



5TH ANNUAL
SOMOS DUHAWKS

5TH ANNUAL
SOMOS DUHAWKS

IMMIGRATION COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

DUBUQUE AND NORTHEAST IOWA

MARCH 2023

Immigration Community Assessment

An Implementation Guide for the Communities of Dubuque and Northeast Iowa

March 2023

For More Information, Contact:

Alex Baum

Director of Advocacy, Data, and Learning

(563) 588-2700

alex@dbqfoundation.org

About the Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque

The Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque envisions a vibrant and inclusive Dubuque region where everyone can thrive. Since 2002, the foundation has inspired people to give back to their community and turned this generosity into lasting change across our region, increasing access to resources and opportunities that help all people succeed.

With its affiliate foundations across the seven-county Dubuque region, the Community Foundation charts clear paths forward that address complex social challenges, from academic achievement to economic opportunity. The foundation is committed to engaging, listening to and learning from all corners of the community to understand its most pressing needs today and tomorrow—and then building the partnerships and assets necessary to address them.

Generosity and collaboration fuel everything the Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque does, and everyone has something to contribute. Visit dbqfoundation.org to learn about the many ways the foundation is building a strong, thriving Greater Dubuque for all—and how you can donate your time, talents, and dollars to transform our region.

Special Thanks and Acknowledgements

This community assessment would not have been possible without the financial support and dedicated leadership of the Dubuque Religious Sisters Collaborative, which is composed of representatives from the Dominican Sisters of Sinsinawa, the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Sisters of St. Francis, and the Sisters of the Visitation. The support and leadership of Dubuque's women religious enabled this research to take place and continue to inspire our community to come together to create a more welcoming and inclusive region.

This community assessment was also made possible by the support of the Greater Dubuque Development Corporation and Northeast Iowa Community College. These two organizations enabled this research through their support and leadership and worked as committed partners over the past three years to serve our region's immigrant families.

We would like to thank the City of Dubuque for its generous funding of Project HOPE and Inclusive Dubuque as well as Connecting Communities in the Americas for its grant to provide additional research on mapping social networks of local immigrant communities.

This research was directed and overseen by the Immigration Community Assessment Steering Committee. In addition to their oversight, the Steering Committee also took the opportunity to drive important local efforts to support immigrant populations, utilizing their knowledge and resources to collaboratively make a difference for local populations. In appreciation of their work and leadership, the individuals who served on the Steering Committee are recognized below.

Immigration Community Assessment Steering Committee

Gisella Aitken-Shadle, Northeast Iowa Community College and City of Dubuque Office of Equity & Human Rights

Fr. Tom Ascherman, Divine Word College

Alex Baum, Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque

Catherine Caitlin, Tri-State VIATS

Sr. Judy Callahan, Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Mark Dalsing, City of Dubuque Police Department

Kristin Dietzel, Greater Dubuque Development Corporation

Shawna Domeyer, Crescent Community Health Center

Paul Duster, Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque

Collins Eboh, City of Dubuque Office of Equity & Human Rights

Ryan Feller, City of Dubuque Housing & Community Development Department

Sr. Kathleen Grace, Sisters of St. Francis

Nicolas Hockenberry, Greater Dubuque Development Corporation
Shirley Horstman, Dubuque Community School District
Jaquelin Hunter, Multicultural Family Center
Joe Kennedy, Dubuque County Sheriff's Department
Coni LaBarbera, Sinsinawa Dominicans
Kelly Larson, City of Dubuque Office of Equity & Human Rights
Dr. Liang Chee Wee, Northeast Iowa Community College
Clara Lopez Ortiz, Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque
Dr. Neil MacNaughton, University of Dubuque
Sr. Rita Menart, Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Ry Meyer, Catholic Charities
Yazmin Miranda, Crescent Community Health Center
Ann Morris, Crescent Community Health Center
Sergio Perez, Loras College
Sarah Petersen, Multicultural Family Center
Art Roche, Pacific Islander Health Project
Megan Ruiz, Presentation Lantern Center
Suzie Stroud, Crescent Community Health Center
Taj Suleyman, Dubuque Community School District

We are deeply grateful to all the local partners, advocates, businesses, and residents who participated in this assessment, providing valuable information and connections. These individuals and organizations continue to drive the daily work in our region that creates real change in the lives of our immigrant families.

We would like to thank all the organizations throughout Iowa and across the country who have been valuable sources of information. Their work serves as an inspiration for the efforts in our region and the recommendations of this research.

Thank you to the Community Foundation's Board of Directors, whose leadership and guidance has made this assessment possible.

Most of all we want to thank the members of immigrant communities who have been so gracious with their time and effort. Throughout this research we have been humbled by the kindness, generosity, and leadership of these individuals and families. It is their input and priorities that lie at the center of this research. But beyond that, it is witnessing their tireless and selfless dedication to serving their communities and our larger region that has shaped our belief about the future we can achieve. We hope this assessment plays some part in capturing their vision for our region and providing support to their goals and ongoing efforts.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	1
Methodology.....	3
Immigrant Populations in The Region.....	7
Pacific Islanders.....	7
Latinos.....	8
Guatemalan Mayans.....	10
Southeast Asians.....	11
Chinese.....	11
Refugees.....	12
ONGOING COLLECTIVE WORK ON IMMIGRATION.....	13
The Proposed Landscape of Collective Work Around Immigrant Needs and Assets.....	14
1. Convene a High-Level Discussion of Immigration.....	15
2. Develop an Online Immigrant Advocate Forum.....	16
3. Convene a Better Together Committee.....	18
4. Connect Other Immigrant Groups Focused on Specific-Level Issues to the Larger Immigrant-Support Community.....	22
BUILDING CONNECTIONS WITH IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES.....	23
Capacity and Power Building.....	26
Outreach.....	27
Navigators.....	28
Cultural Events.....	29
ISSUES FACING IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES.....	30
Case Management.....	30
Education and Youth Support.....	33
Health.....	36
Housing.....	38
Legal Assistance.....	40
Translation and Interpretation.....	42
Workforce and Employment.....	43
CONCLUSION.....	46
APPENDIX A: CCA MAPPING REPORT.....	47

INTRODUCTION

Immigration has played a critically important role in shaping the region’s demographic reality. Over the past decade domestic migration has declined significantly for Dubuque County, with more people leaving for other parts of the country than moving here (see

Figure 1). The trend has been even more stark for the state of Iowa overall (**Figure 2**). However, international migration has been a key driver of growth for the region.¹ Dubuque County’s foreign-born population grew by more than 75% between 2010 and 2021, accounting for nearly 20% of the county’s population increase during that time. The foreign-born population accounts for 46% of the total population growth in the city of Dubuque, and 97% of the total population increase for the Community Foundation’s seven-county region² in Northeast Iowa.³ These numbers don’t include the U.S.-born children of immigrants.

What the numbers do show is how crucial immigrant populations are to the region’s vibrancy and richness. In education and health care, entrepreneurship and public service, food, art, and so much more, immigrant individuals and families are playing a prominent and vital role in the community. Immigration provided an important boost to communities, driving both economic and population growth, as well as an increase in the diversity of cultures and viewpoints.

And yet, at the same time barriers exist in local communities that hamper the ability of immigrant residents to thrive as they should. Whether in terms of access to services, family-sustaining job opportunities, or academic success, research found that many immigrant populations face disproportionately worse outcomes than the general population. Foreign-

Figure 1: Cumulative migration - Dubuque County

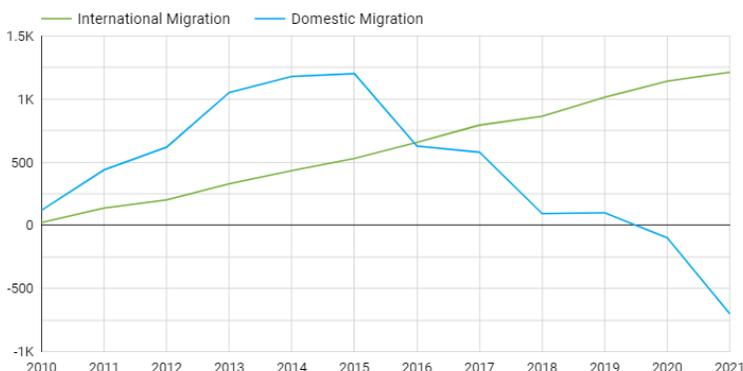
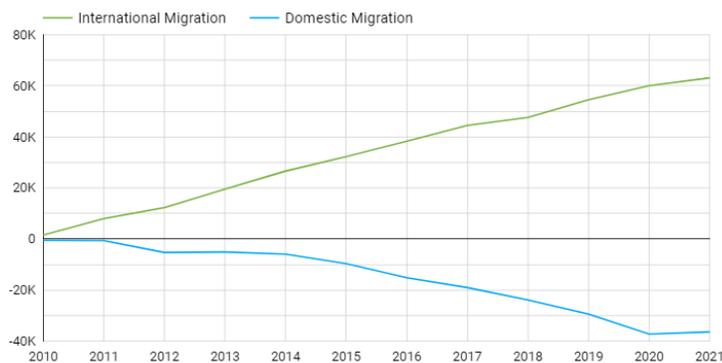


Figure 2: Cumulative migration - Iowa



Source: U.S. Census, Population Estimates

¹ U.S. Census Population Estimate data. Available at: <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/popest/>

² The Community Foundation serves the following counties: Allamakee, Clayton, Clinton, Delaware, Dubuque, Jackson, and Jones.

³ American Community Survey, 2021 and 2010 5-year estimates. Available at: <https://www.census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/data-profiles/>

born individuals in Dubuque County are more than twice as likely to live below the poverty line as the general population,⁴ and English learners in the Dubuque Community School District and Western Dubuque Community School District are more than four times less likely to be proficient in reading or math than the student body as a whole.⁵ While this is certainly not true for every individual and family, there is enough evidence to suggest that local systems are not serving immigrant families as they should, and communities are not as welcoming to immigrants as they could be.

It was in response to the growing recognition of this situation—that immigrant communities are vital to the region’s future yet face significant systemic barriers to their own success—that the Community Foundation was commissioned to conduct an assessment. The goal was to capture the experiences and priorities of immigrant communities, as well as the local service providers and advocates working most closely with them. From these learnings, the Community Foundation identified the region’s key assets, determined pressing needs, and proposed models for communities to consider implementing.

It is important to note the experiences and needs of immigrant communities are far too numerous to capture in this report. While many important issues will not be included in this guide, its aim is to address some of the biggest concerns, and to put forward potential models for continued engagement that will help the region respond to new issues as they arise.

One area the assessment and this guide do not address is the “legality” of an immigrant’s status. The Community Foundation does not condone or advocate any violation of U.S. law. The assessment instead focuses on how best to enable local immigrant residents to thrive, irrespective of their authorization. Many immigrants face complex and unclear circumstances regarding their documentation. For example, most unaccompanied minors in the region have open immigration court cases and an established pathway to temporary residency, a green card, and eventually, U.S. citizenship. But with a backloaded immigration system causing court cases to sometimes take two or three years, these unaccompanied minors may be living in Dubuque for a significant time without authorization, but with the explicit knowledge of the U.S. government. Asylum seekers, mixed-status families, foreign students, and many other individuals may face similar ambiguity. For these reasons, the aim in this research was to focus on creating a welcoming environment and improving connections and services for all immigrant families, instead of trying to advocate for changes to federal immigration laws or make designations of legal status.

In addition, this implementation guide generally is not directly concerned with discussions on how to increase or decrease immigration. Such discussions usually revolve around federal immigration policy and legislation, which is largely outside the scope of this work, which instead focuses on how to create a welcoming region where all residents are able to thrive.

⁴ American Community Survey, 2021 5-year estimates. Available at: <https://www.census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/data-profiles/>

⁵ Iowa School Performance Profiles, 2022. Available at: <https://www.iaschoolperformance.gov/ECP/Home/Index?y=2022>

By implementing policies and programs that enable everyone to succeed and belong, the region will become a more vibrant, growing, and desirable community.

This guide is divided into four primary sections.

- The first is this introductory section, which will include a review of the methodology of the community assessment, a description of programs and accomplishments that have already been undertaken in conjunction with this assessment, and a discussion of some of the relevant immigrant populations that were involved in this research.
- The second section will outline potential models for ongoing collaborative engagement around the needs of immigrant populations and making the region a more welcoming place to live.
- The third section will look at how to improve connections between immigrant populations and the wider community, which is one of the key overarching issues identified through the assessment.
- The final section will look closely at more specific issues and service areas, and will cover case management (including transportation), education and youth support, health, housing, legal assistance, translation and interpretation, and workforce and employment.

In these sections, the Implementation Guide will also list recommendations local communities could pursue to leverage the opportunities and address the barriers discussed in this guide. Each of these recommendations is detailed more fully in the Immigration Community Assessment: List of Recommendations document. This document, an Executive Summary document, and other relevant materials are available at www.dbqfoundation.org/pages/immigration-community-assessment.

Methodology

This community assessment was conducted across a three-year period between 2019 to 2022. An Immigration Community Assessment Steering Committee was formed as part of the process to help provide direction and oversight to the effort.⁶ Research was focused primarily on immigrant populations within Dubuque County, as well as in Jackson County, Clayton County, and Allamakee County. However, because the needs of immigrants in the region are rarely contained within geographical boundaries, additional interviews and research were conducted within other parts of Northeast Iowa, Southwest Wisconsin, and Northwest Illinois.

In consultation with the Steering Committee, it was determined that the following items would comprise the focus of the assessment:

- 1) Elevating the voices of immigrant community members to determine relevant experiences and regional priorities;

⁶ A list of Steering Committee members is given in the [Special Thanks and Acknowledgements](#) section.

- 2) Identifying assets within the region that can be used to help meet those priorities and serve as a foundation for creating a more welcoming region;
- 3) Highlighting gaps in service and other needs that are impeding the ability of immigrant families and communities to thrive in the region; and
- 4) Recommending potential models and programming that may address the issues and opportunities raised by the research.

Because of challenges in connecting with immigrants, as well as identified best practices for collecting information, direct conversations with immigrant members and local stakeholders were prioritized over surveys or other research options. As such, information gathering was conducted primarily through interviews and focus group sessions with immigrant community members, service providers, other local stakeholders such as government officials and immigrant advocates, and organizations and advocates from outside of our region. The research also included collecting publicly available data and conducting a relationship mapping exercise as part of a grant funded by Connecting Communities in the Americas.

However, the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in Iowa in March of 2020 led to a significant change in how this community assessment was conducted. This change was conducted with the approval of the Steering Committee and the support of the sponsors for this research, whose understanding and commitment to serving the community inspired the direction of this work.

This was partly because the need for social distancing significantly impacted the ability to conduct in-person interviews and focus groups with immigrant community members. While some interviews were still conducted over the phone and through teleconferencing, the primary means of gathering information and feedback from immigrant communities was heavily disrupted.

But more importantly, the needs and challenges brought about by the crisis became a much higher priority than conducting observational research. Connections were built during the first part of this project, putting Community Foundation staff in a position to provide valuable support to the local response to the pandemic. The focus was therefore turned to working with immigrant community leaders and other trusted partners to help address the urgent needs brought on by the pandemic.

As a result of these circumstances, it was no longer sufficient to identify and research problems for inclusion in this report; instead, it became necessary to take a more active role and work with community partners to develop a more immediate solution to the need. Therefore, much of the information shared in this assessment was gathered with the perspective and insight of a practitioner experiencing barriers and opportunities firsthand. While this is not a standard method for conducting such an assessment, it offered a more intimate understanding of the key challenges that ultimately inform the recommendations in this report.

One result of this change in approach has been an increased appreciation of the tremendous assets that exist within the region. During the height of the pandemic, and in its aftermath, the work of service providers, local officials, volunteers, advocates, and other individuals has

been truly inspiring to witness. Their investment and dedication to serving the community is remarkable, and over the past two years it has saved lives. But the work of immigrant community members during this period has made the greatest impression. Members of these communities—many of them unpaid volunteers—have been critical to local efforts. They have accomplished things that defied the most optimistic expectations. Working hand-in-hand with these community members has demonstrated to the Community Foundation what valuable assets they are for the region. To recognize this work, and to offer additional transparency for the reader, the list below outlines some of the projects and accomplishments that have been conducted in connection with this community assessment.

Projects and Accomplishments Connected with the Community Assessment

All of Us Dubuque: A coalition of dedicated community partners launched a messaging campaign during the Covid-19 pandemic that highlighted the service of diverse community members to the region and listing local and national resources. The campaign can be seen at www.allofusdubuque.com.

Covid-19 Medical and Vaccine Information Distribution: As part of the City of Dubuque's Equity Immersion Committee and Covid COFA Working Group, local organizations helped with coordinating medical and vaccine information development and distribution for immigrant populations.

Covid-19 Medical Gear Distribution: Numerous local partners and individual volunteers helped to distribute masks and other medical gear during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Federal Funding: Local and regional organizations worked together to pursue federal grants focused on workforce and translation services in support of immigrant groups.

Guardianship Website: Catholic Charities, the Multicultural Family Center, and the Community Foundation partnered to move towards the development of a website for helping to inform and recruit local community members to serve as guardians for unaccompanied minors. More information can be found under *Develop a Guardianship Website* in the Legal Assistance section of the List of Recommendations document.

Guatemalan Volunteer Mentor: Through a partnership between the Dubuque Community School District (DCSD), Northeast Iowa Community College (NICC), and the Community Foundation, with additional support from Catholic Charities, an Ixil-speaking Guatemalan woman was hired to serve as a part-time mentor and teacher's assistant to Guatemalan students at Hempstead High School. This was the first Ixil-speaking individual regularly working with students at DCSD. More information can be found here: <https://dbqfoundation.org/news/bridging-needs-generosity>

Projects and Accomplishments Connected with the Community Assessment (Continued)

Housing Response: Local partners including the Community Foundation, Catholic Charities, the City of Dubuque, Dubuque for Refugee Children, Presentation Lantern Center, Resources Unite, and Tri-State VIATS came together to respond to housing challenges facing immigrants. These challenges include evictions of immigrant families and policy changes from local landlords that restrict the ability of immigrants to obtain housing.

Immigrant Food Distribution: With the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, food insecurity became a major concern for many local immigrant communities. In partnership with immigrant community members and local organizations like the City of Dubuque, DCSD, Latino Empowerment and Development (LEAD), Presentation Lantern Center, Project Rooted, Resources Unite, and Tri-State VIATS, among others, the community worked to coordinate regular, culturally appropriate food deliveries to families in need.

Marshallese Connector at the Visiting Nurse Association (VNA): A partnership between the VNA, the City of Dubuque, the Hawkeye Area Community Action Program, and the Community Foundation funded a Marshallese Connector position at the VNA aimed at helping Marshallese community members navigate local systems during the pandemic. This position has since become a long-term, grant-funded position.

Marshallese Health Fund: The Marshallese Health Fund was launched by a concerned local physician, Dr. Mark Janes, to support Marshallese families during the pandemic, many of whom were facing mounting medical bills with little or no insurance. The Fund is now hosted at the Community Foundation and is administered in coordination with committed nonprofit partners in Dubuque. More information can be found here: <https://dbqfoundation.org/giving-center/dubuque-marshallese-health-fund>

Marshallese Reading Day: The Community Foundation, Monsoon, and the Carnegie-Stout Public Library partnered to host a Marshallese Reading Day for local families aimed at encouraging reading and connecting families to the library.

Marshallese Women's Group: The Community Foundation and other partners provided support for the establishment of Kora Im An Kol (KIAK), a Marshallese Women's Group serving the Marshallese community.

NICC Community Connector Model: An advisory team under the direction of Northeast Iowa Community College helped to develop a new pilot program to train and compensate individuals from underserved populations (including immigrant groups) for connecting members of their community to job training opportunities. Additional information can be found under *Adopt a Natural Helper Program* in the Workforce and Employment section of the List of Recommendations document.

Immigrant Populations in The Region

Dubuque County is home to a wide variety of people from different backgrounds and cultures. Data from the Census Bureau suggests that Dubuque County residents immigrated from over fifty countries across the world.⁷ The stories of each immigrant family are unique and varied, as are those of their communities and cultures. This richness is a tremendous asset to the region and elevating and exploring these stories should be a rewarding part of its collective identity. It also means that this guide could not possibly capture the realities of each of these different heritages and identities. Even adequately explaining the experiences and traditions of any specific group is well beyond its capabilities. Any description of local immigrant groups will be largely incomplete. However, it may be valuable for readers to be presented with some background information about certain groups within the region.

With this goal in mind, the following section will look at some of the local immigrant populations who had findings that extended from the immigration community assessment. Each section will focus on providing a brief description, important findings that may be of relevance to local stakeholders, and/or areas of concern warranting future research.

Pacific Islanders

The region boasts one of the largest Pacific Islander populations in Iowa. While this population comes from a number of different countries, the majority are Marshallese. The Republic of the Marshall Islands is a nation composed of more than 1,100 islands and islets located in the Pacific Ocean. The Marshall Islands has a complicated and difficult history with the United States. Colonized by the Japanese in the early 1900s, the Marshallese Islands were then occupied by the U.S. during World War II. In the years following the war, the U.S. conducted a total of sixty-seven nuclear weapons tests within the Marshall Islands. This significantly impacted the ecosystem of the Marshall Islands and led to major health problems for residents due to the increased radiation.⁸ In large part as a recognition of these events, the U.S. and the Marshall Islands signed an agreement called the Compact of Free Association (COFA) in 1982, which has governed the relationship between the two countries since.

Due to their status as COFA migrants, Marshallese citizens can freely travel, live, and work in the United States without needing a visa. This status has allowed many Marshallese families to move to Dubuque in recent decades, making the Marshallese the fastest growing population in the county. However, COFA migrants still face several legal and administrative barriers, including not being eligible for federal services such as SNAP benefits or cash assistance.

⁷ American Community Survey, 2020 5-year estimates for Dubuque County. Available at: <https://www.census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/data-profiles/>

⁸ Susanne Rust, "How the U.S. Betrayed the Marshall Islands, Kindling the Next Nuclear Disaster," *LA Times*, November 10, 2019, <https://www.latimes.com/projects/marshall-islands-nuclear-testing-sea-level-rise/>.

Another significant group of Pacific Islanders in the region is the Pohnpeian population, residing primarily in Maquoketa. This population is smaller than the Marshallese population and differs from it in a number of important ways, including in language and culture, and in the social structure of the community. However, these communities also share many similarities in their experience, and have an important social and cultural connection. While this guide provides more input from the Marshallese population, there are a number of instances where comparisons are drawn, and lessons learned, regarding the experiences of the Pohnpeian community.

The Marshallese in Dubuque have a network of relationships and social connections that are an impressive asset to both the community and to the region. However, these networks are not always understood by the larger community. For example, there are currently seven Marshallese churches operating in Dubuque, and previous efforts to funnel support through only one of these churches have produced resentment and dissatisfaction among other parishes. During focus group sessions, some Marshallese expressed that they would not feel comfortable attending a meeting or workshop held in a different church. More information about the Marshallese network of relationships can be found in a mapping report conducted by the Community Foundation that is included under [Appendix A](#).

As the Pacific Islander community grows within the region, Pacific Islander groups and culture are also becoming more visible. The inclusion of a Marshallese boat in an exhibit at the National River Museum and Aquarium, the growth of Pacific Islander organizations such as Monsoon, the establishment of the Marshallese women's group Kora Im An Kol (KIAK), and a number of other recent achievements have been important for the area. This type of growth and greater visibility should be supported by the larger community. This guide aims to highlight several possible ways of doing so.

Latinos

Dubuque's Latino/Latina/Latinx (hereafter referred to as "Latino") population is the largest immigrant community within the region. It also represents a wide variety of individuals with cultural roots in over a dozen countries and territories across the Americas and the world. This diversity makes Dubuque's Latino community culturally rich, as well as complex and virtually impossible to summarize.

Latino and Hispanic are also considered to be ethnicities by many data collection agencies (like the U.S. Census Bureau), meaning that there are many Latino people in the community who also have racial identities including white, Black, indigenous, among others. The large number of nationalities, races, and other identities within the Latino population is part of what makes it such a vibrant community. However, during interviews, many individuals within that community expressed uncertainty about their full cultural and social identity and how it relates to the categories used in reports such as this.

Terminology: Latino, Latina, Latinx, Latine, Hispanic, etc.

Residents of Dubuque from Latin American and other Spanish-speaking regions use a variety of terms to refer to their ethnic identity. These include Hispanic and Latino, which are sometimes used interchangeably, though Hispanic usually refers to someone who is descended from Spanish-speaking populations, while Latino refers to someone descended from Latin American communities. In addition, Spanish nouns often have a gender. A male-identifying person of Latin American descent is frequently referred to as a "Latino," while a female-identifying person is a "Latina." A group that may contain both male and female individuals is often referred to by the male "Latino." Some people prefer to be referred to as "Latinx" or "Latine," which removes the gender of the word to make it more inclusive. The preferred term will vary from individual to individual, and best practice is to generally ask each person which term they prefer.

This report will use the term "Latino" to refer to this community because this is the most widely recognized and used term within the region. This decision was made to try to make this guide as accessible as possible to the greatest number of people. The Community Foundation does want to highlight the importance of using inclusive terminology and is committed to trying to engage all members of the community using their preferred identify.

The Latino community is also one of the most prevalent immigrant communities in rural areas within the region. Many smaller towns and agricultural communities often have Latino populations that play an important local role both culturally and economically. Creating a more welcoming and connected environment has become a bigger focus for many of these places, as many rural Latinos still face barriers to becoming fully connected within the community.

Research for the community assessment has also identified a distinction within the Latino population that creates important considerations for local stakeholders and policy makers, namely that there is a notable socio-economic separation within the Latino community. This includes a more financially secure population composed of a frequently multilingual professional workforce with closer connections to Dubuque organizations and institutions, as well as a lower-income population that is less likely to have English language skills, is more marginalized within Dubuque, and often lacks connections to formal institutions. This separation can also be seen along generational lines, with younger individuals and those who are second-generation immigrants being more likely to speak English and have connections to institutions.

The relationships between these two socio-economic groups are highly complex and not always clear, and families may contain individuals that fit into both categories. However, the distinction, as imperfect as it is, is useful for identifying the differences in how these two groups access important information, resources, and services. Many Latinos of a lower socio-economic status have faced numerous barriers to building trust with local individuals and institutions, which frequently results in a lack of connection to formal service providers. This

community is one of the most likely to operate without interacting with more formal institutional channels, staying “in the shadows” and engaging with service providers only in emergency situations. Language availability was often a big driver of distrust, as many Latino individuals feel less willing to engage with institutions that only operated in English. These challenges are explored more in the mapping report included under [Appendix A](#).

Guatemalan Mayans

The Guatemalan Mayan community is one of the quickest growing populations in Dubuque. While many of these individuals consider themselves Latino and share similarities with other individuals with ethnic or cultural roots in Latin America, it is important to address this population separately due to their unique circumstances. These Guatemalan migrants come from indigenous Mayan tribes, each of which has many distinct cultural traditions, histories, and languages. Many Guatemalan Mayans arrive in the United States not speaking English or Spanish, but instead one of over twenty Mayan dialects. The most spoken among residents in Dubuque are Ixil, K’iche’ (Quiche), and Q’anjab’al (Kanjobal). This population is composed of relatively recent arrivals in Dubuque compared to other immigrant groups, with most having arrived after 2010. The Census estimates that the Guatemalan population grew nearly eight-fold between 2010 and 2020,⁹ and the increase in the Guatemalan Mayan population (a subset of all Guatemalans) was likely even more dramatic. Throughout this guide, the Guatemalan Mayan community will often be discussed separately due to the unique challenges and opportunities they face.

Many Guatemalan Mayans come to Dubuque as what are called “unaccompanied minors” or “unaccompanied children.” To be designated as an unaccompanied minor by the U.S. government, the individual must be under eighteen years old, not yet have an immigration status, and have no parent or legal guardian with them.¹⁰ Most of these unaccompanied minors will arrive at the U.S. border and be interviewed by border officials, before being given transportation to Dubuque and being released under the supervision of a “sponsor” (often a relative or a neighbor from Guatemala who is now living in Dubuque). The minor is then assigned an immigration court case where it is determined whether they will be granted temporary resident status (usually with what is called Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, or SIJS¹¹), and thus putting them on the road to obtain a green card and eventually citizenship. Unfortunately, in recent years the wait times for hearings on SIJS have increased from months to two, three, or even four years. As such, these unaccompanied minors face a number of challenges trying to navigate the legal system and access resources and services in Dubuque while they wait. Many of these challenges, along with potential opportunities, are discussed more fully in this report.

⁹ American Community Survey, 2020 and 2010 5-year estimates for Dubuque County. Available at: <https://www.census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/data-profiles/>

¹⁰ Generally, this happens when an immigration official determines that the child has been abandoned or neglected by at least one of their parents.

¹¹ SIJS is discussed more in the section on *Legal Assistance*.

While many Guatemalan Mayans are more recent arrivals in Dubuque, a group of individuals who arrived as unaccompanied minors have now been in the region long enough to become more established. Several have received their green cards and U.S. citizenship, and one family recently obtained a mortgage and bought their first home. This growth means that there is the potential for a group of more secure Guatemalan Mayans who may be able to serve as visible, well-connected leaders for their community. As discussed later in this report, several Guatemalan Mayans have already begun taking more active and public roles, including one woman working with Ixil-speaking students in the Dubuque Community School District and another group partnering with a local nonprofit to help maintain a community garden. More details about the Guatemalan Mayans and their connections to formal institutions are discussed in the mapping report included in [Appendix A](#).

Southeast Asians

The Census' 2021 American Community Survey estimates that there are over 400 foreign-born individuals that originate from Southeast Asia in Dubuque County, including from countries like the Philippines, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and Indonesia. This group includes a wide range of nationalities, cultures, and languages, with individuals in different professions and living in different parts of the community (about 26% live outside the city of Dubuque).¹²

Some local service providers in Dubuque are concerned that there may be a group of Southeast Asian immigrants who are more marginalized and less connected with available services. Some of these individuals may work at massage parlors, nail salons, or other service businesses. Dedicated outreach to these populations is not as common within the region, and there has been less effort locally to do dedicated translation for Southeast Asian languages. Very little information is available regarding the needs and challenges faced by this community; further research and outreach to this group is important.

Chinese

The 2020 American Community Survey estimates that there are over 230 foreign-born individuals originating from China in the city of Dubuque.¹³ There are also many students who come from China to learn at Dubuque's colleges and universities. One aspect of this population, highlighted through this research, is its community's success in hosting cultural events and other services. An example is the Mandarin Ministry in Dubuque, run out of the Westminster Presbyterian Church, which has hosted an annual Chinese Lunar New Year celebration, taught Mandarin and ESL classes, and provided other opportunities for Dubuque residents to engage with aspects of Chinese culture. Their ability to do this without widespread sponsorships from local nonprofits and city organizations focused on

¹² American Community Survey, 2020 5-year estimates for Dubuque County and City of Dubuque. Available at: <https://www.census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/data-profiles/>

¹³ American Community Survey, 2020 5-year estimates for City of Dubuque. Available at: <https://www.census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/data-profiles/>

multiculturalism, but instead primarily in partnership with the Westminster Church, is a valuable model to consider for cultural engagement.

Refugees

While the term “refugee” is often used in a general way to refer to immigrants who have come to the U.S. after fleeing violence and oppression, the term also refers to a legal status given to some immigrants. It is important to discuss briefly how they are similar to and distinct from “asylum seekers,” who also come to the U.S. fleeing violence and human rights violations. The primary difference between the two statuses is where the designation takes place. Refugees generally receive their designation *outside* of the U.S. from a trusted organization like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The U.S. then accepts a limited number of refugees to be resettled into the U.S., with the placement usually done by a refugee placement agency. Asylum seekers, on the other hand, receive their designation *inside* the U.S. Asylum seekers generally present themselves to a U.S. Border or Customs official, go through an initial determination of whether they have a credible fear of persecution, and if it is found that they do so then go through an immigration court case to determine whether they should receive asylum. Often these individuals are released into the U.S. to await their court date, though in recent years U.S. policy has had asylum seekers at the border with Mexico wait for their case in Mexico.

There are a number of families in the region who have members that have come to the U.S. as refugees. However, the local organization that had previously provided refugee placement services for the area, Catholic Charities, ended its refugee resettlement work in 2017 due to the decrease in refugees being admitted to the U.S. on a national level.¹⁴ Since that time, Dubuque has not had a refugee resettlement agency placing refugees in the community.

In 2021 and 2022, in response to the influx of refugees from Afghanistan to the United States, a number of individuals, churches, and nonprofit organizations worked to settle Afghan families in Dubuque and provide them with services. At least two Afghan families have been resettled in Dubuque so far through sponsorship from local churches and collections of private individuals. Additional conversations and discussions have been held regarding Ukrainian refugees. It appears that unless a refugee resettlement agency begins operating in the region again—either through the opening of new services or the expansion of a nearby agency such as the Catherine McAuley Center¹⁵—refugee resettlement will likely take place through private sponsorship.

¹⁴ “Dubuque Group Ends Refugees Resettlement program,” *KCRG-TV9*, December 20, 2017, <https://www.kcrg.com/content/news/Dubuque-group-ends-Resettle-Refugees-program--465360773.html>.

¹⁵ The Catherine McAuley Center: <https://cmc-cr.org/>.

ONGOING COLLECTIVE WORK ON IMMIGRATION

Addressing the barriers faced by immigrant communities poses major challenges. Difficulties navigating local systems of education, employment, and healthcare are exacerbated by additional barriers related to language, cultural differences, legal status, and a lack of familiarity with existing institutions. These problems are not insurmountable, but they must not be taken lightly, and should be tackled in full partnership with representatives from immigrant communities.

Many of the issues addressed in this guide are simply too large for a single organization to undertake. However, by working in partnership as part of a structured effort, immigrant leaders, local organizations, government agencies, community activists, and other key stakeholders can address larger, systemic challenges. This approach, known as collective impact, is currently used in the region to address issues ranging from workforce development to early childhood reading. Forming this type of strategic collaboration faces two major challenges:

1. "Immigration" has such a large scope and covers so many areas that it will be difficult for any collaborative effort to make actual progress or move strategically. This guide covers issues ranging from education to healthcare, from translation to workforce development. Such a broad mandate would make it extremely difficult to see real achievement on important issues.
2. Collaborations must include the participation of immigrant community members. However, barriers include language differences, scheduling and childcare challenges, and power imbalances among participants. "Power imbalances" refers the very natural differences in experience and comfort felt by, for example, a Latino community volunteer and the local chief of police when both sit down for the same meeting. While not intentional, these power imbalances are very real and need to be taken into consideration if the collaborative effort is to be effective.

This section attempts to outline a collective impact model that will allow for strategic engagement around immigrant community needs while also addressing these two challenges. Communities in the region should consider all of the recommendations in this section, keeping in mind that certain pieces should be changed or discarded based on the location and the participants. No single vehicle is perfectly designed for all communities, but hopefully this guide will offer a valuable starting point.

The model described below was designed to achieve five key goals:

- 1) **Be able not just to convene stakeholders, but also carry out projects and initiatives.** Members of immigrant communities participating in large, collaborative efforts can often feel discouraged by a lack of tangible results. Collective work should

not only be concerned with sharing information but should also attempt to achieve visible and worthwhile accomplishments.

- 2) **Be able to pursue both long-term goals and smaller projects.** If this collaborative effort is to achieve tangible results while also strategically addressing systemic issues, it should be designed to be able to carry out projects of different scope and ambition.
- 3) **Include the participation of immigrant community members.** Addressing systemic issues cannot succeed without the direct participation and leadership of the communities being impacted. Collaborative efforts should include members of immigrant populations in a thoughtful way that can maximize their participation.
- 4) **Keep the larger community of stakeholders informed about important issues.** The region has a large number of people who are committed to creating a more welcoming place for immigrant families. The collaboration should strive to keep these individuals informed about and engaged with the work that is being done.
- 5) **Maintain an ability to respond to new challenges and opportunities.** The challenges brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated the importance of being flexible enough to respond to the changing realities that face local immigrant populations.

The Proposed Landscape of Collective Work Around Immigrant Needs and Assets

Local collaborative work around the needs of immigrants has rarely been solely monopolized by one committee. Groups of community leaders, advocates, and service providers have met around issues ranging from specific concerns about migrant rights or Marshallese health, all the way to the large-scale Immigration Forum meetings that led to the community assessment. The diversity of these collaborations is beneficial for the region and should be encouraged. But they can also be more effective when connected together, helping to ensure that all of those working to address the systemic issues facing immigrant communities are aware of what others are doing, and are not working at cross purposes.

With this in mind, this guide views the landscape of strategic work around immigrant needs in terms of three levels:

- 1) **High level:** Throughout the region there are many individuals who are eager supporters of immigrants but may not have the ability or inclination to meet monthly as part of a regular committee meeting. There is a need to create a space where all community members interested in supporting immigrant groups can engage and provide value at a high level.
 - a. **Recommendation:** A large group meeting of those interested in immigration (such as the Immigration Forum in Dubuque) should continue to meet once or twice a year, creating an opportunity for a large group to come together, learn, and discuss.
 - b. **Recommendation:** An online web forum should be established so that stakeholders can ask questions, have discussions, and share activities.

- 2) **Mid level:** This level recognizes the need for a collaborative effort that can drive the region's strategy to meet the needs of immigrant communities. This level will consist of opportunities for committed stakeholders to meet more regularly and tackle larger issues.
 - a. **Recommendation:** Convene a Better Together Committee to meet regularly to pursue large and small projects.
- 3) **Specific level:** There will still be a need for people to gather together to focus on specific issues, or the needs of particular immigrant groups. Meetings of these groups should be encouraged but should then be connected back to the mid- and high-level conversations, to help ensure better coordination.
 - a. **Recommendation:** Other groups focusing on immigration (Pacific Islander Advisory Group, Café Latino, etc.) should be encouraged to keep meeting, but a framework should be established to connect them to the Immigration Strategy Committee and/or the online web forum.

The following pages will provide more detail on each of these four recommendations in the order listed above. While each recommendation could have a positive benefit for the region, the priority should be on the third recommendation *Convene a Better Together Committee*, described [on page](#) 18. Committees like this will be most impactful for driving systemic change for immigrant populations in the region.

1. Convene a High-Level Discussion of Immigration

There is an important role to be played in offering the larger community of immigrant supporters an opportunity to discuss issues, learn about events, and build relationships. Facilitating this type of discussion can be very valuable for connecting with organizations that may not be focused on providing services to immigrants; developing relationships with passionate individuals who may want to volunteer; and building opportunities to elevate immigrant voices. Having a broad convening such as this can also allow more focused groups at the mid and specific levels to share information and successes with the larger population. In addition, this kind of community forum is important for shifting mindsets around immigration. It allows for a more visible and approachable point of engagement for the general community and can be very useful in creating a more positive narrative about local immigrant populations.

Such a meeting should occur consistently once or twice a year. Making sure that this meeting occurs annually, instead of just as a one-time event, provides some consistency in meetings and discussions. These meetings should follow formats that are generally open to the public and make use of videoconferencing technologies, allowing for more participation. Such an event may not require a paid coordinator and could be run by a collection of volunteers or service providers.

For smaller communities or towns interested in this kind of strategic work, it may not be necessary to have both a high-level convening and a mid-level convening (see *Convene a*

Better Together Committee [on page 18](#)). In this case, community members can review both options and select which seems most appropriate for their area.

Models to Consider:

- In Dubuque, in January of 2018, the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary convened the first Immigration Forum event, a large meeting of different immigrant leaders, advocates, service providers, and other key stakeholders. The Sisters continued to host the meeting once every six months, providing updates on recent activities and address specific issues. Discussions from the Immigration Forum led to the development of the community assessment.
- In 2020, Los Angeles County began hosting an annual immigration summit. The summit is a collaboration between the California Community Foundation, the USC Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration, and the Council on Immigrant Integration.¹⁶ A similar annual summit, though perhaps on a smaller scale, could be adopted by rural communities.

2. Develop an Online Immigrant Advocate Forum

Multiple stakeholders expressed the need for greater communication and access to information on issues relevant to immigrant communities. However, many also felt that common forums for sharing information were not always accessible. Meetings used primarily used for reporting on current activities as opposed to reaching joint decisions can be an inefficient use of time given busy schedules. Communicating through email can also cause frustration. Mass emails are not conducive to extensive conversations, do not facilitate multi-lingual discussions, and clog up inboxes. A proposed solution is an online forum where individuals and organizations can share upcoming programming, ask questions, and provide a written explanation of the laws and policies that impact immigrants.

Such a site would be highly beneficial for a community, as it would facilitate ongoing discussion and records regarding a variety of topics important to immigrants, as well as a notice board for available programming and services. It could also allow for translation of discussions into different languages, facilitating participation from immigrant communities in a way that email might not.

However, such a system comes with challenges that need to be considered. The following outline presents the most challenging, as well as potential ways to address them.

- **Moderation and Security:** Hosting an online forum discussing issues surrounding immigrant communities poses a number of risks, both from well-meaning individuals and people with harmful intent. Advocates or service providers might accidentally provide sensitive information about vulnerable immigrants in the forums. In addition,

¹⁶ “1st Annual Immigration Summit,” #LA Together, California Community Foundation, January 13, 2020, <http://latogether.org/2020/01/13/1st-annual-immigration-summit-the-future-of-immigrants-in-los-angeles/>.

having a public online forum could enable predatory or disruptive behavior. These security risks could damage the trust that is necessary for effective engagement with immigrant communities.

- To provide an additional level of security, the forum would need to be monitored and moderated by at least one trusted individual, but potentially more. This person would oversee reviewing content and blocking information that could be problematic. Ideally this position would be held within an organization to ensure consistent application and funding to maintain the oversight.
- Any community launching such a site should consider making it restricted, and only allowing individuals who are known or verified to join. While this may limit the number of people able to view and share content, it would also provide additional security.
- Community guidelines for discussion should be drawn up and clearly posted to prevent users from accidentally revealing sensitive information.
- **Engagement:** The impact of any online tool would be measured by the level of participation from local stakeholders. If such a forum is not robustly utilized, it would be a waste of resources and ineffective. Getting people to use a new tool, and return to the site frequently, can be very challenging.
 - A community should not undertake such a forum without some commitment to key stakeholders to utilize the site.
 - Part of the responsibility of the moderator(s) of the site should be to regularly post new content to make the site valuable. Without frequent and useful updates users will not have a reason to regularly visit the site.
- **Reach:** Some key individuals will not regularly access the site, and others may not know about it. If the site is the only place to find community information on events and services, it could exclude some people. In addition, for many immigrants, accessing and navigating an online forum can be challenging, especially if it is written in a language other than their own.
 - A moderator for the site may want to regularly share key posts or pieces of information through other channels, such as a newsletter, Facebook, or other forms of social media.
 - Funding should be set aside for translating important posts into languages frequently used by local immigrants.

Models to Consider:

- The Inclusive Dubuque Facebook page and newsletter regularly shares information about upcoming events related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. While not the same kind of forum, it does allow for sharing key pieces of information.
 - <https://www.facebook.com/InclusiveDBQ/>
- Private Facebook groups, such as the “Iowa Science of Reading” group composed of educators focused on literacy, also create an opportunity for people to hold discussions about different topics while providing additional security.

- If the hosting organization is looking to leverage additional technology to facilitate community discussions, there are digital platforms designed to solicit community feedback on questions and initiatives. Examples include Zencity Engage, an online tool used by public entities to garner public input.
 - <https://zencity.io/solutions/zencity-engage-collaborative-community-input/>

3. Convene a Better Together Committee

The primary recommendation for furthering strategic work on issues affecting immigrant communities is to launch a Better Together Committee. This would be a collective effort aimed at bringing together a wide range of immigrant leaders, community advocates, service providers, government officials, and other stakeholders to meet regularly to discuss systemic issues impacting local immigrant community members. With a dedicated group of participants meeting regularly, and connecting to the broader community of immigrant supporters, larger systemic needs can be effectively addressed.

But such a committee would again run into the two main challenges referenced above:

1. "Immigration" has such a large scope and covers so many areas that it will be difficult for any collaborative effort to make actual progress.
2. The collaboration must include the participation of immigrant community members, while avoiding participation barriers and power imbalances.

To help address these and other concerns, consider adopting some or all of the following recommendations in order to better facilitate the committee's work.

Focus on a Set Number of Projects at a Time

On account of the large scope of issues a committee may cover, meetings can be dominated by reporting and questions, leaving little time to make progress on actual strategies. The committee should therefore be structured around activities, not reporting, and should identify specific projects for the collective to work on advancing. This will not only narrow the focus of the committee, thereby addressing the problem of scope, but will also help provide a real sense of progress for both committee participants and immigrant communities. Making real, tangible gains through specific activities will go a long way toward demonstrating the committee's value to immigrant communities, who might otherwise dismiss it as a series of meetings lacking substance.

Under this model, the committee will decide on one large project to pursue. This project will serve as the central effort of the committee, and will not only provide focus, but will include specific measurements or deliverables on which to base progress. Once the large project has been completed (likely after several years of effort), the committee will vote on a new project. Examples of large projects include:

- Immigrant power/leadership - Establishing an immigrant center, creating a series of sustainable nonprofits representing immigrant communities, etc.

- K-12 education - Reaching a certain level of proficiency for ELL students or for students from immigrant groups, creating a best-in-state support system for immigrant/migrant students in schools, developing a new structure for immigrant parents to have increased engagement with educators, etc.
- Case management - Establishing an effective, trusted, and sustainable case management system so that immigrants with questions/needs have their issues addressed safely and effectively.

The committee will also establish three to five subcommittees aimed at specific, smaller projects. This will enable progress to be made on smaller needs, while still keeping the committee informed. These should be projects that can be completed in a shorter amount of time and which have a dedicated group of members who are willing to drive the progress for the project. After a smaller project is finished, the committee will decide on a new project to pursue. Examples of smaller projects include:

- Building a translator management database
- Developing a guardianship website
- Creating a Marshallese student group
- Launching an immigrant leadership program
- Developing toolkits for employers looking to hire immigrants

Finally, the committee will also leave time to discuss important issues or address new problems and opportunities. One of the benefits of having stakeholders meet on a regular basis is the ability to deal with new challenges as they arise. Conversely, normal reporting of stakeholder events and activities should primarily be done outside of committee meetings, either through notes or through an online forum (such as the one discussed in *Develop an Online Immigrant Advocate Forum* [on page 16](#)). This is so that stakeholders can still share upcoming events and activities while leaving committee time for discussion of progress on projects and new concerns and opportunities.

Encourage and Enable Immigrant Participation

Language barriers, differing work schedules, power imbalances among committee members, and other issues all act as barriers to full immigrant community participation in the committee. This is a challenge for most committees, where it is easier to identify ways for service providers or government officials to meet than it is to get community representatives to sessions. Yet this will be such a critical need of the Better Together Committee that its structure should be designed specifically with this challenge in mind.

To help address this need, the committee should adopt some or all of the following tools for facilitating immigrant community participation:

1. **Translation/Interpretation:** Allocate funding to translate meeting notes into other languages and to provide interpretation for the meeting. Translating meeting notes will allow a wider group of immigrants to follow the committee's progress. Providing interpretation makes the meeting more welcoming and will allow more community members to be able to effectively participate in the meeting.

2. **Mentor Teams:** Provide participants with the option of forming “mentor teams” to help with comprehension and participation. These teams will consist of two people, or a small group of individuals, and will help pair new participants with a trusted and more experienced committee member who can help facilitate engagement and participation. The teams should be composed of individuals with shared languages, and preferably the team members should have an existing trusted relationship. These teams will help participants to better engage with the committee in the following ways:
 - a. During committee meetings:
 - i. Translating difficult to understand concepts
 - ii. Explaining discussion points
 - iii. Identifying other committee members
 - b. Following committee meetings:
 - i. Holding debriefing sessions where team members can:
 1. Ask questions about the committee’s work,
 2. Share ideas they felt unable to express at the committee meeting,
 3. Report on issues that need to be elevated to the committee leadership,
 4. Gain additional insight about participation in collective impact committees.

These teams can also provide members with additional support to help with leadership development and power building. Through the support of the partner team, less experienced members will hopefully become increasingly comfortable with the committee, allowing for more natural participation.

3. **Immigrant Connection Subcommittee:** Designate one of the subcommittees to be an ongoing group that evaluates whether the committee is effectively enabling immigrant participation. This subcommittee will review how well different immigrant communities are able to participate in the committee and propose changes or outreach if there are any gaps. Having an intentional and ongoing focus on immigrant participation can help sustain momentum on the issue.
4. **Weekend/Evening Sessions:** Hold some committee meetings during evenings or weekends so that more community members (and not just nonprofit staff) can participate. It can often be a challenge for community members to attend meetings that take place during normal work hours. Identifying different times can help alleviate these problems.
 - a. It may be the case that holding sessions during the evenings or weekdays may prevent other committee members from participating as well. In one of its first meetings, the committee should consider whether to:
 - i. Have all meetings take place on an evening or weekend;
 - ii. Have every other meeting be outside of normal work hours; or
 - iii. Designate some meetings as being outside of normal work hours, such as one every quarter.
 - b. For meetings taking place on the weekend and evening, the committee should provide childcare to help facilitate community member participation.

5. **Use Hybrid Meetings...:** With the rise in teleconferencing technologies, often the best way to engage with immigrant populations is by taking a hybrid approach that allows for both online and in-person attendance. Some immigrants struggle with access to online resources and may most easily be able to attend in person. Due to transportation barriers, others may be much more likely to attend if there is an online option available.
6. **...But Prioritize Meeting Face-to-Face:** However, even though teleconferencing may allow for more participation, meeting face-to-face can be extremely valuable for building trust and helping humanize the meeting participants. While most meetings should have hybrid options, the committee should also try to have all members meet face-to-face occasionally in order to encourage relationship building.
7. **Engagement Practices:** The committee should consider utilizing meeting practices that better facilitate participation, especially by individuals who may speak English as a second language, such as:
 - a. Having presenters include visualizations with their presentation to facilitate engagement with English language learners. This could involve the use of pictures or icons in presentations, graphic facilitation to help with notetaking, or other visual strategies.
 - b. Having people sit at round tables where they can face each other instead of in straight rows, which can help to create better engagement between participants.
 - c. Using online tools that allow attendees to participate without needing to speak, such as voting response tools, online white boards in multiple languages, etc.
 - d. Having someone from an immigrant community facilitate the session.
 - e. Conducting activities that help humanize the participants, making them individuals instead of just their job position or community affiliation.

Establish Leadership

The committee will need an individual or individuals who can schedule and facilitate the meetings, conduct follow-up, engage with subcommittees, and carry out other functions necessary for the committee to move forward. While the decision on who should lead the committee will depend on the specific region and participants involved, here are two potential options:

- 1) If funding is available, a coordinator could be hired to help lead the work and ensure that all the activities of the committee advance as planned. This person could also participate in all subgroups and help facilitate other recommendations made in this section. The ideal would be for the coordinator to come from, or have trusted relationships with, at least one immigrant community in the region.
 - a. The Immigration Community Assessment Steering Committee recommended that this position not come from a direct provider of services to immigrants, but instead from a “neutral” organization (such as local government, a funding organization, etc.). This is because the coordinator might prioritize or be seen

to prioritize activities or discussions that best serve the needs of the service provider, instead of the interests of the committee as a whole.

- 2) The committee could also elect a leadership group that would be responsible for coordinating the committee. This group should have multiple members to relieve the pressure on any individual member. The leadership team could also have limited terms to allow for shifting leadership and a greater distribution of responsibilities, as well as allowing for more leadership opportunities from members of different immigrant communities.

The strong preference should be given to the first option. Having an organization that serves as the “backbone” for the committee and that has the resources to provide facilitation and help drive the agenda will make the committee much more sustainable and effective. Having an organization involved will also create greater stability during leadership transitions. Furthermore, if the leadership or facilitator for the committee is a funded position with organizational support, the risk of the collective effort failing, or losing traction, will be greatly reduced.

4. Connect Other Immigrant Groups Focused on Specific-Level Issues to the Larger Immigrant-Support Community

Because of the number of issues facing immigrant communities, it is unlikely that the Immigration Strategy Committee will be able to effectively address them all. There will always be a need for interested individuals and organizations to work together to address a specific issue, or to help support a specific population. In addition, it is inappropriate to insist that the activities of groups focus on immigrant populations should all be subsumed and combined into one committee. Many people come together to pursue their interests and passions about certain topics, and that kind of engagement should be encouraged and supported. Collaborations like the Pacific Islander Health Project Advisory Group, Café Latino, and the Covid COFA Working Group are extremely important, and will continue to be so.

To make these groups most effective and to prevent two groups from unintentionally working on the same activities, an effort should be made to have at least one participant of each group also participate in or be connected to the Immigration Strategy Committee (see *Convene a Better Together Committee* [on page 18](#)). This would be a good task for the leaders of the committee, who could work to identify active groups and then find ways to ensure there is a consistent line of communication to the committee, which could then be shared with the larger immigrant support community. Having these groups connected to an online forum would also be a valuable way to maintain contact and frequent communication (see *Develop an Online Immigrant Advocate Forum* [on page 16](#)).

BUILDING CONNECTIONS WITH IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES

Perhaps the challenge that most defines the barriers faced by immigrant communities in the region is the lack of connection to the larger community. This is not particularly unexpected, as many of the great assets brought by immigrants to Iowa—such as diversity in thought, culture, experience, etc.—can be isolating as well. A lack of familiarity with systems, customs, and institutions not only serves to increase a feeling of disconnect from the larger community, but may also create a real and significant barrier to accessing resources and services. Addressing this lack of connection increases the effectiveness and reach of existing programs and services and is crucial for helping develop the civic pride, collective action, and leadership of immigrant populations.

Interviews with immigrants and advocates have identified several ways that this disconnection manifests:

- **Language differences:** Immigrants who are not fluent in English can face significant challenges accessing information, signing up for services, and providing input to community organizations. These challenges are only reinforced by the lack of resources nationally for languages such as Marshallese and Mayan dialects, and by the fact that many Mayan dialects are primarily spoken and not written (which is also true to a lesser degree for Marshallese).
- **Lack of familiarity with institutions:** For many immigrants, a lack of understanding and connection to common institutions and organizations can lead to challenges accessing available resources. For example, an immigrant family's lack of familiarity with their local hospital, and American hospitals in general, could lead to a lack of preventative care, overdue bills, inaccurate diagnoses, and other avoidable issues.
- **Lack of familiarity with systems:** The challenges listed above are often compounded when there is a lack of familiarity with an entire system, such as the local healthcare, education, or criminal justice systems. Navigating systems can be a daunting task for any individual in the region, but the difficulty is frequently exacerbated when the system is unfamiliar or different than a similar system in the individual's country of birth.
- **Cultural differences:** Cultural differences and an absence of cultural understanding frequently widens feelings of disconnect and separation from services. Examples include differences in Pacific Islander conceptions of time, which can lead to missed appointments, and how many Marshallese youth avoid eye contact with elders as a sign of respect, which can lead to challenges during job interviews.
- **Fear of doing something wrong:** For many immigrants, their unfamiliarity with local institutions and systems may lead to fear that they will somehow mess up or do something wrong. This fear can be rooted in social or cultural attitudes ("I don't want to upset people or look foolish") or concern over legal repercussions. Either way, it

can lead to individuals not engaging with systems or not actively expressing questions or concerns in order to avoid any potential conflict.

- **Geographic disconnect:** For immigrants who are new to a region or a city, they may first gain familiarity with areas that they frequently visit (their home neighborhood, where they work, the local school, etc.). While this is likely true for any new resident of an area, it can feel especially true for immigrants moving from another country. This can mean the geographic distribution of resources can have a much bigger impact on how often immigrants access those resources. For example, if an immigrant family lives in the Dubuque's West End neighborhood, but a resource is located in the Downtown neighborhood, that family may not know of the resource or may not feel comfortable accessing it.
- **Lack of relationships:** The reality of the region is that relationships frequently play a significant role in providing access to everything from jobs to housing to local information. While immigrants often have strong relationships with those within their own community, a lack of ties to the broader Dubuque population can increase the barriers to accessing services and resources.
- **Lack of Trust:** One of the biggest sources of disconnect leading to an inability to access resources is low levels of trust. Immigrant communities frequently have trust concerns with local organizations that are not based within their community, generally due to a lack of relationships, cultural unfamiliarity, and at times legal and safety concerns.

This disconnect also works in the opposite direction, posing significant disadvantages for institutions and service providers looking to engage with immigrant families:

- **Language:** An absence of translation or interpretation services can often make it difficult for service providers to successfully reach immigrant communities and to effectively communicate.
- **Culture:** A lack of cultural competence on the part of organizations can also lead to significant communication barriers. An example discussed in the *Workforce and Employment* section [on page 43](#) relates to employers. Cultural misunderstandings may limit hiring opportunities and lead to higher employee turnover.
- **Homogenous view of population:** In some instances, organizations have viewed immigrant communities as homogenous, without understanding the internal dynamics and relationships that may be important for effective communication and services. For example, support for the Marshallese community targets some of the Marshallese churches, but not all of them (there are currently seven Marshallese churches in Dubuque). This can limit the reach of programming and may cause resentment. This issue is discussed more in the immigrant mapping report included in [Appendix A](#).
- **Limited information and data on immigrant groups:** Local data on immigrant groups is extremely difficult to obtain. Not only is there limited information, but often sources that do exist (such as the American Community Survey) may be inaccurate and frequently undercount immigrant populations.

- **Lack of relationships:** Institutions that do not have strong relationships with immigrant communities often struggle with program implementation. Establishing these relationships can be difficult.
- **Difficulty with follow-up:** Even when organizations can connect with members of immigrant communities, follow-up meetings and conversations are often difficult to schedule and hold consistently due to the barriers discussed above. This creates additional separation, limits the ability of programs to be effective through sustained engagement, and does not allow for trust to build between the individual and the organization.

These barriers are often compounded by the challenges of poverty in ways that are specifically relevant for immigrants. Foreign-born residents of Dubuque County are nearly two-and-a-half times as likely to be below the poverty line as native-born residents of the county.¹⁷ There is evidence that the lack of resources and stresses associated with poverty can lead to isolation and challenges fully accessing resources.¹⁸ In addition, the “scarcity mindset” that can result from poverty may limit people’s ability to pursue available services, especially more aspirational opportunities focused on the future.¹⁹

Taken together, these barriers to connection can have a substantial impact on the ability of immigrant populations to engage with local resources. Immigrants will be less likely to seek out services, and service providers will have a much more difficult time identifying immigrant families to serve. Communication, cultural, and trust barriers also limit the ability to follow-up with immigrants and make providing referrals significantly more difficult. Even when immigrant residents can access services, the level of disconnect may make them less impactful than otherwise would be the case. This means that no matter how effective local services are, immigrant communities’ ability to successfully use these services will always be limited if this lack of connection exists.

This guide will focus on four main ways to establish and maintain connections with immigrant communities.

- The first is **capacity and power building** within immigrant communities, providing members of those communities with additional influence and resources to advocate for their communities.

¹⁷ American Community Survey, 2021 Five-Year Estimates, for Dubuque County. Available at: <https://www.census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/data-profiles/>

¹⁸ K. Samuel et al, “Social Isolation and its Relationship to Multidimensional Poverty,” *Oxford Development Studies* (2017): ISSN 1360-0818, <https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/116624/2/Manuscript%252010-16%5B1%5D.pdf>; Emily Cuddy and Richard V. Reeves, “Poverty, isolation, and opportunity,” *Brookings Institution* (March 31, 2015), <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/social-mobility-memos/2015/03/31/poverty-isolation-and-opportunity/>; Annie Lowrey, “The Time Tax,” *The Atlantic*, July 27, July 2021, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2021/07/how-government-learned-waste-your-time-tax/619568/>.

¹⁹ Ben Fell and Miles Hewstone, “Psychological perspectives on poverty,” Joseph Rowntree Foundation (June 4, 2015), <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/psychological-perspectives-poverty>.

- The second is improving **outreach** from social service providers, helping them connect more effectively to a greater number of immigrant families.
- The third is improving **navigation** at key agencies and organizations to help immigrant populations make better use of existing services.
- And the fourth is through expanded **cultural offerings** designed to help the larger community understand and build connections with local immigrant communities.

Capacity and Power Building

This section describes activities and programs that could increase the capacity within immigrant communities so they may better serve members of their own communities and advocate for their needs. There are two primary reasons why this capacity and power building is the initial option to be discussed. First, providing resources to individuals and groups that already possess community relationships and cultural and linguistic knowledge eliminates some of the major barriers preventing effective delivery of services. In addition, members of immigrant communities are often best equipped to understand the needs and priorities of their own populations. Putting greater decision-making ability and authority in the hands of immigrants increases the likelihood of community buy-in and support for initiatives.

The second reason to prioritize capacity and power building is that it is frequently the most overlooked and lacking strategy of the four identified in this guide. Much of the focus of social service providers in the region has been on outreach to immigrant communities: “How can we reach more immigrants?”, “What are the names of people in need of help?”, “How do we build a relationship with immigrant leaders?”, etc. While these are questions local organizations should be asking, they are, at best, only half of the story.

Outreach is about trying to get organizations with resources access to immigrant groups. But outreach alone does not create resources and power *within* immigrant communities, thereby enabling those communities to connect their members to service organizations and advocate on their behalf. Service providers in the region place immense value on immigrant leaders, usually volunteers, who are the first point of contact for outreach, translation, etc. But despite being recognized as crucial connectors, the region has very few formal structures through which to equip and empower immigrant leaders and community members. Resourcing the assets that already exist within immigrant communities is perhaps the most impactful action that can be done to improve the support given to immigrant populations.

The reality is that very few resources in the region are dedicated to centering power within immigrant communities. And there are very few organizations that are led by immigrants and designed to directly serve immigrant communities. Most of the organizations that do exist, such as Latino Empowerment and Development (LEAD) and Kora Im An Kol (KIAK), have small budgets and are sustained entirely by volunteers. During the Covid-19 pandemic in Dubuque, the incredible work carried out by members of immigrant communities was largely done by untrained volunteers, who worked to support their communities despite their day

jobs, not because of them. Small organizations and individual volunteers will always be critical to the work done in support of immigrant populations. But identifying ways to increase capacity within those populations will help improve their effectiveness and limit vulnerabilities. It is also the best way to ensure that the work being done aligns with the priorities of immigrant populations and has their support and participation.

To ensure that the work being done in the region aligns with the priorities of immigrant populations and has their support and participation, consider the following recommendations:

- Create and Support Immigrant-Led Nonprofit Organizations
- Establish an Immigrant Center
- Adopt a Natural Helper Program
- Establish Communal Spaces
- Support Community Organizing

Outreach

The Dubuque region is generally rich in resources, with effective programs and valuable services readily available to help improve the lives of residents. However, reaching those residents, and especially immigrant families, can pose significant challenges. Many organizations struggle with establishing communication channels with local immigrant communities. During this research, service providers commonly commented on the frustration they feel when it comes the challenge of effectively encouraging immigrants to access local systems.

The task of determining how best to connect with immigrant populations can seem daunting, and many organizations never make initial inroads, instead prioritizing projects that seem more achievable. Developing a set of best practices for outreach can help address these issues by focusing the organization's efforts and identifying processes for carrying them out. While this may require additional allocation of resources (hiring new staff, initiating special projects, etc.), very often just taking the initial step of adopting more effective practices removes connection barriers. In fact, this research shows that simply committing to increased outreach can lead to meaningful outcomes.

Local organizations can start the process of building relationships by considering the following recommendations:

- Diversify Outreach Efforts
- Provide Translated Materials and Interpretation Services
- Locate Connectors in Residential Areas with a High Concentration of Immigrants
- Include Immigrant Support Organizations in Regular Meetings
- Use Best Practices for Including Immigrant Community Members in Meetings
- Take a 2Gen Approach

Navigators

One of the most imposing barriers facing residents of the region is the challenge of navigating support systems. Understanding what step to take next, how to fill out a form correctly, or who to call for help can be extremely difficult for many people, and especially lower income individuals.²⁰ For immigrants these problems may be compounded by a lack of familiarity with local systems, language challenges, and a cultural or societal fear of being seen as causing problems. Some immigrants may simply avoid seeking services instead of dealing with the potential for failure and humiliation.

Hiring additional navigators, especially at organizations or government departments that regularly serve immigrant communities, can be an extremely beneficial way to improve engagement with local populations. Navigators are individuals employed or hired by service providers to assist community members with accessing services. The best navigators are those that are trained in the requirements of service systems and that come from the communities they serve, providing them with the language and cultural knowledge to effectively help. These navigators can leverage trust and relationships within immigrant communities to make sure that a greater number of people are able access important services.

Excellent examples of valuable immigrant navigators already exist within Dubuque. These include community health workers at Crescent Community Health Center, paraprofessionals at the Dubuque Community School District, family navigators at Child Health Specialty Clinics, and staff at the Northeast Iowa Community College. Many other organizations, such as institutes of higher education in the area, also have staff that, while not navigators, frequently serve a navigator role. Several navigator positions were also created as a result of collaborations connected with this research, including the Guatemalan Mentor program and the Marshallese community connector at the Visiting Nurse Association (see *Projects and Accomplishments Connected with the Community Assessment* on page 5). This is by no means an exhaustive list of navigators in the region but is meant to provide examples of existing navigators who are members of local immigrant communities.

While hiring navigators is an undoubtedly powerful tool for helping improve access to services for immigrant populations, this role should not be seen as a substitute for capacity and power building. Navigators are meant to move forward the mission of the organization they work for and follow the direction of their (usually non-immigrant) managers and bosses. This is a very valuable and necessary part of how service organizations in our region work, and navigation plays a critical role in helping to provide equitable access to systems. That said, it should not be seen as a replacement for advocacy and power building within immigrant communities.

²⁰ The challenges of navigating government support services is discussed in Annie Lowrey, "The Time Tax," *The Atlantic*, July 27, 2021, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2021/07/how-government-learned-waste-your-time-tax/619568/><https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2021/07/how-government-learned-waste-your-time-tax/619568/>.

An example of previously recommended program that can fulfill some of the roles of a navigator position is the Natural Helper program. While this is not a substitute for having a paid staff position dedicated to navigation, training, and compensating immigrant volunteers to help members of their communities navigate systems can increase access to services. The *Natural Helper* program is described in more detail in the List of Recommendations document.

Cultural Events

Cultural activities are not often discussed in relation to providing services. Art and culture can be useful mechanisms for facilitating service provision, in addition to being an important part of long-term relationship building that leads to greater connectivity. Celebrating immigrant culture through artwork, performances, festivals, and other mediums helps build appreciation and understanding and creates a more welcoming and inclusive environment.

Facilitating more cultural events also meets a need that is frequently expressed by immigrant communities in the region. Many older individuals and parents are concerned about preserving and passing down their culture to future generations. For example, during focus groups with Marshallese community members, many people expressed concern that Marshallese children were becoming less connected with their island culture and language. Immigrant respondents also frequently expressed a desire to share cultural traditions with the larger population in the region. Community members also expressed a desire to have support from the larger community in meeting these two goals. To that end, the following recommendations can be undertaken to encourage and facilitate cultural events:

- Support Immigrant Cultural Events
- Develop Relationships with Immigrant Communities
- Engage International Students
- Support Youth Programming

ISSUES FACING IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES

Immigrant populations are extremely valuable contributors to local culture, workforces, and communities. Many immigrant families also experience a range of needs, from language to legal, healthcare to housing, and education to entrepreneurship. All of these factors will vary from individual to individual and community to community.

Given the breadth of the needs and assets within local immigrant communities, this section is not intended to be comprehensive. Instead, it will attempt to address some of the major gaps and opportunities that exist in various issue areas, and provide direction for future work and collaboration. It is only through consistent engagement and work that any of these areas can be adequately addressed, and this section of the guide is intended to provide some basis for local stakeholders to move forward on that engagement.

This section will focus on seven different issue areas.

- Case Management
- Education and Youth Support
- Health
- Housing
- Legal Assistance
- Translation and Interpretation
- Workforce and Employment

Case Management

One of the biggest challenges facing new immigrants in the region is simply navigating unfamiliar systems. Accessing services can be a confusing and laborious process for many people in the region, but immigrant families face additional difficulties, including language barriers, unfamiliarity with local institutions, and a lack of social connections. For many immigrants, having a case manager who helps with navigating local systems can be an immense benefit. The case manager can identify services, make connections to providers, help with paperwork and other requirements, highlight needs that the immigrant may not have known about, and provide enough knowledge to help their client be successful and comfortable utilizing local systems. Those providing case management within the region are often critical for helping with transportation as well, enabling immigrant families to physically access the resources they need.

Case management services will differ substantially in terms of how formal and extensive the support is that they provide. Social service organizations may staff trained social workers who provide case management for clients. Other organizations may employ community

connectors, community health workers, coaches, and other navigators with cultural and language skills to help immigrants identify needs and connect to services. A number of small nonprofits and volunteer organizations also conduct extensive case management work, often undertaken by unpaid staff. And very frequently, untrained volunteers, community leaders, members of faith communities, and other individuals with a personal (but not professional) connection to the family will serve in this role, helping to navigate systems and act as advocates.

While ideally all case management would be handled by paid and trained staff, the reality in the region is that individuals and organizations from all of these categories will likely be necessary for the foreseeable future. Special recognition should be given to those smaller nonprofits and volunteer community members who play a case management role for immigrants, including those among the most marginalized in the region. These volunteers and nonprofit staff, many of whom receive little to no compensation for their services, frequently move mountains in support of their immigrant neighbors. Without their committed and dedicated work, the system of support for new immigrant families would be untenable, and many immigrants would fall through the cracks. Volunteers within immigrant communities also play an enormous role in case management, often in ways that go unseen and unrecognized within the larger community.

One of the reasons for the region's reliance on volunteers is a lack of established support for new, non-refugee immigrants who come here. Throughout the United States, refugee resettlement organizations are generally responsible for settling new refugee families into a community, providing them with housing, helping with job searches, and offering other valuable services during that initial period. These organizations receive federal funding to provide these services and support. However, since 2017 the region has not had a refugee resettlement agency, with the Catherine McAuley Center in Cedar Rapids being the closest organization in Iowa. Also, refugee resettlement generally only refers to immigrants designated as refugees, and doesn't apply to asylum seekers, unaccompanied minors, COFA migrants, or many of the other new immigrant arrivals who come here. This means that local nonprofits serving new immigrants generally do not receive federal funding for case management, but instead rely on the work of volunteers and other funding streams in order to provide services. Most new arrivals (outside of university students) are initially welcomed to the community and connected to services by small nonprofits or volunteers.

While these groups and individuals often do excellent work helping immigrant families and should be commended for their efforts, this situation does raise serious issues:

- **Lack of Training:** Many community members who work to support immigrant families have little experience with the systems they are helping navigate, or the regulations in place. This is especially true for members of immigrant populations who are assisting those in their own communities, as they may only have recent or infrequent knowledge of how to access services. This can increase the difficulty of obtaining those services, making the process more laborious, less efficient, and potentially less successful.

- **Challenges Sharing Knowledge:** When volunteers or smaller organizations do learn how to engage with a system or access a service, they may not be able to effectively share that knowledge with other volunteers. This leads to a situation of “re-inventing the wheel,” where multiple, disconnected advocates each struggle to figure out the solution to the same problem.
- **Missing Relationships:** A wealth of resources are available within the region; however, those resources can be difficult to identify and access. While larger and well-established organizations face problems understanding the landscape of service providers, it is even more challenging for small nonprofits and volunteers, who may have limited relationships with institutions and service providers. This may cause those volunteers to lean heavily on the few relationships they do have, potentially missing other resources and reducing what services are available. And if an immigrant family only has one individual providing case management, this may result in limited options for important needs like jobs, housing, and legal assistance.
- **Damaged Relationships:** In addition to a lack of relationships, damaged relationships, due to interpersonal conflicts or an absence of trust, can also interrupt the case management process. Two individuals may have a falling out, or argue over an important issue, or simply have a serious miscommunication that leads to a broken partnership. This is especially challenging within immigrant communities, where well intentioned service providers may exacerbate a problematic situation due to a lack of cultural understanding. Damaged relationships between advocates and community leaders can lead to additional challenges and ultimately lead to a decline in services for immigrants. While these problems can arise with larger organizations, the use of professional and paid staff and clearly defined procedures governing behavior and supervision are frequently used tools to avoid serious, lasting damage to relationships.
- **Risk of Burnout:** Advocates and other individuals that support immigrants are often at high risk of burnout due to the need that exists, the complex challenges facing immigrants, and the very personal and emotional reactions that are elicited by some immigrants’ stories. There have been numerous examples in the region where advocates who feel overwhelmed by their work find it necessary to leave and focus on other priorities. This can be especially true when people in a community identify one person (often with language skills) as a key connector. This risk for burnout can be more pronounced in volunteers because their case management work comes separately from their job, leaving less time, little to no compensation, and a lack of support from coworkers or other institutional mechanisms.
- **Key-Individual Risk:** Having case management handled by an individual or a small organization also makes it more likely that a support network will fall apart if anything were to happen to that individual. If the important individual becomes burned out or sick, or moves to a different job or region, immigrant families may be left without trusted connections or navigational support. When the immigrant’s relationship is with an organization instead of a volunteer, this risk can be mitigated, and there can be relationships with multiple staff members as well as a system for replacing the lost capacity.

- **Risk of Mistakes:** While many volunteers are well-meaning and committed advocates, they may be untrained and have only a limited understanding of important issues. This raises the possibility of unintended but serious mistakes. If a volunteer gives improper advice (such as on legal or medical situations), this can potentially have a major impact on immigrants and even lead to problems for the larger community. In other cases, the desire of volunteers to advocate for immigrants may put them in conflict with the policies and requirements of local institutions. Because established organizations should provide training and have policies handling oversight and liability, the risk of a serious mistake becomes less likely and less impactful.
- **Risk of Predatory Behavior:** Unfortunately, not all volunteers will be well intentioned. Given the marginalized and vulnerable position of many immigrants, and especially immigrant youth, the risk posed by predatory individuals is a real concern that the region should take seriously. Often immigrants, including immigrant minors, rely on volunteers (who may be virtual strangers) for everything from financial support to being driven long distances for legal hearings. Many volunteers do not undergo background checks or regular supervision when they begin providing support to immigrants.

Taken together, these challenges decrease the effectiveness of immigrant support services, and leave open the risk for significant problems. The following recommendations offer potential pathways to address these issues:

- Fund Additional Case Management Support
- Build Case Management “Networks”
- Facilitate Background Checks
- Build Capacity in Immigrant Communities
- Develop a Guardianship Website
- Provide Transportation Support

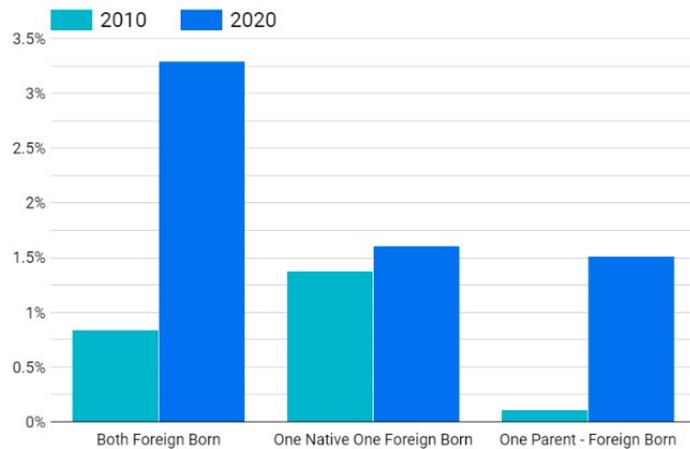
Education and Youth Support

The percentage of youth under the age of eighteen in Dubuque County who have at least one foreign-born parent rose from 2.33% in 2010 to 6.42% in 2020 (see **Figure 3**). During a period when the number of young people overall in Dubuque County has slightly declined, the number of these children has nearly tripled. If the region’s demographics continue to move in the same direction, immigrant families will make up an even larger portion of the region’s population. Enabling these young people to thrive will have positive future ramifications as they become the next generation of parents, workers, and leaders.

Interviews and focus group sessions have identified the benefits that immigrant children and youth bring to the community. These include, but are not limited to:

- **Cultural diversity and creativity:** Immigrant youth bring different perspectives and backgrounds to a community, helping to generate new ideas and expose other young people to different ways of thinking. Evidence suggests that diverse classrooms can have important cognitive, social, and emotional benefits for all students in the classroom.²¹

Figure 3: Percent of population with foreign-born parents - Dubuque County



Source: U.S. Census, Population Estimates

- **Hard working:** The hard work and dedication of immigrant youth may best be demonstrated by local Guatemalan unaccompanied minors, many of whom attend school while also working to support themselves and their families.
- **Cultural navigation:** Many immigrant children already act as important cultural navigators for their families, often serving as interpreters, advisors, and connectors.
- **Civic engagement:** Immigrant youth have expressed a strong interest in leading activities to help benefit both their local immigrant communities and the wider population where they live. Recent examples from Dubuque include the involvement of youth in the planning of the Latinx festival and the Marshallese Mani Day celebration and presentations carried out by the Pacific Islander Club at Hempstead and Senior High School.
- **Desire for education:** Many immigrant families cite education as one of their primary reasons for coming to the U.S., and to Northeast Iowa.
- **New community opportunities:** The work done by immigrant youth has already created new events and other cultural opportunities that otherwise would not be available in the region. This helps make the region a more welcoming place for diverse populations, enables cross-cultural connections, and increases the cultural richness and variety of local offerings.

In short, young people from immigrant communities have significant potential to provide ongoing leadership for the region. However, a number of barriers disproportionately impact students from immigrant communities. One of the largest issues involves language skills, as English language learners can struggle to engage with curriculums taught primarily in English. This is particularly true for students who may have come to the U.S. already facing an education gap, especially high school students who may have only had a few years of formal

²¹ Amy Stuart Wells et al, "How Racially Diverse Schools and Classrooms Can Benefit All Students," *The Century Foundation*, February 9, 2016, <https://tcf.org/content/report/how-racially-diverse-schools-and-classrooms-can-benefit-all-students/>

education. Feelings of disconnection between immigrant students and their schools, teachers, and the rest of the student body can also impact academic success. Students have expressed feeling that their school “isn’t for them” or is not a key part of their future career aspirations.

These barriers can significantly impact academic achievement. English learners score more than fifty percentage points lower in both reading and math proficiency than the general student body at both the Dubuque Community School District and the Western Dubuque Community School District. Only 11.3% of Pacific Islander students in Dubuque are currently reading at grade-level proficiency, and four-year graduation rates are nearly 13% lower for Hispanic students than the general population, and over 54% lower for Pacific Islanders.²² For older immigrants, this often leads to greater disparity in educational attainment. Foreign-born individuals in Dubuque County over the age of twenty-five are more than four times as likely to not have graduated high school as is the native-born population. At the same time, a greater percentage of the foreign-born population has a bachelor’s degree or higher than does the native-born population. Despite the high level of academic achievement among many immigrants, over a quarter of the population above the age of twenty-five has still not achieved a high school diploma or equivalency.²³

Responsibility for improving educational outcomes for children from immigrant communities should be a priority for the community as a whole. By encouraging greater connection between immigrant families and the general population policymakers and stakeholders can positively impact academic achievement for immigrant children across the region. The following list of recommendations should be considered to support this goal:

- Hire Paraprofessionals and Other Staff Focused on Immigrant Students
- Establish a Guatemalan Mentorship Program
- Create an Expanded Marshallese Student Group
- Support Early Childhood Reading
- Provide Additional Workforce Development Options for Immigrant Youth
- Achieve Greater Representation in Classrooms
- Engage and Retain International College Students

²² Iowa School Performance Profiles, 2022. Available at: <https://www.iaschoolperformance.gov/ECP/Home/Index>

²³ American Community Survey, 2021 5-year estimates for Dubuque County. Available at: <https://www.census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/data-profiles/>

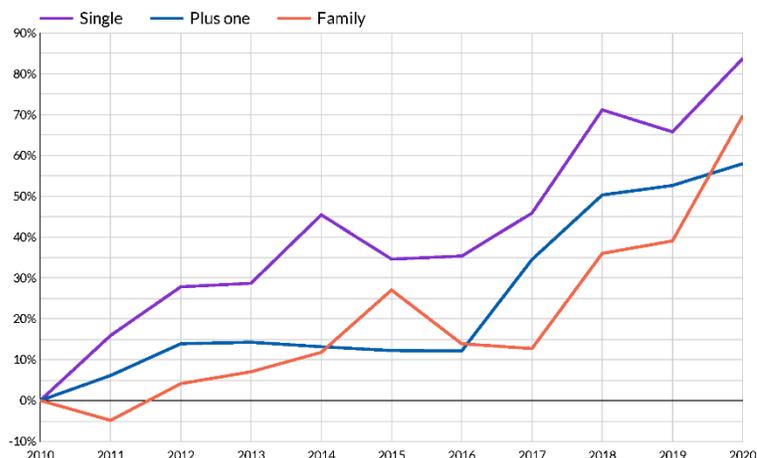
Health

Healthcare for immigrant communities has been one of the most prominent areas of focus in the region, and for good reason. While there is some evidence that the average immigrant is actually in better health than the native-born resident in the United States,²⁴ this is counterbalanced by challenges accessing the healthcare system. For many immigrants, unfamiliarity with the system (and sometimes distrust of it) may lead to individuals avoiding visits to care providers.

It is not uncommon in immigrant communities for individuals to see a healthcare practitioner only when they are experiencing a medical emergency, a situation that often leads to higher costs and more serious conditions that could have been avoided through preventative visits and treatments.²⁵ This is compounded by the rising cost of healthcare (see **Figure 4**), which may discourage immigrants without employer-supplied health insurance from making hospital visits. In Dubuque County, it is estimated that over 24% of foreign-born individuals are uninsured, compared to just 3% of the native-born population.²⁶

Health-care concerns have been even more prominent for the region's Pacific Islander population, for whom advocacy around health care has been an ongoing struggle for much of the past twenty years. Due to a myriad of historical factors—ranging from the testing of nuclear weapons on the Marshall Islands to dietary changes caused in part by colonization, nuclear contamination, and environmental disruption—the Marshallese population is at elevated risk for many of the leading causes of death in the United States. For example, it is estimated that adult Marshallese in the U.S. experience more than four times the incidence of diabetes than the general U.S. adult population.²⁷ These challenges have been compounded

Figure 4: Change in insurance premiums from 2010 value by coverage type - Iowa



²⁴ Ken Terry, "Immigrants Healthier than Native-born, But Advantage Fades," *WebMD*, July 13, 2021, <https://www.webmd.com/a-to-z-guides/news/20210713/immigrants-healthier-native-born-advantage-fades>.

²⁵ "State's Undocumented Immigrants Use Fewer Health Services than U.S.-born Residents," *UCLA Center for Health Policy Research*, May 5, 2014, <https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/newsroom/press-releases/pages/details.aspx?NewsID=186>.

²⁶ American Community Survey, 2021 5-year estimates for Dubuque County. Available at: <https://www.census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/data-profiles/>

²⁷ McElfish PA, Rowland B, Long CR, Hudson J, Piel M, Buron B, Riklon S, Bing WI, Warmack TS. "Diabetes and Hypertension in Marshallese Adults: Results from Faith-Based Health Screenings." *J Racial Ethn Health Disparities*. Dec 2017;4(6):1042-1050. doi: 10.1007/s40615-016-0308-y. Epub 2016

by federal policies around health insurance. From 1986 to 1996, Marshall Islanders living in the U.S. as COFA migrants ([see page 7](#)) were able to enroll in Medicaid and Medicare under federal law. However, in the 1996 Welfare Reform Act, COFA migrants were not listed as eligible for these two benefits (many advocates believe this was simply due to oversight). That meant that many individuals at elevated risk for serious medical conditions lost access to their health insurance. It is estimated that in 2020 nearly 30% of Dubuque County's Pacific Islander population was uninsured.²⁸

This finally changed at the end of 2020, when the U.S. Congress reinstated Medicare and Medicaid access for the Marshallese and other COFA migrants.²⁹ After years of hard-fought advocacy, this news was greeted with tremendous relief by local Marshallese communities. This result shows the value of continued advocacy and speaks to what Pacific Islanders and their allies were able to accomplish. Since that time, local care practitioners such as Crescent Community Health Center have worked to sign up uninsured Marshallese families for these benefits, helping to get dozens of individuals improved access to medical care.

This last effort points to one of the important assets that has been a notable success for the region: the outreach of care providers to immigrant communities. While one of the most prominent findings of this research is the lack of connection between immigrant communities and existing support systems ([see page 23](#)), within Dubuque, healthcare providers have been some of the most successful organizations in building trusted relationships with immigrants.

- Crescent's Pacific Islander Health Project has been recognized for its impressive work serving the Pacific Islander community in the region, and they employ community health workers focused on Latino and other specialized populations.
- The Visiting Nurse Association employs a community connector serving the Marshallese population who provides both navigation and outreach.
- Monsoon has been scheduling numerous community conversations with Asian and Pacific Islander communities to discuss health issues related to gender-based violence.
- Child Health Specialty Clinics' family navigator serves the local Pacific Islander population.
- MercyOne and UnityPoint have conducted extensive free testing programs at immigrant community celebrations and in their residential communities.
- And a collection of partner organizations and community leaders met under the facilitation of the City of Dubuque to help with emergency efforts focused on immigrant populations during the Covid-19 pandemic.

This level of outreach and service within the health-care space was cited by immigrant communities during focus group sessions as an important reason for coming to the region.

Nov 11. PMID: 27837454; PMCID: PMC5426989. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5426989/>

²⁸ American Community Survey, 2020 5-year estimates for Dubuque County. Available at: <https://www.census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/data-profiles/>

²⁹ Diamond, Dan. "How 100,000 Pacific Islanders got their health care back." *Politico*. 1 January 2021. Available at: <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/01/01/marshall-islands-health-care-453215>

Although these successes should be recognized, gaps in service for immigrant populations continue to exist, especially for those who may not be able to have medical expenses covered through insurance. For example, brain health³⁰ services are a major gap within the community. And medical interpretation continues to be an outstanding need. The following recommendations provide some potential opportunities to help address these and other challenges the community faces.

- Hire Additional Navigators
- Provide Funds for Uncovered Medical Expenses
- Provide Brain Health Services
- Offer Training for Medical Translation and Interpretation
- Offer Training for Brain Health Translation and Interpretation

Housing

Quality, affordable housing continues to be an ongoing need throughout the region, with an estimated 40% of renter-occupied households in Dubuque County spending 30% or more of their income on rent.³¹ The estimated number of renter-occupied households decreased between 2015 and 2020, despite a growing population throughout the county.³² Iowa only has forty-six affordable and available rental homes for every hundred extremely low-income renter households.³³ For low-income families especially, being able to identify affordable housing that does not have significant safety or structural problems can be a challenge.³⁴ In 2022, the East Central Iowa Association (ECIA) conducted a housing needs assessment for the City of Dubuque found that there was a high and unmet need for housing units within Dubuque, and concluded that the city should be designated as a distressed housing community.³⁵

³⁰ The Community Foundation uses the term “brain health” when talking about conditions related to a person’s psychological and emotional well-being. This is to work against the stigma often associated with the term “mental health.”

³¹ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s 2014-2018 Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) dataset. Available at: <https://www.huduser.gov/PORTAL/datasets/cp.html>

³² American Community Survey, 2015 and 2020 5-year estimates for Dubuque County. Available at: <https://www.census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/data-profiles/>

³³ Andrew Aurand et al, “The Gap: A Shortage of Affordable Homes,” *The National Low Income Housing Coalition*, March 2020, https://reports.nlihc.org/sites/default/files/gap/Gap-Report_2020.pdf.

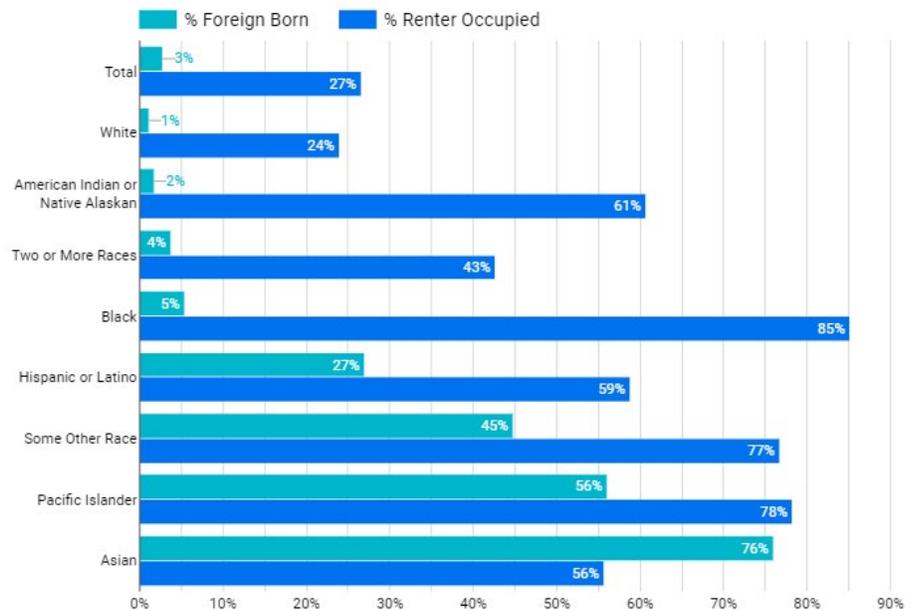
³⁴ Grace Nieland, “Assessment: ‘Housing Crisis’ Apparent in Dubuque,” *Telegraph Herald*, July 9, 2022, https://www.telegraphherald.com/news/tri-state/article_82a82dec-4923-5fba-8ee3-fb396780c125.html.

³⁵ “Dubuque Housing Needs Assessment,” *East Central Iowa Association*, April 2022, https://www.greaterdubuque.org/media/userfiles/subsite_90/files/DubuqueHousingNeedsAssessment_04-2022.pdf.

Many immigrants face barriers to obtaining quality housing. Due to limited social networks and lack of familiarity with housing systems when first arriving here, many immigrants rely on housing recommendations from friends or family. This can produce a limited number of options, often resulting in immigrant populations living in the same neighborhoods or apartment complexes (this is also likely due, in part, to immigrants wanting to live near friends and family). This can be exacerbated by language challenges, preventing some immigrants from finding certain options or connecting with available resources. A lack of a credit history or a steady source of income can also factor into an immigrant's ability to find stable housing. Many landlords struggle with renting to immigrant families. This may be due to a requirement for social security numbers or other forms of ID for background checks, difficulties with communication, or a larger discomfort working with immigrants, perhaps stemming from cultural differences or a lack of familiarity with those populations. At times, anti-immigrant biases may lead landlords to avoid renting to immigrant families.

Taken together, these barriers create risks and challenges for many immigrants, such as limiting the pool of available housing or forcing immigrants to take lower-quality or more expensive options than might otherwise be necessary. It could also lead to overcrowding, especially if immigrant families live in multi-generational households or share housing with other families due to low income or a lack of options. These barriers can result in landlords having significant leverage over immigrant tenants, who may not be able to advocate effectively for themselves, easily move to another living space, or feel comfortable reporting issues to government authorities. This scenario poses the risk of unfair price increases and other exploitative practices. These additional barriers increase the risk of situations where individuals may lose housing and be unable to find a suitable replacement, placing many immigrant families in a vulnerable position.

Figure 5: Percent of population that is foreign born and that lives in renter occupied housing by race and ethnicity - Dubuque County



Source: U.S. Census American Community Survey 2020 5-year estimates

There are many examples of individuals and organizations in the region responding to these challenges in positive ways. In several cases individual residents have come forward to offer housing options to vulnerable families, including in rural areas where housing shortages have become a major issue. Volunteers and organizations have also served as advocates for immigrant families, helping to negotiate with landlords and resolve unexpected issues. Collective approaches have seen some benefits as well.

In 2021, the Community Foundation, the City Housing and Community Development Department, and a number of nonprofit organizations came together in response to a rapidly developing situation where a group of immigrants were losing their housing after new management instituted a stricter background check that required a Social Security Number. After convening, the City of Dubuque revised its housing background check form to provide other ways of accessing information, and representatives from the City met with the new management group to explain the situation and provide the new form. These and other examples, including the recommendations that follow, reflect the many important efforts that take place throughout the region to address housing challenges for immigrant communities:

- Advocate for Affordable, Quality Housing
- Provide Additional Trainings on Tenants Rights
- Coordinate Outreach to Landlords
- Form an Immigrant Housing Ally Coalition
- Provide Support for Mortgages

Legal Assistance

The legal requirements for staying, living, and working in the community are among the persistent challenges immigrant families face. This is true for recent immigrants pursuing Special Immigrant Juvenile Status or an asylum case, college graduates looking to work at local businesses, COFA migrants trying to demonstrate their ability to travel and work in the U.S., and long-term residents working to receive their U.S. citizenship.

Meeting these requirements can be confusing, expensive, and time consuming. A 2013 analysis by the American Action Forum found that U.S. government agencies have generated over 234 different government forms related to immigration, leading to an estimated 98.8 million paperwork burden hours each year at a cost of approximately \$30 billion in costs to immigrants and businesses.³⁶ Immigration court cases have also faced an immense backlog. For example, in one of the region's closest immigration courts, located in Omaha, Nebraska, the average court case takes 1,265 days, or over three and a half years, to be completed.³⁷

³⁶ Sam Batkins, "The Intersection of Immigration and Regulation," *American Action Forum*, April 2013, <https://www.americanactionforum.org/insight/the-intersection-of-immigration-and-regulation/>.

³⁷ Syracuse University TRAC Immigration System for FY23, accessed December 19, 2022. Available at: https://trac.syr.edu/phptools/immigration/court_backlog/court_proctime_outcome.php

Correctly navigating these forms and legal requirements can have major implications for immigrants, determining whether they can work, receive benefits, become citizens, or even stay in the country. Having access to help and support with these requirements can be a major benefit. In 2022, individuals applying for asylum were more than twice as likely (50% vs. 22%) to have relief granted if they were represented by an attorney.³⁸ A 2019 study from the Immigration Policy Lab at Stanford University found that when the fee waiver process for applying for citizenship was simplified, it led to approximately 73,000 people per year becoming citizens who otherwise would not have applied.³⁹

Locally, nonprofits and volunteers have been incredibly valuable in helping immigrant community members fill out forms and apply for everything from a new passport to U.S. citizenship. Local colleges and universities also dedicate a significant amount of time and resources to helping students navigate the immigration system so they can study in Dubuque. These efforts are enormously important given the complexity and challenge associated with immigration statutes and requirements.

Legal Requirement Example: I-94 Forms

Because the variety of legal needs is far too great to list here, an example might provide some insight into the challenges immigrants and advocates face. As COFA migrants, Marshallese immigrants are free to travel, live, and work in the U.S. without needing a visa. The document that provides this authorization is an I-94 Form, which is a piece of paper individuals receive on arriving at the U.S. and that has historically been stapled to the individual's passport. If this form is lost (not uncommon given how it is attached to the passport), it needs to be replaced. Forms received after April 30, 2013 are available online, but those received prior to that date must be obtained by completing Form I-102 at a cost of \$445 (plus \$85 for biometrics).

Obtaining a hard-copy I-94 has proved exceptionally difficult. In Dubuque, a coalition consisting of immigration attorneys, social workers, city officials, and other nonprofit representatives have worked to obtain I-94s through I-102 submissions, Freedom of Information Act requests, and conversations with USCIS and Customs & Border Patrol officials. Because paper documents may be filed in government buildings under long-unused systems, frequently requests come back without success. Some advocates have suggested taking a bus full of Marshallese to the nearest border so they can reenter and receive a new form, but this raises fears of immigrants being detained and not allowed to return.

These forms are crucially important for Marshallese individuals, allowing them to freely work and travel in the U.S. Simply replacing a lost form can be a time-consuming and expensive process with only a partial chance of success.

³⁸ Syracuse University TRAC Immigration System for FY22. Including all relief granted. Available at: <https://trac.syr.edu/phptools/immigration/asylum/>

³⁹ Vasil Yassenov et al, "Standardizing the Fee-waiver Application Increased Naturalization Rates of Low-income Immigrants," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 116, no. 34 (August 20, 2019): 16768-16772, <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.1905904116>.

While many of the changes and reforms that would help simplify the legal system must be enacted on the national level and are therefore largely outside of the scope of this guide, there are other measures that can be undertaken on a local level, as detailed in the following recommendations:

- Connect with Immigration Attorneys
- Provide Support for Fees and Completing Forms
- Develop a Guardianship Website
- Build Trust with Local Law Enforcement
- Advocate for an Independent Immigration Court System
- Issue Community-Based ID Cards

Translation and Interpretation

For those with limited English skills, Dubuque can often be challenging to navigate and feel unwelcoming. Many local organizations also struggle to serve immigrant families with limited English proficiency. Contributing to these difficulties is the fact that several of the most prominently spoken languages in the region, including Marshallese and Mayan dialects, are not commonly spoken or translated in the U.S., and therefore few national and state-level resources are able to help with interpretation. This situation is not unique. Addressing needs for individuals speaking these languages has been a major difficulty for many regions across the country.

Dubuque's ability to provide translated documents and interpretation improved in many ways during the Covid pandemic. This was because of a more concerted effort from individuals to reach out to those who have language skills. There was also a much larger recognition of a very important point: Whenever possible, people who provide interpretation or translation should be paid for their efforts. The ability to speak a different language is a valuable skill that is difficult to master, and those who have that skill should be compensated for their work.

An additional barrier has been the need for specialized translation and interpretation. Health care providers and legal organizations often utilize technical language that, if interpreted incorrectly, can cause harm to immigrant families. Many institutions require interpreters with certain training or specialization to ensure that technical terms are translated accurately.

Due to limited capacity in the region, often there are no available interpreters with the required training and certification. This means that interpretation may not meet necessary standards, and organizations (such as hospitals) may not be able to compensate community members who do provide translation. In some cases, children are relied upon to translate for their parents, a troubling reality given that it might involve important technical information or serious medical diagnoses.

Providing translation and interpretation has become more important with the arrival of new refugees from countries like Afghanistan and Ukraine; the lack of translation and

interpretation services severely limits our region's ability to engage with these new arrivals. While it will be challenging to provide universally available translation and interpretation, the following recommendations will help create additional resources and increase availability:

- Compensate Community Members for Translation and Interpretation
- Hire Additional Navigators
- Utilize Available National and State Translation and Interpretation Services
- Create a Local Translation and Interpretation Database
- Offer Basic Interpretation Training
- Offer Training for Medical Translation and Interpretation
- Offer Training for Brain Health Translation and Interpretation
- Make Use of Translation Technology

Workforce and Employment

When immigrants have been asked why they came to this region and what they like best about it, "good jobs" is one of the most frequent responses. Job opportunities are a huge attractor for immigrants to the region, and high-quality, well-paying jobs are among the best ways of retaining immigrant families. Yet, despite the attractiveness of local job openings, many local immigrants are currently underemployed and are working in low-paying occupations compared to other available positions. In Iowa, median earnings are over \$9,700 less per year for foreign-born men compared to their non-foreign-born counterparts, and over \$8,100 less for foreign-born women.⁴⁰ These lower wages may limit an immigrant family's potential for climbing out of poverty. Because the region offers significant opportunities for workforce training and higher education, there are a number of avenues that immigrants can follow to improve their employment, leading to economic advancement and improved livelihoods. This combination of available jobs and training options can work as a strong incentive for immigrants to come to this community, and then stay in order to pursue better career opportunities.

The availability of workforce is one of the most persistent concerns for local employers. According to Greater Dubuque Development Corporation's 2022 Skills Gap Analysis, the Dubuque Metropolitan Statistical Area's number of available jobs is projected to outpace the working age population over the next ten years. In addition, the top six industries in the region are currently facing a skills gap, and several key occupations are lacking a local pipeline of available workers.⁴¹ And while the unemployment rate in Dubuque County has returned to near its pre-pandemic rate, the labor force has fallen by approximately 1,200

⁴⁰ American Community Survey, 2021 5-year estimates for Iowa. Available at: <https://www.census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/data-profiles/>

⁴¹ "Greater Dubuque Region 2022 Skills Gap Analysis." *Greater Dubuque Development Corporation*, 2022, https://www.greaterdubuque.org/media/userfiles/subsite_90/files/GDDC-NICC_2022_SkillsGap_WorkforceBreakfast.pdf.

since 2019.⁴² With over 1,400 jobs available on AccessDubuqueJobs.com as of December 2022, many companies are in need of workers in order to meet current demand or to expand their businesses. Part of the decrease in labor force may be due to a decrease in immigration, as immigration rates have declined significantly since their peak in 2016.⁴³

Being better able to connect immigrants to family-sustaining careers helps resolve both the needs of immigrant families and employers. Many immigrants face limited work options due to a lack of education, resources, and connections. These limited options often lead to underemployment, where the individual takes a lower paying job that doesn't fully utilize their skills and can even result in exploitative working conditions. Providing wider access to job opportunities can boost individual earning potential and improve working conditions.

From the perspective of employers, immigrants can be a much-needed solution for persistent workforce shortages, as these communities are some of the fastest growing populations in the region. Between 2010 and 2021, Dubuque County's foreign-born population grew by more than 75%, which was responsible for nearly 20% of the county's population increase.⁴⁴ In the city of Dubuque, the Pacific Islander population nearly tripled between 2010 and 2020, making it the fastest group population in the city.⁴⁵

Many immigrant communities have incredibly strong networks that would be a huge asset to any company looking to find additional employees. The better the community is at connecting immigrant populations to high-quality employment and supporting them through the hiring process, the more attractive the region will be to those immigrant populations as word-of-mouth travels.

However, several barriers to successfully employing immigrants in the region exist. Many immigrants rely primarily on referral networks within their immigrant community to find job opportunities, which can severely limit their options. Challenges in connecting employers and service providers with immigrant communities means that often many of the excellent resources available in the region are not utilized. For a deeper discussion of these connectivity issues and possible solutions, see the section titled *Building Connections with Immigrant Communities* [on page 23](#).

Another major challenge is that in many cases the community has not done enough to equip employers with the resources and knowledge to successfully hire and retain workers from immigrant populations. Employers have reported making the effort to hire from an immigrant community, only to lose those employees shortly after. This is often because employer

⁴² Labor Force data for October 2022 and October 2019 from Iowa Workforce Development. Available at: <https://www.iowaworkforcedevelopment.gov/local-area-unemployment-statistics>

⁴³ Bill Conerly, "Drop in U.S. Immigration Further Tightens Labor Market," *Forbes*, April 28, 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/billconerly/2022/04/28/immigration-very-low-despite-border-controversy-contributing-to-tight-labor-market/?sh=677fb6b92e30>.

⁴⁴ American Community Survey, 2021 and 2010 5-year estimates for Dubuque County. Available at: <https://www.census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/data-profiles/>

⁴⁵ U.S. Census decennial census, 2020 and 2010 for City of Dubuque. Available at: <https://data.census.gov/>

expectations do not match with the realities of life for immigrant community members. This could be for many reasons, such as:

- A lack of translation of materials, safety instructions, etc. in the employee's native language.
- Policies or procedures being not well suited for matching with an employee's culture or needs. Examples include:
 - Employees violating strict rules around being late due to transportation challenges, cultural differences around scheduling and time, difficulty with access to other services like childcare or health care, etc.
 - A company using a web-based or email-based onboarding portal for new employees that is challenging for immigrant employees.
 - Immigrant employees being uncomfortable raising concerns or questions through normal communication channels (like telling a supervisor) and quitting out of fear or frustration.
- Differences in culture around appearance or demeanor. For example, many employers have been unimpressed by young Marshallese people not making eye contact during interviews, even though avoiding eye contact with an elder can be a sign of respect in the Marshall Islands.
- The commitment of CEO's or c-suite staff to hire from immigrant communities not being taken up or understood by other staff (HR staff, supervisors, etc.).

While these issues can be addressed, some employers are uncertain about how to get started. The prospect of translating materials, altering procedures to fit with different cultural norms, and making other necessary changes can be a daunting task that requires a degree of cultural insight. Many employers struggle to do this on their own and may also be concerned about not understanding the legal issues that can come with hiring immigrants. All of this can lead to missed opportunities to match immigrant employees with potential high-quality employers.

The following recommendations have the potential to alleviate some of the challenges around immigration and workforce needs:

- Develop Employer Toolkits and Assistance
- Adopt a Natural Helper Program
- Add Navigators, Success Coaches, and Immigrant Outreach Staff
- Offer additional Non-English Workforce Training Options
- Implement a RISE AmeriCorps Program
- Provide Additional Workforce Development Options for Immigrant Youth (Workforce Engagement for Guatemalan Unaccompanied Minors)
- Provide Workforce Support to International Students

CONCLUSION

The interviews, focus group sessions, and field work done for the community assessment highlighted what a valuable asset immigrant communities are for the region. They are important drivers of demographic, cultural, and economic growth, and if current trends continue, they will play an even larger role in building the vibrancy of local communities. Yet this growth will remain limited if the barriers described herein constrain immigrant families. The region has done impressive work in recent years to reduce these barriers and better empower immigrant communities to succeed, but there is still work to be done.

Communities should come together to work collaboratively on these issues. Many of the challenges discussed in this report are simply too large to be addressed without a strategic partnership of key stakeholders and committed advocates. And at the center of this partnership must be immigrant leadership: this must be the engine moving the work forward, as well as the north star aligning it with the priorities of immigrant families. The accomplishments in the region over the past three years, despite the challenge of an unprecedented global health crisis, demonstrate that communities can achieve a great deal when working together.

The priority for this strategic work will need to be growing connections between immigrant communities and the larger population. These relationships are necessary for the effectiveness of whatever collective action is taken to address the challenges in the region. And to best facilitate these connections, the focus should be on building power and capacity within immigrant communities. Having well-resourced immigrant leaders working on behalf of their communities is a major need in the region, and one of the best means of raising the effectiveness of local services, outreach, and partnership.

It will be a challenge for any collective effort to adequately address the scope of needs that are impacting immigrant families. The hope is that this implementation guide will provide direction, both for the short-term and for future efforts and objectives. As work is done to address the needs in one area, it will also produce rippling benefits that help alleviate other barriers as well. By building a framework for effective collaboration, local communities will be better prepared to respond to the next crisis or opportunity that impacts the region.

By working collaboratively to build relationships and address systemic barriers impacting immigrant families, this region can create a more welcoming home for everyone who resides here. A truly successful community is one where everyone—no matter who they are, where they come from, or what they look like—can thrive.

APPENDIX A: CCA MAPPING REPORT

Understanding the internal communication channels of immigrant groups can be extremely valuable for local stakeholders and community leaders. By effectively tapping into these networks, organizations can more easily provide services to immigrant populations and can better reach segments of those populations that may previously have gone unserved. Improving engagement in this way also helps prevent mistaken assumptions that can lead to breakdowns in trust, such as an over-reliance on a small number of immigrant leaders that may not represent all of their community. This report will seek to provide insights into how information is shared within three of Dubuque's largest immigrant populations with the goal of helping local stakeholders identify opportunities for improved communication and avoid potential pitfalls.

The research conducted for this report focused on three primary immigrant groups: Dubuque's Marshallese, Latinx, and Guatemalan Mayan communities. Research was primarily based around one-on-one interviews and focus-group sessions with immigrant community members and local service providers. In addition, a relationship network mapping exercise was conducted with members of the Marshallese community in order to identify key connectors within the community. This research produced findings related to both the internal networks of immigrant communities and how these communities often interact with local service organizations and government institutions.

While each of the findings are specific to the individual population being studied, this research identified four recommendations that apply more widely across different immigrant populations:

- 1) Avoid treating immigrant populations as monolithic, as there may be groups and relationships within these communities that play an important role in determining communication channels.
- 2) Prioritize hiring multilingual immigrant community members as navigators to help increase access to resources and services.
- 3) Service organizations should work to ensure that relationships between immigrant community members and staff also exist between the immigrant individuals and the organization as a whole, as this will help ensure that the relationship doesn't disappear if the staff member leaves their position.
- 4) Community stakeholders should work to foster connections between different immigrant groups, as there remains a lot of potential for collaboration on advocacy and information sharing.

This research was made possible due to a generous grant from Connecting Communities in the Americas.

Introduction

Over the past three years, the Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque has been involved in conducting an Immigration Community Assessment for the region around Dubuque, Iowa. This assessment has involved interviewing members of immigrant populations, service providers, and other key stakeholders in order to develop an understanding of assets in the region, elevate the needs and priorities of immigrant communities, and identify precedent models that the region could consider implementing.

One of the findings of the assessment has been the importance of understanding communication channels and relationships *within* local immigrant communities. The larger Dubuque population at times has the tendency to view immigrant communities as monolithic - as one single block of similar and well-connected people. This has led to situations where service providers and other stakeholders identify specific leaders or connectors to serve as a primary point of contact for the entirety of their community. A small number of individuals may receive information or resources for the entire population or may be seen as being able to represent the community on larger decisions or programs.

Evidence from the assessment suggests that this does not always reflect the reality for these communities. A highly visible individual or leader might only represent a portion of a population and may be limited in their ability to connect with some families and individuals given the internal dynamics of the community. Connectors may also become overexposed or overused, leading to burnout and other negative consequences. Conversations with immigrant populations have highlighted examples of this previously taking place in Dubuque, leading to unanticipated problems and setbacks.

The purpose of this research is to try to provide additional information on the internal structure and communication channels within some of Dubuque's largest immigrant populations. While fully mapping communication channels and relationships from multiple immigrant communities is beyond the scope of this research, the aim is to provide insights that will help local stakeholders better understand how to share information and resources with immigrant communities more equitably. This report will then offer several recommendations that Dubuque and other similar communities could consider for improving interactions with immigrant communities.

This research was made possible by a generous grant from Connecting Communities in the Americas (CCA), an initiative dedicated to facilitating connections between community foundations across the Americas. Their leadership and support around issues facing transnational migrants has been critical in making this work possible.

Immigrant Populations in Dubuque

Dubuque is home to a wide variety of people from different backgrounds and cultures. Data from the Census Bureau suggests that Dubuque County residents immigrated from over 50 countries across the world.⁴⁶ This level of diversity means that local immigrants cannot be easily categorized, and it can be difficult to draw conclusions that accommodate their significant differences in experience and background. For this reason, this research focused primarily on three of the largest immigrant groups within the Dubuque region: the Marshallese community, the Latino/Latina/Latinx community (hereafter referred to as "Latinx"),⁴⁷ and the Guatemalan Mayan community.

The Marshallese Community

Dubuque boasts the largest Marshallese population in Iowa, and one of the most significant in the United States. Residents of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, which is a nation composed of more than 1,100 islands and islets located in the Pacific Ocean, are able to freely travel, live, and work in the United States without needing a visa due to an agreement called the Compact of Free Association (COFA). Their status as COFA migrants has allowed many Marshallese families to move to Dubuque in recent decades, making the Marshallese the fastest growing population in the county. However, COFA migrants still face a number of legal and administrative barriers, including not being eligible for federal services such as SNAP benefits or cash assistance.

Latinx Community

The Latinx population in Dubuque County represents a wide variety of individuals with cultural roots in over a dozen countries and territories across the Americas and the world. This diversity makes Dubuque's Latinx community culturally rich and very complex. There is also a significant socio-economic separation within the community.

⁴⁶ American Community Survey, 2020 5-year estimates for Dubuque County. Available at: <https://www.census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/data-profiles/>

⁴⁷ Residents of Dubuque from Latin American and other Spanish-speaking regions use a variety of terms to refer to their ethnic identity. These include Hispanic and Latino, which are sometimes used interchangeably, but Hispanic often refers to someone who is descended from Spanish-speaking populations, while Latino refers to someone descended from Latin American communities. In addition, in Spanish nouns often have a gender. A male person of Latin descent is frequently referred to as a "Latino," while a female is a "Latina." A group that may contain both male and female individuals is often referred to by the male "Latino." Some people prefer to be referred to as "Latinx" or "Latine," which removes the gender of the word to make it more inclusive. The preferred term will vary from individual to individual. For this research, we will use the term "Latinx" to try to include as many groups as possible, although we acknowledge that many individuals do not recognize the term, and that the most commonly used terms are "Latino" and "Hispanic."

This includes a more financially secure population composed of a frequently multilingual professional workforce with closer connections to Dubuque organizations and institutions, as well as a lower-income population that is less likely to have English language skills, is more marginalized within Dubuque, and often lacks connections to formal institutions. This separation can also often be seen along generational lines, with younger individuals and those who are second-generation immigrants being more likely to speak English and have connections to institutions. The relationships between these two socio-economic groups are highly complex and not always clear, and families may contain individuals that fit into both categories. However, the distinction, as imperfect as it is, is useful for identifying the differences in how these two groups access important information, resources, and services. This research will primarily focus on the lower socio-economic Latinx population, due to the increased barriers that exist between this group and local services.

Guatemalan Mayan

Another sizeable and quickly growing population in the region immigrated to Dubuque from Guatemala. These Guatemalan migrants come from indigenous Mayan tribes, each of which has many distinct cultural traditions, histories, and languages. Many Guatemalan Mayans arrive in the United States not speaking English or Spanish, but instead one of over twenty Mayan dialects. The most commonly spoken among residents in Dubuque are Ixil, K'iche' (Quiche), and Q'anjab'al (Kanjobal). This population is composed of relatively recent arrivals in Dubuque compared to other immigrant groups, and a substantial number have come to Dubuque as unaccompanied minors. While this community shares many similarities with other individuals with ethnic or cultural roots in Latin America, for the purposes of this research they are considered a different population due to their unique circumstances and communication networks.

Methodologies

For each immigrant population, this research relies primarily on interviews and focus group conversations with members of that immigrant community and with service providers who work closely with that community. These interviews were used to gain information on how community members build connections within their community and with service providers, allowing them to access important information and resources. Interviews and focus group meetings were either conducted in English or utilized an interpreter. Interpreters were generally recruited from within the local community, which both created a greater sense of comfort with the research and was often necessary due to the challenge of finding reliable, professional translation services for less commonly spoken languages such as Marshallese or Ixil.

In addition, the research team conducted a relationship mapping exercise with Marshallese community members using human-centered-design principles. This exercise had immigrant community members draw maps showing their relationships to two resources in their lives:

- 1) Connectors - Defined as the sources that connect the respondent to help and information. This can be a person, an organization, or even something like a social media site or the local newspaper.
- 2) Change Makers - Defined as the source the respondent goes to when there is a problem in their community they want to see fixed. Again, this could be a person, an organization, or something like a social media site or newspaper.

By asking respondents to map out these relationships, the research aimed to better understand how respondents received information, how they connected to important local services and resources, and how they best engaged in civic projects and problem-solving for larger community issues. Participants were also asked whether they served as Connectors or Change Makers for others within their community.

Relationship mapping sessions were held at local immigrant churches following services, which allowed the research to be conducted at locations frequently utilized by immigrant communities and where large groups were already gathering. Due to the presence of families, the reliance on interpreters to help respondents with limited English proficiency, and the need to complete the sessions within a reasonable time frame, the research method was designed to be relatively simple and easy to understand. Respondents were provided with prompts to help illustrate people who might be Connectors or Change Makers in their lives. These prompts used example taken from interviews and focus group meetings to help make them more relatable to the respondents. A list of prompts used can be found in [Appendix A](#).

Because this research was done in a large group and involved writing down relationships and connections, many of the Latinx and Guatemalan immigrants felt uncomfortable taking part in this research. Therefore, this exercise was only conducted with members of the Marshallese population, focusing on parts of the community that have been less commonly represented in community-wide initiatives.

Research Findings

Due to the uniqueness of each of the immigrant populations involved in this research, these findings have been separated into three sections focused on each group. Cross-cutting findings that were relevant to all of the populations will be highlighted in the **Conclusions and Recommendations** section.

Marshallese

Due to the size of the population, their legal status, and their connection to local organizations, the Marshallese were the most willing to participate in this research, and especially in the relationship mapping exercise. This section highlights specific findings from the mapping exercise, and then incorporates this into findings from the focus groups and interviews.

Intra-Community Connections

Connections within the local Marshallese community are extremely important for the sharing of resources and communication. This was highlighted by the relationship mapping exercise:

- Over half of all Connectors and Change Makers identified were Marshallese.
- When a specific person was identified, either by name or job title, it was a Marshallese person 85% of the time for Connectors, and 72% of the time for Change Makers.
- Within the Marshallese community, some individuals stood out as key leaders:
 - Two Marshallese women made up 33% of all mentions for Connectors.
 - These two plus another individual comprised 45% of mentions for Change Makers.
- At the same time, in addition to these three another 29 Marshallese individuals were identified as either Connectors or Change Makers. This suggests an intense reliance on certain leaders combined with broader social connections throughout the Marshallese community.
- While it was not explicitly detailed throughout this research, it appears that one Marshallese leader in particular was routinely identified despite being unaffiliated with the respondents' church or being a close relative. This individual was designated as a Change Maker by nearly one-third of the respondents.

This research corresponds with findings from interviews and focus groups. Many Marshallese have large families in Dubuque, and consider extended family (aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.) to be very close and nearly comparable with parents and siblings. These family units are a major source of information and connection. Church communities also play a large role in Marshallese life, and while there are connections between the churches, they are not always trusted partners. In focus group sessions, some Marshallese stated that they would not always feel comfortable attending events, workshops, or trainings held in one of the other churches. In addition, Marshallese who do not attend church often feel excluded by programs that rely on churches as key connectors. The community is still able to host events and celebrations that span across multiple churches, but communication can sometimes be challenging.

Marshallese organizations or groups were not as frequently mentioned during the research, though this may be changing. The non-profit organization Monsoon, a state-wide organization staffed in Dubuque entirely with Pacific Islanders, has recently gained much more traction with its programming in the region. And just prior to the writing of this report, a new Marshallese women’s group named Kora Im An Kol (KIAK) formed in order to help coordinate community involvement and leadership among Marshallese women. These two groups have the potential to further alter the dynamics of Marshallese intra-community networks.

Connections to Institutions

There is a large variance in how well the Marshallese community is connected to local institutions. The relationship-mapping research found that institutions might be identified by the organization itself or by a specific staff person (like a doctor or teacher). Staff were identified as a “person” in this analysis, but were also associated with their organization for analysis of institutional connections. Findings include:

- Organizations were the second most likely category to be identified as Connectors or Change Makers, behind individuals (see **Figure 1** on pg. 15).
- Health-care providers were the most commonly identified organizations (see **Figure 2** on pg. 15), but were much more likely to be listed as Connectors (20% of all Connectors) than Change Makers (5% of all Change Makers).
 - Crescent Community Health Center was the most frequently listed health-care provider, identified by half of the respondents, followed by the Visiting Nurse Association (VNA) at 35%.
 - There was a large degree of overlap between the health-care organizations, as nearly every respondent who named a health-care organization also listed Crescent.
- Schools also received a significant number of mentions (6% of all Connectors and 10% of all Change Makers), and were the only organizations to be listed an equal number of times as a Connector and a Change Maker.
- 30% of respondents also referenced the City of Dubuque, a person affiliated with the City (such as the mayor), or a City department (such as the police).
 - However, the City was identified much more frequently as a Change Maker (11% of all mentions) than as a Connector (1%).
- The Community Foundation was listed by 25% of the respondents, and private companies were listed by 15%, most frequently as a Change Maker.

The prevalence of health-care providers as Connectors matches the findings from interviews and focus groups, as many Marshallese families have established regular relationships with local health organizations. This is in large part due to the additional effort many of these organizations have made to engage with the Marshallese community. Crescent, the VNA, and Child Health Specialty Clinics were the most frequently named health organizations, and all three have hired Marshallese staff to

serve as community connectors. This points to the importance of having navigators and members of the community on staff in service organizations.

Other Sources

The research also asked about other sources that served as Connectors or Change Makers for the Marshallese, such as online sources, newspapers, television, etc. Understanding how members of the Marshallese community received news about their region and expressed their own desires for change could offer important avenues for future engagement. The results from the relationship matching exercise include:

- 45% of the respondents listed “Facebook” as a Connector within their circle, and an additional person listed “Safari” (a web browser) as a Change Maker. This suggests a substantial online presence for many Marshallese, especially as a means of getting information.
- Only one respondent listed “newspaper,” and another said “the news.”

During several interviews, Facebook was identified as a potentially effective means of communication with the Marshallese community. During the early months of the Covid pandemic, Facebook was used as a contactless means of engaging with a large number of Marshallese families very quickly. The most effective messages on social media tend to be written in or include wording in Marshallese.

Latinx

Within the Dubuque region, trust was perhaps a larger and more defining barrier for the Latinx community than for any of the other communities involved in this research. Especially for the local Latinx population of a lower socio-economic status, concerns about the ability to trust individuals and institutions often resulted in a lack of connection to formal service providers. Dubuque’s Latinx community was the most likely to operate without interacting with more formal institutional channels, staying “in the shadows” and engaging with service providers only in emergency situations. Language availability was often a big driver of distrust, as many Latinx individuals felt less willing to engage with institutions that only operated in English. This lack of trust was often true even for documented immigrants and those with permanent legal status. This is partially because concerns with formal institutions frequently extend beyond immigration status, and because even after securing a green card many immigrants can face significant legal risks. While this is certainly not true for every member of the lower socio-economic Latinx community, it has led to many in the community being marginalized and disconnected from social service providers.

Intra-Community Connections

Within the lower socio-economic Latinx community, relationships between families and among family members is very important. Often certain families will have a leadership role in the community and will serve as a primary connector, especially for families that are new to the region. These local leaders often help to resolve challenges that might otherwise have been addressed by more formal institutions or by service providers.

However, several respondents noted that within the lower socio-economic Latinx community, nationalities can be very important. Tensions between nations and pre-conceived notions about other Latin American countries may impact relations between immigrant families. In addition, biases based on skin color can also play a significant role in shaping relationships and communication networks. These internal dynamics create an additional level of complexity and challenge that is not always visible from outside the Latinx community.

Connections to Institutions

This lack of trust in institutions means that many families have limited connections to local organizations and service providers. For example, a number of respondents reported Latinx families visit hospitals or other medical providers only in an emergency. The relationship with specific organizations can also change quickly if people don't feel comfortable or welcome. In Dubuque County, there were numerous reports of families changing which church they attended based on where they felt comfortable, with the addition of a regular Spanish mass or the institution of new policies perceived as less welcoming being enough to compel families to travel long distances to find a more agreeable service. The strength of relationships within the Latinx community also plays an important role in determining connections to institutions. Decisions made within Latinx community networks about whether an organization is welcoming or not carry a lot of weight in determining whether individual families connect to those organizations.

One type of institution that does often play a stronger and more consistent role as a connector are local schools. These can often be an important source of information and support for Latinx families, especially in families where children are relied upon for their English language skills. This was seen most frequently in schools that have dedicated Spanish-speaking staff who focus on community outreach.

High-Volume Connectors

An issue that was raised several times during interviews related to situations where one person from the Latinx community – usually employed by a local organization – became identified as a trusted connector. In these cases, word spread that a specific individual could be relied upon to connect community members to services and help navigate local systems. These situations frequently led to the connector becoming

“burned out” and feeling overwhelmed by the number of requests for assistance that they received. This often resulted in the connector leaving their position or seeing their role as a connector significantly reduced.

When a highly utilized connector such as this leaves their position, it often takes time for the organization to find a replacement (if they are able to find a Spanish-speaking replacement at all). The time that lapses between the original person leaving and the new hire arriving frequently leads to Latinx community members becoming disconnected from the organization. Often, though not in all cases, immigrant families form their connection with the individual connector instead of with the institution, which can make it difficult to maintain relationships or trust with those institutions once the person has left. Because of this, highly utilized connectors often represent a “key-person risk,” meaning that their absence can be a significant setback for providing access to information and resources for the Latinx community.

Guatemalan Mayan

The Guatemalan Mayan community is much more recently settled in the Dubuque region, with many of the individuals immigrating after 2010. A large percentage of the Dubuque population came to the United States as unaccompanied minors. This means that they arrive younger than 18 years old, often without a parent in Dubuque, but with a more consistent pathway to permanent legal status. Upon arrival in Dubuque, many of these individuals are paradoxically both highly reliant on current residents for connections and information while also being surprisingly self-sufficient, paying their own way without significant financial support. This means that for the many basic needs such as housing and work, Guatemalan Mayan communities often operate in very closely connected networks. However, for access to other services like medical care and education, there can be numerous barriers facing Guatemalan Mayan immigrants that often require dedicated help from a small group of committed volunteers.

Intra-Community Connections

Many Guatemalan Mayans who come to the United States live in what are sometimes called “ciudades espejo,” or “mirror cities,” where migrants from the same small town or region in Guatemala reconstitute their communities in the U.S. This means that many of the new Guatemala Mayan arrivals to the Dubuque area have some connection with another local resident, often a relative or neighbor from their region in Guatemala. These connections are key to becoming established within the community: finding a place to live, somewhere to work, and a basic orientation to living in Dubuque. However, new arrivals are frequently expected to be largely self-sufficient in terms of covering costs and meeting needs. This means that a larger connection to social service systems often remains unaddressed within the Guatemalan Mayan community.

Connections to Institutions

Guatemalan Mayans face even greater barriers than most immigrant groups in Dubuque when it comes to establishing connections to social service systems and organizations. Key reasons for this include an extreme lack of translation and interpretation services for Mayan dialects in the region, the relative newness of the population, and a much lower familiarity with engaging formal service institutions (especially in the case of unaccompanied minors). Respondents in interviews have cited numerous challenges making meaningful connections for Mayan Guatemalans with educational institutions, workforce organizations, medical facilities, and other service providers. There are a limited number of strong, direct connections between Mayan Guatemalans and most formal service organizations.

What connections do exist are generally facilitated through small nonprofits or local volunteers who provide navigation, case management, and/or transportation services for local immigrants. Many of these organizations focus the majority of their work on Guatemalan Mayans, and often on unaccompanied minors specifically. They help register individuals for school, arrange for medical appointments, drive minors to immigration court hearings, provide food and furniture in times of need, and carry out a host of other important activities to help immigrants navigate local systems. These individuals and small nonprofits are often a critical and highly utilized connector between Mayan immigrants and the larger social service system.

However, the prominent role of volunteers and small nonprofits has had unintended impacts. These include:

- Volunteers or nonprofit staff making problematic decisions or providing questionable advice, frequently due to misinformation or to a lack of a formal governance structure that might be present within a larger organization;
- Disagreements between volunteers and smaller nonprofits leading to splits that may restrict Guatemalan Mayan access to services;
- The potential for key-person risk, as one or two individuals can be responsible for a large number of connections between immigrant communities and service providers.

Potential Future Changes

As discussed above, one of the notable features about Dubuque's Guatemalan Mayan community is its relative newness within the region. The Census estimates that the Guatemalan population grew by nearly eight-fold between 2010 and 2020,⁴⁸ and the increase for Guatemalan Mayans (a subset of this group) was likely even more

⁴⁸ American Community Survey, 2020 and 2010 5-year estimates for Dubuque County. Available at: <https://www.census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/data-profiles/>

dramatic. But as time passes, an initial group of Guatemalan Mayans are beginning to become more established in Dubuque. This includes individuals receiving their green cards and U.S. citizenship, and one family has even obtained a mortgage and bought their first home. This growth means that there is the potential for a group of more secure Guatemalan Mayans who may be able to serve as visible, well-connected leaders for their community.

Through a collaboration between the Community Foundation, Northeast Iowa Community College, and the Dubuque Community School District, an Ixil-speaking individual was hired to work with Guatemalan students at the local high schools for the first time. A local nonprofit has established a community garden that is largely operated and maintained by Guatemalan Mayans. And other members of the community are showing a strong interest in continued education and growing their economic prospects. These changes could have a significant impact on the relationships and connections that exist within the Guatemalan Mayan community and which connect them to formal service organizations.

Conclusions and Recommendations

While these findings show three very distinct and complex social groups, there are several recommendations for local stakeholders and leaders that apply across all of the listed populations.

- 1) Do not treat immigrant communities as monolithic:** This research indicates that the internal relationships within immigrant populations can be complex, and there may be multiple communication networks existing simultaneously within each community. Whether it is due to the difference between Marshallese churches or the national dynamics within the Latinx community, intra-population connections and relationships can be important drivers of effective communication. Local stakeholders should be cautious about relying exclusively on one communication channel or community leader, as this approach may fail to reach everyone in a population and may even create further problems or feelings of mistrust. Organizations and stakeholders should also continue to strive to better understand the internal networks of immigrant communities, helping to elevate new connectors and change makers.
- 2) Prioritize the hiring and training of navigators:** Navigators can be an effective tool for helping local immigrant populations develop trusted relationships with local organizations. By hiring a multilingual individual from an immigrant population specifically to provide outreach and support to their community, organizations can build effective relationships and communication channels with populations that might otherwise go unserved. The effectiveness of this approach was demonstrated in the relationship mapping exercise,

where 71% of all references to organizations as “Connectors” were regarding organizations that employed Marshallese community members in navigator roles. Interviews and focus group sessions also highlighted how critical these individuals can be for accessing needed services.

Prioritizing the hiring of navigators on a community level can also produce several other benefits. Having multiple navigators within a region can help reduce the potential for navigator burnout. In addition, the more navigators there are serving a population, the greater likelihood that those navigators will be connected to different internal communication networks. And by paying immigrant individuals to serve the needs of their own communities, less reliance is placed on untrained volunteer leaders, which can improve the quality and resilience of service channels.

- 3) Work to transfer relationships to institutions:** While navigators can serve as valuable connectors for immigrant communities, they can also increase the possibility of “key-person risk.” If a community’s relationship is with the navigator and not the organization employing that individual, there is a greater probability that the relationship will break apart if that navigator leaves their position. This has been seen in Dubuque most frequently with the Latinx community, and it can be difficult to repair those relationships due to the time and effort required to find and train a new navigator.

To help avoid this problem, organizations with a navigator should build additional connections between clients and the institution itself, or with other staff. By establishing this additional trust and redundant channels of communication, organizations can help maintain their relationship with immigrant community members even if a staff person were to leave their position. While this can be challenging, it can also help prevent the need to start from scratch whenever a key staff person leaves their position.

- 4) Foster connections between immigrant groups:** This research did not encounter many strong connections *between* the largest immigrant populations. It was rare for members of an immigrant community to reference members of a different immigrant group as connectors or change makers. An exception to this is within the Latinx community, where Latinx individuals often form connections and relationships despite the nationality of their family’s country of origin. But even here there are challenges, as well as limited connections between the Guatemalan Mayan community and the larger Latinx community.

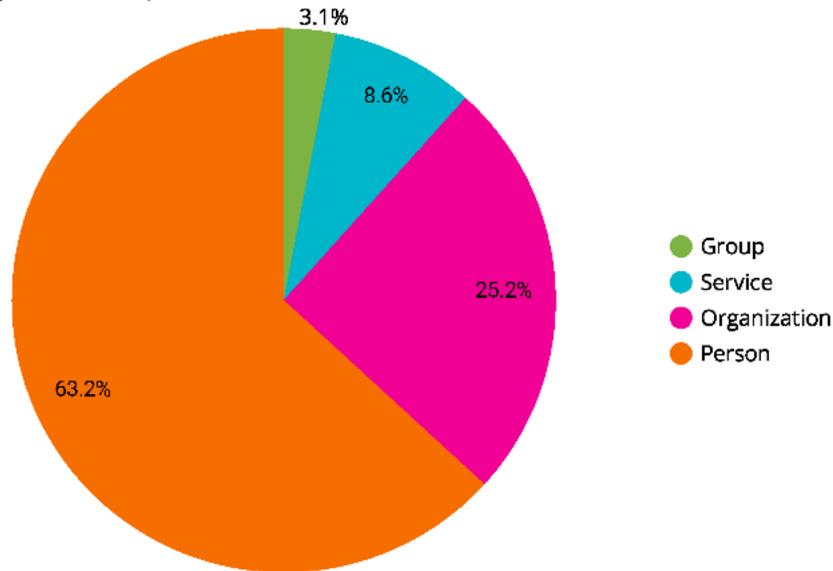
Stronger connections between immigrant groups could be valuable. Many immigrant populations have similar goals—such as access to better translation services, housing support, and legal services—and collaboration between

immigrant groups could help with both advocacy and sharing information. There are a number of organizations in the Dubuque community that have helped to foster cross-cultural connections between immigrant groups, such as the Presentation Lantern Center, Inclusive Dubuque, and the Multicultural Family Center. Expanding these activities, and focusing specifically on developing formal relationships and communication channels that can lead to improved collaboration, could produce real benefits for immigrant communities.

The aim of these recommendations—and the information shared about Dubuque’s largest immigrant populations—to help improve communication channels and increase access to information and resources. While this research is not exhaustive, the additional insights may identify potential opportunities for stakeholders and leaders looking to improve relationships between immigrant communities and local institutions. Continuing to learn more about the dynamics of immigrant networks will help the region avoid repeating past mistakes. And by helping immigrant populations better partner with existing service institutions, individuals and organizations can help Dubuque become a more welcoming place.

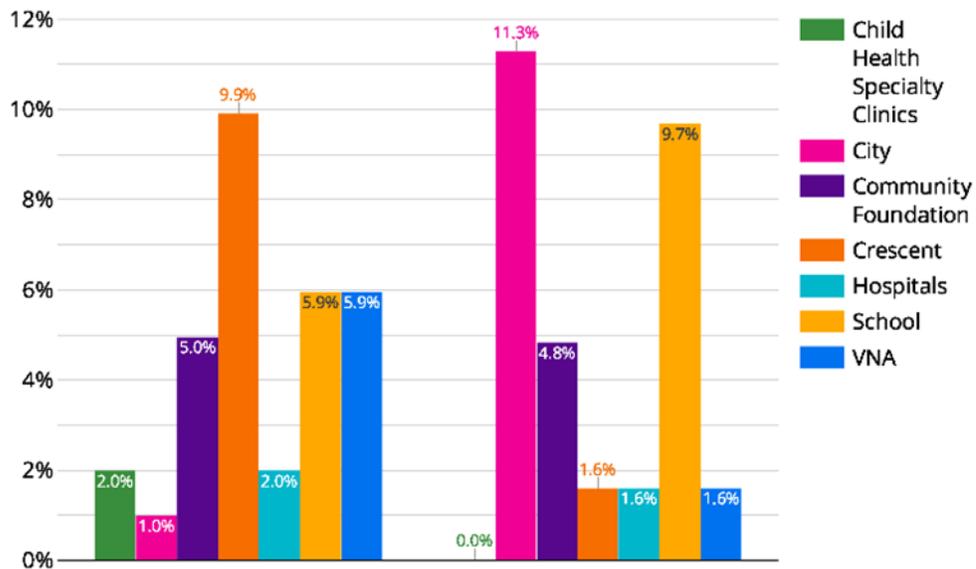
Figures

Figure 1: Connectors and Change Makers Identified by Type of Entity



Note: Services most frequently refer to types of media, such as newspapers or social media.

Figure 2: Dubuque Organizations as Percent of Identified Connectors and Change Makers



Prompts Used as Part of Relationship Mapping Sessions

The following definitions and prompts were used by researchers and provided to interpreters in order to help facilitate the sessions:

Part 1 - Connectors

"Who are the 'Connectors' in your life? These are the sources that connect you to help and information. It can be a person, an organization, or even a thing like Facebook or the newspaper."

Prompts:

- 1) "If something broke that needed to be fixed—a part of your car, a piece of furniture, an appliance—and you didn't know where to go to find someone to fix it, who would you ask? Who would know who you should call?"
- 2) "If you had some kind of trouble—maybe difficulties with your landlord, problems with a hospital bill, or an issue with the police—and you didn't know what to do, who would you ask for help?"
- 3) "Who tells you the news about what is happening locally in Dubuque, in your neighborhood, or in your community? Who is the connector that usually lets you know when something new is happening?"
- 4) "Think now about other people who serve as 'Connectors' in your life. Who or what else might play this role for you?"

Part 2 - Change Makers

"Who are the 'Change Makers' in your life? These are the sources that you go to when there is a problem in your community that you want to see fixed. It can be a person, an organization, or even a thing like Facebook or the newspaper."

Prompts:

- 1) "If there was something new that happened at you or your child's school that you didn't like and you wanted to get it changed, who would you talk to?"
- 2) "If there was a new rule passed in the city that you didn't like—maybe higher fines, a new law about how late a celebration can go in a public park, or regulations that mean your favorite restaurant has to close down—and you wanted to get this rule changed, who would you talk to?"
- 3) "If you had a great idea about how to make your community better—such as fixing a street sign, holding a cultural event, or starting a new City service—and you wanted to make it happen, who would you talk to?"
- 4) "Think now about other people who serve as 'Change Makers' in your life. Who or what else might play this role for you?"