parents become more involved in their children’s schools. For example, the partnership hosted dialogue dinners that brought together immigrant and U.S.-born parents and community members for a meal and discussion about the changing community. The parents spoke about their common values and goals for helping their communities.

The **NYC Economic Development Corporation** launched the Immigrant Bridge Program to help move unemployed and underemployed skilled immigrants in New York City into gateway jobs earning $30,000-40,000 annually in high-demand fields where employers are having difficulty hiring.

A similar program on Long Island, funded by Citi Community Development, provides skilled immigrants access to microloans to cover the costs of credential evaluations, recertification and relicensing.
children succeed in school. English-speaking parents gained a newfound appreciation for the challenges immigrant parents face and were motivated to lessen these barriers. As a result, the Parent Teacher Student Association has begun translating more materials into appropriate languages and working to become more language-inclusive.

In Boise, Idaho, the city has worked closely with the Department of Parks and Recreation to establish the International Summer Youth program, a summer enrichment program that pairs refugee students with U.S.-born peers.

Seattle also launched a significant immigrant support initiative in partnership with a major foundation and their schools to provide counseling for immigrant students and access to legal services for those at risk of deportation. The program has four tenets: Community education forums, counseling support, Ally/Know your Rights training and avenues to report discrimination.

Support Entrepreneurship

Communities can highlight existing programming to expand immigrant entrepreneurship, support local ecosystems and networks, and accelerate business development. In order to ensure that individuals have access to these tools, communities could:

- Advertise existing programs that support new entrepreneurs, such as micro-lending programs, mentorship initiatives and business incubation programs. Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanian’s small business support programs and NYC Immigrant Business Initiatives are two examples.

- Look at models from other cities, such as Louisville’s RISE mentorship program for entrepreneurs and Minneapolis/St. Paul’s Neighborhood Development Center, which offer a one-stop shop model that includes multilingual training, microfinance and business incubation.


- Partner with the Small Business Administration (SBA) and local chambers to provide information about SBA tools and resources through workshops, roundtables and other events.

- Harness immigrant professional talent.

- Provide career-planning services and opportunities for immigrants with foreign degrees to determine how to re-enter their profession or transition to a new field. Use organizations like Upwardly Global’s online tools to find jobs available in the local market, build resumes, prepare for interviews, etc.

- Create professional connector programs (such as successful examples from Halifax, St. Louis, Louisville and Detroit) to pair U.S.-born employees and foreign-born jobseekers in a mentorship opportunity to help expand the professional networks of foreign-trained immigrants and their familiarity with U.S. workplace and hiring practices.

- Identify skilled immigrants facing barriers to licensing, particularly those in high-demand professions, and work with state and local licensing boards to develop solutions. Support the work of World Education Services to remove barriers.

- Partner with Upwardly Global to create state guides (as in CA, MI, NY, RI, NH and elsewhere) for high-skilled immigrants and refugees to learn about the professional licensing process.

- Promote awareness of labor protections and rights. Work with immigrant- and refugee-serving organizations to disseminate information on worker protections and safety education, anti-discrimination law, and employee rights.
EQUITABLE ACCESS

Welcoming communities ensure that immigrant residents have access to city and county services and cultural assets by actively removing barriers to participation and inclusion. Welcoming plans could include:

- A language access policy and education process within local government.
- Building the cultural competency of government employees and community providers so that they have the skills to provide services to people from diverse backgrounds.
- Working with all agencies to design programs that serve all residents more effectively.
- Ensuring program performance measures incorporate immigrant access as a key metric.

Montgomery County, Maryland’s Language Access Policy furthers access to services for limited English proficient residents, with a focus on broad education and training, hiring of bilingual staff, supporting agencies with more accessible interpretation services, and ongoing monitoring. The county also makes substantial investments in English language learning programs.

Allegheny County’s Department of Human Services provides basic services for immigrants in Pittsburgh and works through an Immigrant and International Advisory Committee to ensure services are culturally competent and accessible. Over time, the committee has established foundational relationships between government, community-based organizations and local residents. These collaborations give participant communities a voice while also implementing a host of innovative projects that no member agency could do on its own. These range from ensuring greater language access through translation and interpretation to deploying a cadre of AmeriCorps members to help agencies better manage caseloads to supporting international youth mentoring programs.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Welcoming cities and counties actively ensure that newcomers can fully participate in civic life, and have access to leadership, citizenship and democratic opportunities. Welcoming plans could include:

- Encouraging citizenship through community partnerships and inviting civic leaders to participate in citizenship classes and ceremonies.
- Implementing citizen and leadership academies that help immigrants be successful in participating in and influencing decision making in the community.
- Implementing strategies that ensure local boards, commissions and civic organizations have leadership that is representative of local demographics and work with these groups to create a welcoming culture.
- Creating outreach mechanisms that help immigrant community members participate in city planning and inform the work of government.

“Your Path to Citizenship Starts at the Los Angeles Public Library” is a joint effort by the Los Angeles Public Library (LAPL) and the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service to help eligible Los Angeles residents start their own personal journey to become citizens. “Citizenship Corners” in all 73 library locations that provide information and resources, meeting room space and access to study materials along with a robust and information-rich website has established LAPL as the starting point on a person's
personal path to citizenship, while also helping local libraries reach a new market of users.

The MyCity Academy in Nashville empowers New Americans to understand and participate in Nashville’s government. Over the course of six months, MyCity participants meet with leaders from metro departments and tour metro facilities. In doing so, they gain a better understanding of how their government works and learn how to resolve issues and obtain information. Upon graduation, MyCity participants are able to help their communities understand and access government services. MyCity graduates also have the opportunity to interact with New Americans from other communities through the MyCity alumni network.

SAFE COMMUNITIES

Welcoming cities and counties foster trust and build relationships between immigrants and local law enforcement. These communities also actively create programs that build relationships between immigrant and U.S.-born residents, fostering trust and mutual respect. Welcoming plans could include:

• Creating a Welcoming Ambassadors program that brings together receiving community members and immigrants to help people become connected to each other and build greater knowledge of immigrants in the community.

• Encouraging volunteerism and mentorship among receiving community members to help build resources, capacity and knowledge of integration services.

• Supporting community dialogues to help all community members voice their concerns, find common ground and set the stage for a more inclusive community.

• Working with local law enforcement to build trust with the immigrant community.

• Convening cross-sector collaborations to build and strengthen networks that promote immigrant inclusion.

Following national and regional hate crimes targeting immigrants, many local law enforcement leaders in the Kansas City area spoke out in support of efforts to establish a welcoming community and the importance of building strong relationships with all segments of their communities, including recent immigrants. The voice of elected officials and other community leaders is crucial to building understanding among the public. Participation in events such as community vigils, unity declarations, peace events and others show support for the importance of being a welcoming community.

In Norcross, Georgia, the city expanded a Citizens Police Academy to engage Spanish-speaking residents and build trust and knowledge between residents and police. At a larger scale, New York has focused on a number of ways to enhance police community relations and public safety. The city has passed an executive
order that prohibits local law enforcement from inquiring into an individual’s immigration status unless a serious crime has been committed. NYPD also recruits for new officers in immigrant communities to diversify the police force in an effort to become more representative of the communities they patrol. A New Immigrant Outreach Unit of the police has also created youth sports leagues to reach immigrant youth and their families, including soccer leagues with Middle Eastern and African immigrant communities and cricket leagues with South Asian communities.

In St. Louis, the Mosaic Ambassadors Program brings together immigrants with U.S.-born St. Louisans. Ambassadors are residents of St. Louis who make a simple commitment to share information, visit at least three immigrant restaurants or businesses in the area, and, importantly, make that vital message of welcome real by inviting a new immigrant home for dinner. Other ambassadors operate “pop-up” sites at local corporations with large numbers of immigrant employees where they promote St. Louis’ welcoming and integration services and distribute helpful information. Mosaic surpassed its initial goal of recruiting 50 Ambassadors with over 200 applications in the first three weeks.

**USE OF THIS TOOLKIT**

Local government officials should review their community’s policies and practices using this toolkit, and determine actions they could take to becoming a more welcoming community. As actions are taken, community leaders should promote and celebrate their actions and encourage their residents, business leaders and others to demonstrate their support.