

# LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

A photograph of a man and a woman looking at a document together. The man is on the left, wearing a black and white hoodie, and the woman is on the right, wearing a blue and white striped shirt. They are both looking down at a document on a table. The background is a blurred office or meeting room.

## IMMIGRATION COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

DUBUQUE AND NORTHEAST IOWA

MARCH 2023

Community  
Foundation  
OF GREATER DUBUQUE

# INTRODUCTION

The following pages provide detailed descriptions of the recommendations discussed in the Immigration Community Assessment Implementation Guide. For a description of the methodology, achievements, and key findings of the Community Assessment, please see the Implementation Guide.

This document is broken down into four main sections, each listing the corresponding recommendations identified in the Implementation Guide:

- **Priority Recommendations:** This section includes brief descriptions of ten priority recommendations that key stakeholders should consider implementing.
- **Ongoing Collective Work on Immigration:** This section discusses recommendations for continued strategic work to address larger issues and opportunities related to local immigrant populations (*Recommendations 1.1 through 1.4*).
- **Building Connections with Immigrant Communities:** This section outlines how to improve connections between immigrant communities and local service providers, cultural institutions, and the local population at large. The recommendations are broken down into four subsections:
  - Capacity and Power Building (*Recommendations 2.1.1 through 2.1.5*)
  - Outreach (*Recommendations 2.2.1 through 2.2.6*)
  - Navigators (*Recommendation 2.3.1*)
  - Cultural Events (*Recommendation 2.4.1 through 2.4.4*)
- **Issue and Service Recommendations:** This section discusses some of the primary needs and opportunities related to specific services within the region. The recommendations are broken down into seven subsections:
  - Case Management (*Recommendations 3.1.1 through 3.1.6*)
  - Education and Youth Support (*Recommendations 3.2.1 through 3.2.7*)
  - Health (*Recommendations 3.3.1 through 3.3.4*)
  - Housing (*Recommendation 3.4.1 through 3.4.5*)
  - Legal Assistance (*Recommendations 3.5.1 through 3.5.6*)
  - Translation and Interpretation (*Recommendations 3.6.1 through 3.6.8*)
  - Workforce and Employment (*Recommendations 3.7.1 through 3.7.7*)

Some recommendations are replicated in different sections of this document. This is done to improve navigation for individuals looking for recommendations on a specific topic. A note under each recommendation indicates when it can be found in any other sections of this document.

# PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

This assessment provides over fifty recommendations for the region to consider in regard to the key findings listed above. While each of these recommendations has the potential to benefit the region, local stakeholders will need to decide which to prioritize in order to best address their own communities' needs. To assist with this process, the following list offers ten recommendations that can have large near-term impact for all communities.

## **Recommendation 1.3: Convene a Better Together Committee**

One of the key needs that was identified during this research was the importance of having a coordinated and strategic effort between local stakeholders to address issues affecting immigrant communities on a systemic level. A recommended method of meeting this need is through a Better Together Committee, which is a dedicated group of immigrant leaders, community advocates, service providers, government officials, and other stakeholders, who meet regularly to generate concrete progress on systemic issues impacting local immigrant communities. Issues raised in these meetings are often far-reaching and too difficult for any single organization to tackle, whereas the collective efforts of a Better Together Committee hold the potential to effect real change.

## **Recommendation 2.1.1: Create and Support a Sustainable Immigrant-led Nonprofit Organization**

During this research, community members frequently expressed the need for the development of immigrant-led nonprofit organizations focused on serving and advocating for their communities. Such organizations can help to overcome connection barriers while also providing leadership opportunities for immigrant community members. Potential benefits of immigrant-led nonprofit organizations include immigrant members being paid for serving and advocating for their community, additional resources and decision-making authority being centered within immigrant populations, the creation of visible points of contact for other local organizations looking to engage with immigrant communities, and a more formal and trusted structure through which community members can elevate concerns or needs.

## **Recommendations 2.1.3 and 3.7.2: Adopt a Natural Helper Program**

Natural Helper programs connect key volunteers with local institutions, provide them with training and clear resources for answering questions, and then compensate them for their involvement. These programs have also been found to give many participants a greater sense of belonging within their communities and strengthen their connection to local organizations and service providers. It is also a good way to identify leaders for additional civic participation, such as taking roles on boards or advisory committees. A version of this model is currently being piloted by the Northeast Iowa Community College (NICC), who are compensating individuals to connect community members to job training programs.

### **Recommendations 2.3.1, 3.3.1, and 3.6.2: Hire Additional Navigators**

Understanding and correctly accessing the support systems in the region can be extremely challenging, especially for immigrant families who also struggle with language barriers, unfamiliarity with local systems, and the fear of cultural or societal stigma. Navigators are individuals employed by service providers to help community members access services. The best navigators are trained in the requirements of service systems and come from the communities they serve, meaning they have the language and cultural knowledge to effectively connect with immigrant families. By leveraging trust and relationships within immigrant communities, navigators can help ensure that a greater number of people are able access important services.

### **Recommendations 3.1.1 and 3.1.2: Invest in Additional Case Management Support & "Networks"**

Social service organizations, smaller nonprofits, and local volunteers often play a key role in providing the case management needed to help immigrant families navigate unfamiliar systems and access the services and resources they need. However, the current environment of case management in the region raises several serious issues, such as a lack of training, a risk of burnout, and the potential for predatory behavior. One solution is to invest in case management capacity within the region. This investment could involve hiring additional case managers at local service providers that can work with immigrant communities, as well as better resourcing the small nonprofits that often handle case management tasks. Another option is to link a series of organizations and volunteers into case management "networks." Because these networks connect immigrant families to multiple organizations and individuals, they provide a more robust support system and wider access to knowledge and resources.

### **Recommendation 3.2.2: Establish a Guatemalan Mentorship Program**

The Guatemalan mentor program, previously a partnership between the Dubuque Community School District, NICC, and the Community Foundation, with additional support from Catholic Charities and a private donor, was created in response to the challenges that unaccompanied Guatemalan minors were facing in local schools. A Guatemalan mentor who spoke Ixil (the most commonly spoken dialect in Dubuque) was placed in a local high school to support students. The mentor supported Guatemalan students during class, and served as an important point of connection between the school and the students and their families. Where too often there had been a lack of communication, this mentor elevated challenges, passed along information, and helped create mutual understanding.

### **Recommendation 3.2.3: Create an Expanded Marshallese Student Group**

One of the more successful initiatives in the region aimed at immigrant youth in the past several years is the Pacific Islander Club at Hempstead and Dubuque Senior high schools. Expanding this group, or creating of a similar group open to all students but focused on the priorities of the Marshallese community, would empower immigrant youth to take an active civic role by undertaking projects of their own design and aimed at benefitting their

community. This Marshallese group would partner with local organizations to raise awareness among students about issues that are important to their community, support student involvement in the development of programming around those issues, and supply venues for carrying out that programming. This club could also be leveraged to provide academic support, a way to engage Marshallese youth and other young people around Marshallese culture, and a means for connecting more young people to local organizations.

### **Recommendations 3.3.4 and 3.6.6: Train Community Members in Medical Translation and Interpretation**

One significant gap in the region is the availability of licensed medical interpreters and translators, especially for languages like Marshallese that are not commonly spoken throughout much of the United States. Many health-care providers employ certified medical translators to make sure that they can correctly translate the technical terms used by staff. However, in many instances these interpreters are not available, and so providers rely on untrained community members for interpretation. By offering local immigrants access to medical translation and interpretation classes, and by helping them get certified in this area, the region can improve the quality of health care provided to non-English speakers as well as compensate local community members for providing a valuable service.

### **Recommendation 3.7.1: Provide Employer Toolkits and Assistance**

The region could do more to equip local employers with the skills and resources to successfully hire and retain immigrant employees, thus creating an additional barrier for immigrant residents seeking high-quality job opportunities. There have been several recent instances where local employers made efforts to hire from immigrant communities, only to struggle with retention of those employees. Employer expectations often do not align with the realities of life for immigrant community members. To assist employers with hiring and retaining members from immigrant communities—and to ensure that immigrant employees are able to thrive and succeed professionally—the Dubuque region should develop toolkits and/or a consulting capacity to help businesses improve their systems, institute new policies and practices, and gain connections to local immigrant populations.

### **Recommendations 2.4.3, 3.2.7, and 3.7.7: Engage International College Students and Provide Workforce Support to International Students**

Dubuque's higher education institutions are a major asset for the region, and their international students are an important and valuable part of the community. However, there are a number of barriers that limit the ability of international students to build long-term careers in Dubuque, including insufficient support for navigating legal requirements and a lack of connection to larger regional life and culture. The region should work to help retain international students by establishing a local resource to help students and businesses build connections and navigate the legal requirements for continued employment. Arts and culture organizations should also conduct targeted outreach to international students in order to help build a connection to the larger Dubuque community.

# ONGOING COLLECTIVE WORK ON IMMIGRATION

## **1.1 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 an Better Together Committee* [on page 7](#)). 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.<sup>1</sup> A similar annual summit, though perhaps on a smaller scale, could be adopted by rural communities.

## **1.2 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 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, 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 be in charge of reviewing content and blocking information that could be problematic. Ideally this position would be held within an organization in order 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.

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<sup>1</sup> "1<sup>st</sup> 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/>.

- 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/>

### **1.3 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 Project 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 6](#)). 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 the 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 child care 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 make an effort 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 in order 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 facilitator for the committee is a funded position with organizational support, the risk of the collective effort failing or losing traction will be reduced.

## **1.4 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 Better Together 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 Better Together Committee (see *Convene a Better Together Committee* [on page 7](#)). 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 6](#)).

# BUILDING CONNECTIONS WITH IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES

## Capacity and Power Building

### **2.1.1 Create and Support a Sustainable Immigrant-Led Nonprofit Organization**

One important way of building capacity within immigrant communities is to support the creation or development of an immigrant-led nonprofit organization focused on serving and advocating for immigrant communities. This would allow immigrant community members to be paid to serve their community (instead of only doing it as volunteers), would create an official point of contact for local organizations looking to engage with immigrant communities, would place resources and decision-making authority within immigrant communities, and would develop a more formal structure for community members to be able to elevate concerns or needs. Such an organization would greatly help in overcoming connection barriers while also providing leadership opportunities for immigrants. This was also a need that was frequently identified by immigrant community members during interviews and focus group sessions.

Such an organization would also serve a different role than immigrant staff within other service providers (see Navigation section), or organizations led by non-immigrants who advocate for and support immigrants (see Outreach section). Both of these assets are crucial for immigrant communities to be able to thrive within this region, and they have done much of the heavy lifting in recent years. But navigators are limited in their ability to make choices about the allocation of resources and are constrained by the decisions of their organizations. And organizations not centered in immigrant communities may struggle to truly understand and advocate for community needs, and may face cultural, linguistic, and trust-based challenges. An immigrant-led nonprofit would help fill a gap that exists within the current framework of service organizations.

But creating an immigrant-led nonprofit organization also raises several questions. The first of which is whether to have an organization supporting just one immigrant population (such as a Marshallese-led organization that advocates for Pacific Islanders), or a pan-immigrant organization that seeks to address the needs of multiple populations. Throughout interviews and focus group meetings, immigrant community members have been divided on this answer, with some wanting to create as inclusive an organization as possible, and others interested in working to build support and advocacy for just their community. Both options have strengths and drawbacks, and identifying which option is the best will depend on the local situation and the circumstances around its creation. For groups looking to launch an organization, it will be important to consider:

- Who are the leaders within immigrant communities who are helping drive the creation of this nonprofit, and what are their interests?
- What funding is available, and what type of program is it best suited to support?
- What assets are available to help with the creation of the program?
- What is the makeup of the immigrant populations in the area, and what kind of connections exist among different immigrant communities?
- Which option are immigrant community members most interested in launching?

Generally speaking, it will likely be organizations focused on the needs of a specific immigrant community that are the most likely to be created and will see the most buy-in from within immigrant communities. For a potential pan-immigrant organization option, please see *Immigrant Center* on the next page.

There are also organizations already in existence within this region that could be expanded to help fill this need. This expansion would have the advantage of not needing to develop an entirely new entity from the ground up. Three potential options within Dubuque include:

1. Latino Empowerment and Development (LEAD): This nonprofit helps connect Latino residents with educational resources, food, personal protective equipment, and other necessities. It is currently run entirely by volunteers and has a minimal budget.
2. Monsoon Asians & Pacific Islanders in Solidary: This statewide nonprofit serves victims/survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking in Asian and Pacific Islander communities. Within the past several years Monsoon opened a Dubuque office staffed by local Pacific Islander community members. Monsoon's mission is important and should be a focus on their work, but there is the possibility that with support from the community they could expand to help incorporate other services and additional advocacy.
3. Multicultural Family Center (MFC): The MFC serves as a welcoming and safe place for Dubuque families, focusing on building unity and success through diversity, equity, and inclusion. The MFC's director, Umaru Balde, is an immigrant fluent in ten languages and dialects. The breadth of the MFC's mission and its position as part of the City of Dubuque may make it difficult to meet all of the priorities expressed by immigrant communities for this research, but its current work does help fill part of this role, and there is the potential for further expansion of programming and representation.

Whether through the creation of a new organization or the expansion of an existing one, any immigrant-led nonprofit will need:

- Long-term financial and political support from the community;
- A clear understanding of the organization's purpose and mission; and
- Support from a wide cross-section of its immigrant population (not only having support from one parish, etc.).

## Models to Consider:

- Monsoon: In the short amount of time Monsoon has had an office in Dubuque, their impact has grown significantly. They have become an effective bridge between the Pacific Islander community and other local service providers, and have become involved in a variety of programming like hosting cultural events and supporting literacy for Marshallese youth. Monsoon's trajectory and development could be a valuable model to consider for creating other immigrant-led organizations.
  - <https://monsooniowa.org/>
- The Ethnic Minorities of Burma Advocacy and Resource Center (EMBARC): Iowa's first and only refugee-led service provider, EMBARC's ultimate goal is to create opportunities for all refugees in Iowa by removing barriers and fostering equity and inclusion.
  - <https://www.embarciowa.org/>

### **2.1.2 Establish an Immigrant Center**

A potential avenue for creating an immigrant-led nonprofit organization would be the development of an Immigrant Center, such as the [Clarkston Community Center](#) (see models to consider). This organization would serve as a central meeting area and service center for immigrant populations, offering translation, services, support, and potentially even recreational opportunities. It could also serve as an important communal space for immigrant groups (see Recommendation 2.1.4 *Establish Communal Spaces* in this section). This nonprofit organization, run and staffed by immigrants, would provide many of the advocacy and connection services discussed above, while also serving as a key access point for resources. Recreational and technology facilities – such as soccer fields, basketball courts, computer labs, a convention hall, etc. – could help create a positive and safe space for immigrants to congregate, building trust and familiarity that could help increase the effectiveness of service delivery.

This recommendation has the downside of requiring a significant investment in terms of the building and grounds for the Center. Being able to create a facility that can be used as a gathering place and access point for services and delivery will require space, money, and time. If grant funding (such as through federal infrastructure funds or other opportunities focused on construction or refurbishment of spaces) could be utilized, that would make this option much more feasible. Even with such grants, this recommendation may require a larger amount of financial support to cover the facilities and the cost of staff to run the site.

There are existing organizations within Dubuque that already play some of this role and could see their capacity expanded to address some of these elements. Two prominent examples are:

- The Presentation Lantern Center: The Lantern Center serves as an immigrant welcome center, and provides advocacy, English tutoring, and additional support for immigrants.



- Multicultural Family Center (MFC): The MFC supports families from diverse cultures and backgrounds, and especially has programming for youth. The MFC also has a large indoor space that can be used for events. The current director of the MFC, Umaru Balde, is himself an immigrant and speaks more than ten languages.

Neither of these organizations have stated the desire to try to take on the role of an immigrant center with their current resources, and both would need significant additional investment in order to do so.

Models to Consider:

- Clarkston Community Center: Clarkston, outside of Atlanta Georgia, has been one of the leading refugee resettlement communities in the U.S., with 43% of its residents being foreign-born. The Clarkston Community Center caters to these individuals, offering event space and a variety of refugee related programs.
  - <https://clarkstoncommunitycenter.org/>
- Immigrant Welcome Center: The Immigrant Welcome Center in Indianapolis, Indiana, provides programming for immigrants and refugees, partner organizations, and the larger community. The Immigrant Welcome Center also runs a Natural Helper Program (see *Natural Helper Program* below).
  - <https://www.immigrantwelcomecenter.org/>
- Sudanese Community Center: The Sudanese Community Center in Iowa City provides services related to education, job searching, culture, sports, and other community-focused issues for the local Sudanese population.
  - <https://www.sudanesecommunitycenter2000.org/index.html>

### **2.1.3 Adopt a Natural Helper Program**

*This recommendation also appears as Recommendation 3.7.2 under Workforce and Employment*

One of the key assets located in this region’s immigrant communities are dedicated volunteers. Many of the key leaders, connectors, and translators working to support immigrant communities are volunteers who put in long hours to help improve their communities. They are often trusted both by community members and local nonprofit organizations, and serve as a key point of outreach and input. These volunteers should be acknowledged and celebrated for their work.

Yet such reliance on volunteers is not ideal. Rarely are they compensated for their efforts, which means that they often work other jobs to support themselves, leaving limited time to help other community members, attend meetings, etc. Many are also untrained regarding the systems and institutions they are connecting to and may lack information about how best to efficiently direct other immigrants to services. These factors create bottlenecks around connections between immigrant communities and service organizations and increase the likelihood of misinformation and navigational challenges.

One program that has been successful in helping address some of these issues is a “Natural Helper” program. In a Natural Helper program, key volunteers (who are usually multilingual) are trained on local systems and services and are often provided with greater access to local resources and important connections. They are also compensated for their participation in this program, which might include stipends, recognition, and certificates or credentials from local educational institutions that can be valuable for their careers. The volunteers then agree to remain a part of the program for a period of time (often at least a year) after receiving their training.

Natural Helper programs connect key volunteers with local institutions, provide them with training and clear resources for answering questions, and then work to compensate them for their involvement. These programs have also been found to give many participants a greater sense of belonging to where they live and a sense of connection to local organizations and service providers. It is also a good way to identify leaders for additional civic participation, such as taking roles on boards or advisory committees.

Establishing and resourcing a natural helper program can provide a more formal structure to the frequent work done through immigrant volunteer leaders and can improve the services provided through those leaders. It also helps recognize and compensate dedicated volunteers, which can increase their satisfaction and participation and encourage others to step into leadership roles.

Natural helpers could be particularly beneficial for connecting immigrants to workforce opportunities, as demonstrated by a new local pilot program (see “Models to consider”).

Models to consider:

- Northeast Iowa Community College (NICC) is currently developing a pilot program aimed at training and compensating individuals from underserved populations so that they can connect members of their community with job training opportunities. This includes working with members of immigrant populations. The NICC pilot program, which is still in development, goes beyond many other models listed in this report by providing stipends for trainings and financial incentives for each individual who is successfully connected to an NICC program. The combination of empowering individuals to serve their community and compensating them for their time and effort is an exciting design that should be supported by the community.
- City of Portland, ME - Office of Economic Opportunity: The City of Portland runs a Natural Helpers Leadership Program that trains Natural Helpers to better support their communities. The program provides participants with a stipend, and partners with the University of Southern Maine to provide everyone with a credential (previously a certificate, now a “badge”).
  - <https://www.portlandofopportunity.com/natural-helpers>
- Immigrant Welcome Center: The Immigrant Welcome Center in Indianapolis utilizes a Natural Helper program.
  - <https://www.immigrantwelcomecenter.org/get-involved/volunteer/>

- Welcoming America Community of Practice: Welcoming America has previously launched a community of practice to provide additional support to communities developing Natural Helper programs.
  - [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1CyeetO8scAunaLQCpm0bCebgN2lnPLWPSwuF\\_NjDwYl/edit#](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1CyeetO8scAunaLQCpm0bCebgN2lnPLWPSwuF_NjDwYl/edit#)

### **2.1.4 Establish Communal Spaces**

Repeatedly during discussions with local immigrant members (and especially Marshallese individuals), respondents raised a desire for a communal space for their community. Physical gathering space can be a very valuable tool for building a sense of community, for celebrating culture, and for having an easily identifiable space for holding meetings or learning about services. Parks and churches have served this purpose within the region, but the former are outdoors and may not be amenable to meetings, and the latter can be exclusionary, especially if a community has multiple faiths and churches. For example, many Marshallese community members stated they would not feel comfortable attending a meeting or workshop located in a Marshallese church to which they did not belong.

Immigrant communities have used local spaces for celebrations and meetings, such as restaurants, convention spaces, meeting halls, and nonprofit meeting spaces (including at the Community Foundation). However, many community members do not feel a sense of ownership over these spaces, and there may be a lack of comfort or familiarity with those locations. This has repeatedly led to questions about where to hold trainings, information sessions, and important meetings. Utilizing an unfamiliar or untrusted space may result in lower attendance and challenges in establishing follow-up meetings.

Identifying easily accessible, safe, and inexpensive indoor spaces that immigrant communities can regularly utilize could produce valuable benefits. If the space were accessible to multiple immigrant communities, that could also have the advantage of helping improve service provision and building connections between immigrant communities. If the space could also be used for celebrations, sporting events, and more informal gatherings, it could also be a valuable way of attracting younger immigrants to participate in programming. One of the challenges sited in the past for the Pacific Islander Club at Dubuque's Hempstead and Senior High Schools was the lack of space for meeting outside of the schools, especially a space that was attractive to the students (meaning that had basketball and volleyball courts).

Building or purchasing a collective space could be an option, but would require resources, and may be most practical in combination with something like an immigrant center described under Recommendation 2.1.2 *Establish an Immigrant Center* [on page 15](#). A less resource intensive option would be if there was a local organization that was interested in utilizing their facilities as a communal space for immigrant communities. Being able to do this successfully would require significant work and dedication on behalf of the organization – simply saying “immigrants are welcome here,” is not sufficient. Some steps to consider are:

- Holding frequent and recurring events for immigrant populations. Often in order to build trust and familiarity with an immigrant community, it is important to establish consistency and a commitment to a long-term arrangement. It may take many months of holding an event or a meeting before a significant number of people become comfortable with the meeting and begin to attend.
- The organization may want to invite members of immigrant communities to help decorate the space to make it feel more comfortable, but to also help establish a feeling of ownership and welcome.
- Transportation (and parking) may be a consistent challenge, especially if the space is not located near residential areas that are frequented by immigrant groups.
- If the organization is for-profit or if the space requires a fee, raising funds to help offset the costs may be an important step the community can take.

Models to consider:

- Clarkston Community Center: The event space at the Clarkston Community Center, which is focused on serving largely refugee and immigrant populations, allows for a consistent space for weddings and celebrations along with informational meetings and service provision.
  - <https://clarkstoncommunitycenter.org/rental/>
- Pacific Islander Health Project Community Education Classes: The Community Education Classes put on by Crescent’s Pacific Islander Health Project present a good model for how organizations can build trust and a relationship with an immigrant community. At first, attendance of the classes was limited. But by conducting the classes consistently every month in the same space, word soon spread that these were valuable and reliable classes that community members could depend on being available, and participation increased significantly.

### **2.1.5 Support Community Organizing**

Increasing the ability of immigrants to advocate for their own needs is an important part of building immigrant capacity and power. During focus groups and interviews, many immigrants expressed frustration that they did not feel like they had a voice in local decision making. While creating more opportunities for input is an important part of addressing this issue, improving the capacity of local immigrant communities to organize and advocate for their needs is also critical. Developing the tools for successful advocacy is not always an easy process.

Community organizing can be one effective means of helping improve advocacy within immigrant populations. By engaging with communities and helping create democratic systems for collaboration around important issues, those communities can gain a greater ability to influence local public policy. However, community organizing has not recently been a common practice within the region, and there are not many organizations currently focused on it, especially not with immigrant communities.

By funding and providing training to immigrants on advocacy techniques like community organizing, there may be a potential to build capacity within immigrant populations to more fully engage with local decision making. This, combined with additional opportunities for input, can enable immigrant communities to more consistently address issues that are important for their populations.

Models to consider:

- CASA: As part of its work supporting and advocating for immigrant families, CASA carries out community organizing programming aimed at developing collective leadership to advocate for immigrant needs.
  - <https://wearecasa.org/program/community-organizing/>
- Iowa Migrant Movement for Justice: Within Iowa, the Iowa Migrant Movement for Justice (which recently formed from the combination of two organizations: American Friends Service Committee Iowa and Iowa Justice for Our Neighbors) carries out community organizing to do advocacy at the state and local level.
  - <https://www.iowammj.org/>

## Outreach

### **2.2.1 Diversify Outreach Efforts**

One important idea to consider when conducting outreach to immigrant communities is to intentionally diversify the number of community connectors that are used for outreach. It is valuable to intentionally build multiple contacts within an immigrant community and to regularly maintain communications with each individual. There are several reasons for this:

- Immigrant populations are usually not monolithic, and community leaders may not represent the entire community. An example of this is Dubuque's Marshallese community, which has seven different Marshallese churches. Sometimes communications or services conducted through leaders in one church would not reach all of the congregations in the community. This has the potential to reinforce feelings of resentment and division within an immigrant population. It is important to understand what these divisions might be, and work to build relationships with different groups within a community.
- Reliance on only one community connector can create key person risk, where if anything happens that makes that person unable to effectively serve as a connector, it could significantly hinder communication with the population as a whole.
- Providing information through multiple sources reduces the amount of work any one connector needs to do. This is important when working primarily with volunteers, as volunteer burnout can be a significant issue.

Models to consider:

- Mapping Research: The networks and connections of three of Dubuque's larger immigrant communities - the Marshallese, Latino, and Guatemalan Mayan populations - are discussed in more detail in a mapping report conducted by the Community Foundation that is included under *Appendix A* of the Immigration Community Assessment Implementation Guide.

### **2.2.2 Provide Translated Materials and Interpretation Services**

Translating documents into locally spoken languages can be one of the most effective ways of improving outreach to immigrant communities. Translated documents are not only easier to read for individuals for whom English is a second language or not spoken at all, but it also shows a desire to engage with immigrant communities and to invest resources into relationship building. Translated signs and documents can create a more welcoming environment for immigrant communities and building additional trust. Interpretation can also be important for meetings that immigrants attend. It is important when conducting outreach to immigrant groups to have a reliable interpreter arranged beforehand.

Whenever possible, organizations and service providers should also compensate translators and interpreters, and not solely rely on volunteer services. The ability to speak multiple languages is a valuable skill, and local community members should be fairly compensated for the service that is provided.

For more information on recommendations related to translation and interpretation, see the *Translation and Interpretation* section [on page 64](#).

### **2.2.3 Locate Connectors in Residential Areas with a High Concentration of Immigrants**

An underappreciated barrier creating disconnect between immigrant populations and the larger community is geographic separation. Immigrant families in this region usually live in different areas than service providers, who may not be based in residential districts. Because transportation is an issue for many immigrants, and because trust is frequently developed through regular interaction instead of understanding and being confident in systems of support, this geographic separation can prevent immigrants from accessing services.

Decentralizing access by locating connectors to services within neighborhoods where immigrants live can be a way to address some of these issues. By establishing a connector or service provider within a residential community or frequently trafficked area, making it feel welcoming, and staffing it with someone from the neighborhood who knows and is known by the community, service providers can avoid transportation challenges and increase trust. If these individuals have cultural knowledge and language skills relevant to local immigrant groups, it will only further improve connections with immigrant communities.

### **2.2.4 Include Immigrant Support Organizations in Regular Meetings**

Coordination among service providers can be a valuable tool for increasing outreach to immigrant communities. There are many organizations that engage regularly with immigrant communities and can provide valuable insights and connections for collaborative efforts. While these organizations are limited, and therefore will not be able to attend every meeting, their experience and relationships can be a valuable addition to ongoing discussions.

### **2.2.5 Use Best Practices for Including Immigrant Community Members in Meetings**

One of the most effective ways to connect with immigrant communities and to gain input into collective decision making is to invite immigrant leaders and community members to meetings and discussions. However, sending out invitations is not always enough to facilitate successful participation. Meetings designed for government officials, nonprofit staff, or business leaders may not be conducive to immigrant participation. In addition, it is important to recognize the power dynamics that may be present in your meeting and that may limit communication. Inviting an immigrant community member to join a meeting with the chief of police or the CEO of a major company may create a dynamic where that community member is unable to freely express themselves. While this situation is not always avoidable, recognizing it and taking steps to mitigate any issues will serve to better promote immigrant participation.

Below is a list of some best practices that may be valuable for facilitating immigrant participation in meetings or activities:

- **Provide Translation/Interpretation:** Providing translation and interpretation services will enable the participation of immigrants that do not speak English as their primary language.
- **Make the meeting action focused:** Many immigrant community members (especially those that are volunteers and are not attending as part of their job) are more likely to come if the meeting is focused on the development of programming, instead of only sharing information.
- **Connect the meeting to another desirable service:** Combining a meeting or information session with another service that immigrant community members are interested in can help increase attendance. If immigrants are already planning to participate in a nutrition class, a legal clinic, or a church service, holding the meeting in combination with this existing event will be more convenient and increase participation.
- **Include follow up:** Outreach to immigrant individuals should continue even after they attend their first meeting. Demonstrating that a meeting will be held consistently by regularly reaching out to that person about future meetings can be important for building trust, and therefore sustained participation.

- **Invite immigrant-facing social service providers to attend, and ask for their help:** Organizations that work closely with immigrants have important connections, cultural knowledge, and established trust with immigrant communities. Their partnership in hosting meetings can make those meetings much more effective.
- **Make someone from that community a facilitator:** Asking a member of the immigrant community to facilitate the meeting can make other immigrants more comfortable while also addressing language and cultural knowledge concerns. Doing this will require first building trust with that facilitator, as well as making sure that they feel trained and supported in their efforts.
- **Utilize flexible times and locations:** Meetings that work best for staff at service providers may not be the most convenient for immigrant community members. Holding meetings after work hours or on the weekends and at more convenient locations will allow greater immigrant participation.
- **Use “hybrid” meetings:** Including both teleconferencing and in-person meetings can allow for the greatest amount of immigrant participation. While some community members may have limited access to the internet, others who face transportation or child care may only be able to attend if the meetings have an online option.
- **Provide compensation and food:** An immigrant individual’s time is valuable, and if they are being asked to attend a meeting, compensating them for their involvement can be important. This could involve a stipend, but even providing a meal can build trust and make immigrants much more able to participate.
- **Provide child care:** Providing child care at the premises, or making the meeting family friendly, can be important for allowing many immigrants to participate in meetings.
- **Visualization tools:** For individuals for whom English is not their primary language, prioritizing the use of images and icons over written words can help facilitate more participation. Tools such as graphic facilitation can be effective at helping engage immigrant audiences.
- **Breakout groups, more informal setups:** Large and formal meetings can discourage some immigrant community members from voicing opinions and concerns. Utilizing breakout groups, smaller discussions, and seating arrangements where participants sit face-to-face or around tables can create a more welcoming environment for some community members.

### **2.2.6 Take a 2Gen Approach**

One effective way of conducting outreach to immigrant families is by engaging multiple generations of those families at the same time. Two-generation (2Gen) programming does not focus exclusively on children or adults but considers the family as a whole in order to utilize a more holistic approach. Engaging immigrant families can be a valuable technique for several reasons, including:

- Some immigrant families live in multigenerational households and frequently involve multiple generations in decision making;



- It builds connections to social services for multiple individuals at the same time, instead of requiring different interactions or multiple appointments; and
- It enables the leveraging of diverse skills within the family, such as linguistic or cultural knowledge.

Models to Consider:

- The Aspen Institute compiled a series of reports and webinars investigating the use of 2Gen practices with immigrant and refugee families. The series covered four main topic areas: cultural competency, growing language skills, working with immigrants of different legal status, and building trust with families.
  - <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/programs/community-strategies-group/family-economic-success/2gi/>

## Navigators

### **2.3.1 Hire Additional Navigators**

*This recommendation also appears as Recommendation 3.3.1 under Health and 3.6.2 under Translation and Interpretation*

One of the most imposing barriers facing residents of this 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.

The addition of navigators can be a major benefit for helping resolve these issues. Navigators are individuals employed or utilized by service providers to help assist community members with accessing services. The best navigators are those that are both trained in the requirements of service systems and 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. 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.

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<sup>2</sup> See the following link for an article discussing some of the challenges of navigating government support services: Lowrey, Annie. "The Time Tax." *The Atlantic*. 27 July 2021. Available at: <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/>

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, also have staff that, while not navigators, may 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* in the Implementation Guide). 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.

However, while hiring navigators is an undoubtedly powerful tool for helping improve access to services for immigrant populations, it should not be seen as a substitute for capacity and power building. Navigators can serve an important role, but still 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 this region work, and navigation plays a critical role in helping to provide equitable access to systems. But it should still not be seen as a replacement for advocacy and power building within immigrant communities.

The role of navigators is especially important in healthcare. Health services can be an intimidating experience, especially if there are language and cultural barriers. Misinformation about medical issues can be common, especially during a health crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic. Understanding what information is correct or how to best engage with complex systems like insurance or medical billing can be very difficult for community leaders and volunteers that are supporting immigrant families. Having a trusted individual who is knowledgeable about health-care systems and paid to assist members of their local community can be a huge asset. Health-care providers and related organizations should consider creating more navigator positions staffed by members from immigrant communities, such as community health workers or community connectors.

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 Recommendation 2.1.3 [on page 16](#).

## **Cultural Events**

### **2.4.1 Support Immigrant Cultural Events**

One of the most direct methods for developing cultural connections between communities is through supporting immigrant cultural events. These events allow the wider public to gain a better understanding and appreciation for different cultures, creating a greater sense of

empathy and knowledge regarding immigrant populations. Cultural events can also be an empowering experience for immigrant communities. And hosting a larger number of immigrant celebrations and performances creates a greater diversity of events in the community, making this region richer and increasing the number of available experiences for residents. Helping support, organize, market, and fund immigrant cultural events can be beneficial for creating greater cultural connection.

Welcoming America has created a [field scan](#) of different art and cultural events used to support immigrant cultures. The report identified four key strategies:

1. Bridging newcomers and longer-term populations
2. Elevating cultural traditions as assets
3. Engaging newcomers and other allies in civic processes
4. Co-creating spaces that reflect identity

Each of these strategies, when conducted in partnership with members of immigrant communities, can be valuable ways for arts and culture organizations to support immigrant populations.<sup>3</sup>

A number of examples exist at the local level of support for immigrant cultural events. These include, but are not limited to: the support of Marshallese Independence Day each year in Dubuque, the Marshallese boat exhibit at the National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium, the annual Latinx festival in Dubuque, a planned Cascade Latino Welcoming Event, and other programs that are hosted in the region.

#### **2.4.2 Develop Relationships with Immigrant Communities**

One of the primary challenges identified by arts and culture organizations is the difficulty in establishing deep relationships with immigrant communities. This lack of connection can severely hamper any ability to develop new cultural programming or invite increased immigrant participation. For arts and culture organizations looking to build relationships with immigrant communities, here are some recommended best practices that may enable improved outreach:

- **Repeated Engagement:** Building trust is critical for developing new relationships, and one of the best ways to do this with immigrant populations is through repeated contact. This not only builds familiarity, but also demonstrates that the organization is interested in providing ongoing support and a longer-term engagement. Any organization looking to conduct outreach should plan on multiple meetings and repeated conversations on a consistent schedule. With limited resources and capacity

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<sup>3</sup> Arroyo, John C. "Bridging Divides, Creating Community: Arts, Culture, and Immigration." *ArtPlace America*, LLC and *Welcoming America*. 2020. Available at: [https://welcomingamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/artplacefieldscan-artsandculturestrategiesforimmigration\\_final\\_10\\_05\\_20\\_singlepages.pdf](https://welcomingamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/artplacefieldscan-artsandculturestrategiesforimmigration_final_10_05_20_singlepages.pdf)

for local organizations, this is often a much more difficult proposition than it may first appear. Organizations should be aware of this before planning outreach.

- The Creatives Café hosted by the City of Dubuque (where arts and culture organizations regularly set up space to engage with diverse artists from across the city) is a good example of a repeated engagement that is looking to establish long-term relationships with diverse communities.
- **Leverage Partnerships:** Developing partnerships with immigrant serving organizations and groups can be an effective way for arts and culture organizations to begin building contacts and relationships of their own. In addition, partnering with other arts and culture organizations can be a tool for reducing the difficulty of building long-term connections with immigrant communities. If arts and culture organizations are looking to set up repeated and consistent events with an immigrant community, sharing funding, scheduling, and engagement responsibilities among several organizations can help make this a more feasible prospect.
- **Meet Immigrant Communities Where They Are:** There are generally a number of barriers that might keep members of immigrant communities from attending events or meetings that help build relationships. Helping to reduce these barriers can make meetings much more accessible. Considerations include:
  - Holding meetings in locations that are familiar to immigrant communities or that are located near where they live. Inviting immigrants to travel to a downtown office location may generate only a limited response. If it is necessary to choose a space further away from residential areas, providing transportation can be helpful.
  - Choose times that are more feasible for immigrant community members. Evening sessions or weekend sessions are often better alternatives for people who may not be able to take time off between 9:00 and 5:00. Additional services like child care can also help families attend.
  - Food is an important element of many cultures and is often included by many immigrant populations as a part of gatherings. Providing food, especially culturally appropriate food, can be a valuable way to get people to come and to make people feel welcome.
  - Providing translation can create a more inclusive environment and can increase the number of community members who are able to engage in the event.
- **Provide Something of Value:** While many immigrants may be interested in engaging with arts and culture organizations, for some it will be difficult to take time off from a busy schedule unless they see an immediate benefit in the meeting. Some successful examples of how organizations can provide this value include centering the meeting around a topic that immigrant community members want to see moved forward (such as how to help immigrant youth engage with cultural traditions) or partnering with other organizations offering desired services (such as legal assistance or connections to job opportunities).

### **2.4.3 Engage International Students**

*This recommendation also appears as Recommendation 3.2.7 under Education and Youth Support*

In addition to a general support for immigrant cultural events, arts and culture organizations also have opportunities for targeted outreach to specific communities. Interviews and discussions during the Community Assessment point to international college students as one of the key groups on which organizations should focus. International students are often eager to engage with new cultural offerings, but their unfamiliarity with their new home and barriers like expense and transportation can often keep them from seeking out local opportunities. The region would benefit from this population developing closer ties with local arts and culture organizations. Helping attract and retain talented international students and convincing them to make this region their long-term home will significantly benefit the local economy, culture, and community.

Outreach to this population should involve partnership between arts and culture organizations and local higher education institutions, with a specific focus on connecting to international students (or at least students who are new to Dubuque). Making the opportunities easily accessible and highly visible will be important for students who are trying to adjust to a new home. In addition, reducing barriers like transportation or the cost of attendance and arranging events at times that are the most convenient for students will be important for making programming successful. Doing this could lead to great long-term benefits as international students build a relationship with the local community.

### **2.4.4 Support Youth Programming**

Arts and culture organizations can also play a major role in supporting programming for immigrant youth. These can be great opportunities to engage with young people, develop future connections, and help meet the priorities of immigrant populations, namely helping young individuals retain immigrant traditions and culture and helping build connections between immigrants and individuals from the wider community. Local school districts, the Multicultural Family Center, the Presentation Lantern Center, and other immigrant-focused organizations have connections with immigrant children that could be leveraged for additional programming.

For a description of a potential educational program that could partner with arts and culture organizations, please see *Create an Expanded Marshallese Student Group* [on page 36](#).

# ISSUES FACING IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES

## Case Management

### **3.1.1 Fund Additional Case Management Support**

One of the most straightforward solutions is to provide funding to build professional case management capacity within the region. If there is a greater paid, trained, professional workforce helping support immigrant families in accessing services, it will lead to better outcomes for immigrant families while helping alleviate many of the problems discussed above. This can be accomplished by expanding existing case management capacity within local organizations, creating new case management positions focused on immigrants at established providers, and increasing the funding provided to smaller nonprofit organizations that are currently conducting case management for immigrant families.

Being able to create a well-funded professional system that is able to provide case management for all new immigrants to a community would take a significant amount of resources and likely a major shift in mindset within the region. While this is a worthy goal and would result in major benefits for immigrant populations and the community as a whole, this may be difficult to achieve in the near term. However, any increase in the capacity for professional case management would have a positive impact on immigrant communities.

### **3.1.2 Build Case Management “Networks”**

Many of the major challenges that are listed in the introduction to this section can become most apparent when there is a single person responsible for case management. A potential solution involves an immigrant family being supported by a “network” of individuals and organizations working together. This concept is designed to make sure that immigrants who may need more case management support (recently arriving families, unaccompanied minors, linguistically or culturally isolated families, etc.) would become connected with four to five individuals and organizations that would help with case management. This network would communicate with each other, relay knowledge and information, and share responsibility for supporting the individual. Members of the network could also work collectively on necessary case management tasks, like helping with transportation.

There are several reasons for using a small network to help conduct case management. Having multiple contacts for an immigrant family builds in redundancy, helping reduce the dependency the family may have on any one individual. It also may reduce burnout and allow for access to a wider range of knowledge and connections, as a greater number of

individuals are involved in support. And it creates a more formal mechanisms for local stakeholders to provide volunteers with training and resources.

While there are a number of different models that could be used or adapted for this type of network, there are several important considerations that should be highlighted for creating this type of program:

- While many of the models listed below only use individual volunteers as part of the network, there are advantages to networks containing both volunteers and staff from local organizations. For example, staff could leverage formal training and institutional support, while volunteers may have greater flexibility outside of work hours.
- Having a local organization coordinate these groups could be very beneficial and would help with organizing volunteers and providing long-term stability. A coordinating organization could also provide volunteers with training, resources, referrals, and other important supports.
  - Some funding would likely be necessary for a host organization to coordinate case management networks.
- Being able to run background checks on volunteers can help make sure that volunteers are well-suited to the role, especially if they are helping provide case management for children. This could be a role played by a coordinating organization. See the next recommendation (*Background Checks*) for additional information.
- Incorporating individuals from within the immigrant population should also be a priority, as it leverages the skills and relationships of that individual for case management efforts. At the same time, including that individual as part of a larger support network will help with burden sharing and build greater connections for that immigrant volunteer within the larger community.

Models to consider:

- The Sponsor Circles program is used to help with the resettlement of Afghan and Ukrainian refugees in the United States by having groups of people sponsor those refugee families and provide them with support and some case management services. A similar system could be used for non-refugees.
  - <https://www.sponsorcircles.org/>
- The Capital Area New Mainers Project connects 3-4 local volunteers to serve as a Family Mentor Team in support of new immigrant families. Family Mentor Teams go through background checks and some training, with helping with transportation being a big part of their responsibility.
  - <https://www.newmainersproject.org/>
- The Dubuque Circles Initiative was a program that connected a group of volunteer allies with a low-income individual in order to provide support and help break the cycle of poverty. The program was run by the City of Dubuque but eventually ended. Elements of the program could be adjusted to help serve immigrant families. While the Dubuque Circles Initiative is no longer in operation, a related program focused on poverty is Circles USA.
  - <https://www.circlesusa.org/>

### **3.1.3 Facilitate Background Checks**

An unfortunate but real risk when talking about volunteers working from a position of power and authority with immigrants, and especially immigrant children, is the potential for predatory behavior. Criminal background checks can be a valuable tool for helping to limit this risk. Organizations that utilize volunteers in situations where they may have unsupervised access to immigrants, and especially children, should consider conducting background checks to help reduce risk. Examples include volunteers who provide case management, mentoring or educational tutoring, and transportation.

However, background checks also cost money and require staff time to gather the volunteer information and carry out a check. For smaller organizations with limited time and budgets who are desperate for more volunteers, requiring background checks may be a major difficulty. Communities should consider creating a funded resource, perhaps located at a government office or larger nonprofit organization, that smaller organizations could access to help run background checks on volunteers. Making this service centrally located and free to use would greatly reduce the barrier to running background checks.

### **3.1.4 Build Capacity in Immigrant Communities**

One effective way to improve case management is by creating additional resources and capacity within immigrant communities that can help support newly arrived immigrants. Through building capacity within immigrant populations, individuals and organizations with existing relationships and language/cultural skills can be equipped to help other members of their community navigate local systems. The following are a list of interventions described elsewhere in this report that could be relevant for improving case management:

- Support the creation or expansion of immigrant-led nonprofits to allow them to take on more case management work (see *Immigrant-led Nonprofit Organization* [on page 13](#)).
- Create an Immigrant Center that could provide additional support to new immigrant families (see *Immigrant Center* [on page 15](#)).
- Develop a Natural Helper program that trains and compensates immigrant volunteers, allowing them to provide case management support for other immigrant families (see *Natural Helper Program* [on page 16](#)).
- Consider locating connectors and individuals with case management skills in communities where many immigrants live (see *Connectors Located in Immigrant-Heavy Residential Areas* [on page 21](#)).
- Hire additional navigators in important organizations who can help take on case management duties or support others in their case management work (see *Navigators* [on page 24](#)).



### **3.1.5 Develop a Guardianship Website**

*This recommendation also appears as Recommendation 3.5.3 under Legal Assistance*

Upon arriving in Iowa, many unaccompanied minors move forward with their immigration court case by applying for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS). This status provides the minor with a legal residency status in the U.S. and opens a pathway to applying for a green card and eventually citizenship. As part of applying for SIJS, the minor also becomes involved in a juvenile court proceeding that makes determinations that are important for SIJS. As part of this process, the juvenile court will also appoint a guardian for the minor to help ensure that the child's needs are being met. Guardians can play an important role in helping unaccompanied minors access services and navigate unfamiliar systems.

However, because there is not a formally established system for identifying guardians, this can often cause issues. It is generally the responsibility of the minor and their advocates to identify a person willing to be a guardian. This often results in the minor's attorney, a nonprofit staff person, or a volunteer soliciting help from people they know in order to secure a guardian.

This can lead to two issues. The first is that the minor and their advocates are unable to find an acceptable guardian before the minor ages out of the juvenile court system, thereby undermining their ability to apply for SIJS. In Iowa, guardianship must be established before the minor turns 18, and judges may be unwilling to grant guardianship if the minor is getting close to that age. If it takes a long time to find an appropriate guardian for the minor, it may pose a significant problem for their immigration court case. Informal systems based on personal networks may draw from a smaller pool of potential guardians.

The second issue is that this informal system of nonprofit staff/volunteers requesting help from their acquaintances sometimes leads to under-prepared guardians. These guardians may not adequately understand what guardianship entails and may be less committed to being a guardian, but instead may agree to the position out of necessity or as a favor to the person making the request. In some instances, individuals have been pressed to serve as guardian to multiple minors. Having guardians who are not fully committed to being

#### **What is Guardianship?**

Guardianship in SIJS cases is not always well understood, partly because the term "guardian" often means different things in different situations. In this case, the guardian's role is to make sure that the minor's well-being is being addressed and to report back to the court on any issues. The guardian does not have any financial responsibility for the child, nor does the child need to live with the guardian (though there have been instances where this has happened). The guardian's job is to try to help figure out solutions for financial, housing, and other issues the minor might face, not to take care of those issues directly. So, if the unaccompanied minor accidentally damaged school property and needed to pay the school back, the guardian would be expected to help figure out a solution but would not have to cover the payment themselves. Anyone interested in becoming a guardian or learning more should speak with a qualified legal professional for more precise information.

guardians and who do not fully understand what being a guardian entails is a disservice to both the guardian and to the minor.

A solution proposed by service providers in the community is to create a more formal system where potential guardians can submit their names to a website hosted by a local organization. This website would provide information on what being a guardian entails and other important considerations, and would allow potential guardians to submit their name and contact information. This would add them to a list that could be accessed by immigration attorneys looking for a guardian for the unaccompanied minor they are representing. Such a system could also include:

- A background check to help ensure that potential guardians are appropriately screened;
- Testimonials to show the experiences of others who have served as guardians;
- Training programs, support groups, and other resources to help better support guardians in their new role; and
- Other services aimed to help the guardian or minor.

Such a system would provide a better process for referring people who are interested in being a guardian, helping to increase the pool of available guardians. It would also help ensure that potential guardians understand what they are signing up for and would reduce the pressure on nonprofit staff and volunteers to always seek out new guardians whenever one is needed. In addition, creating trainings and resources for guardians would improve the help they provide to minors as well as connecting with local social service organizations.

Models to consider -

- In Dubuque, the Multicultural Family Center (MFC) has been in conversations with Catholic Charities, the Community Foundation, and other advocates about hosting a guardian website. The language and content for the website would be developed by immigration attorneys and other support organizations, while the MFC would conduct background checks and hold the list of potential guardians. Immigrant advocates could then refer potential guardians to the website in order to gain more information and to submit their information. The MFC could also then offer services and opportunities both to the guardians and to the unaccompanied minors.
  - The guardian list would only be accessible to immigration attorneys representing a minor seeking SIJS to help protect the privacy of those on the list.

After multiple discussions with statewide organizations and advocacy groups, this research has not identified another website serving this role within Iowa. It could be a model to be used by other Iowa communities.

### **3.1.6 Provide Transportation Support**

Transportation remains one of the most frequent needs met by small nonprofits and volunteers providing case management services. This is because those families and individuals most at need of case management services are also the most likely to not have reliable modes of transportation. This is especially true for unaccompanied minors and asylum seekers that may have ongoing immigration court cases. The closest Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) office for the region is located in Cedar Rapids, and the closest immigration courts are in Omaha, Nebraska and Chicago, IL, meaning that immigrants regularly need to travel for hours to make mandatory check-ins and immigration court dates. Yet many of these immigrants are also ineligible for a driver's licenses and may not be able to afford long-distance transportation. In addition, these immigrants regularly need local transportation services for everything from medical appointments to parent-teacher conferences. It is often volunteers and small nonprofit organizations that fill this void by providing hours of transportation support.

This makes finding drivers one of the largest volunteer needs within the region. The community should work to encourage additional volunteers to help with transportation, especially since there are limited non-car options available for consistently getting to appointments. But because transporting vulnerable immigrants, and especially minors, can create serious risks, it is also important to invest in additional resources for conducting background checks (see *Facilitate Background Checks* [on page 31](#)). In addition, organizations and government offices should consider the creation of more formal transportation options for immigrants and the expansion of public transport to help meet important needs.

Models to consider:

- Regional Transit Authority (RTA): The RTA in Region 8 provides transportation services in Delaware, Dubuque, and Jackson Counties. Establishing a formal RTA program for arranging transportation for immigrants needing to go to medical appointments or other important meetings could be a valuable way of reducing the pressure on volunteers. However, additional work would need to be undertaken to make this a service regularly utilized by immigrants, including translation, easy financial assistance, and coordination with local nonprofits to help create consistent and reliable usage.
  - [https://www.rta8.org/AboutUs/about\\_us.cfm](https://www.rta8.org/AboutUs/about_us.cfm)
- The Tri-State VIATS and Dubuque for Refugee Children are two of the organizations in Dubuque that most frequently provide volunteer transportation services to local immigrants.

## Education and Youth Support

### **3.2.1 Hire Paraprofessionals and Other Staff Focused on Immigrant Students**

Feedback from parents, educators, and students seemed to show the value of having paraprofessionals, mentors, and other staff in the schools focused on supporting English language learners. It is especially valuable to have staff that share the cultural and linguistic identities of immigrant populations. Having individuals at local schools who have linguistic and cultural knowledge can be a major benefit for students being able to learn and to understand how best to succeed at school. These staff also serve as connectors for parents, utilizing their existing relationships to build bridges between the schools and families, which can be valuable given the importance of parent engagement in a child's education. And staff can also provide immigrant children with a role model demonstrating to students that they can succeed at their studies and find a good job that gives back to their community. This is especially important because some interviews indicated that certain populations of immigrant youth (such as, but not limited to, unaccompanied minors and girls living in rural areas) were at a higher risk of giving up on aspirational thoughts around education, and instead focusing on maximizing immediate earnings at lower paying jobs.

Many schools are limited in which staff they are able to hire, and there are teacher and staff shortages at many of the schools throughout the region. Most schools cannot simply increase the number of staff that serve immigrant youth without significant changes in funding, state policies, etc. With that in mind, beyond simply increasing the number of staff serving immigrant students, this report recommends:

- 1) Schools consider language ability, cultural knowledge, and connections within immigrant communities as highly valuable when hiring new staff.
- 2) Local leaders and other stakeholders should advocate for increasing funding and support for students from immigrant families and English Language Learners.
- 3) Community members and partner organizations could pursue creative solutions to helping provide additional mentoring and educational support for immigrant youth. An example of such a program is discussed in the next recommendation.

### **3.2.2 Establish a Guatemalan Mentorship Program**

In early 2021, the Dubuque Community School District, NICC, and the Community Foundation partnered together to create the Guatemalan Mentor program, with additional support from Catholic Charities and other local organizations. This program was created in response to the challenges facing unaccompanied Guatemalan minors in the Dubuque Community School District. Many come to Dubuque speaking almost no English and very little Spanish, but instead Mayan dialects such as Ixil, K'iche', and Q'anjab'al. A majority of these students struggle in school as they try to learn both English and Spanish while also studying math, history, and other subjects in a language they don't fully speak. Mayan dialects are infrequently spoken in the United States, and so it can be very difficult to find

interpreters. In addition, many of the dialects are traditionally more of oral instead of written languages, and so there are few translated books or documents available for students. All of this creates a challenging learning environment for Guatemalan students.

The Guatemalan Mentor program was designed to help this situation by having a Guatemalan individual who speaks Ixil (the most commonly spoken dialect in Dubuque) placed into one of the high schools in order to help support Guatemalan students. However, the program experienced a problem because the School District was unable to hire the Guatemalan individual due to insufficient educational credentials. In order to address this challenge, the Community Foundation provided a grant to NICC, who hired the individual to serve as a volunteer mentor at the School District. At the same time, the individual took HSED classes at NICC with the goal of receiving her high school degree, and then potentially being hired by the School District full time.

The mentor had a significant impact on Guatemalan students and was able to provide additional help and support to them during class. Perhaps even more importantly, the mentor was able to build an additional connection between the school and the students, elevating challenges, passing along information, and helping create mutual understanding where there normally would have been a lack of communication. The School District was very pleased with the additional assistance, and the Guatemalan mentor expressed pride in being able to support students. She continued in her position through the beginning of 2022.

Continuing programs such as this would provide a lot of value for both schools and immigrant students. Being able to place people within local schools and pay them for their work provides an increased level of engagement and support for students who otherwise struggle in an unfamiliar environment. Additional funding should be raised to support this type of project.

### **3.2.3 Create an Expanded Marshallese Student Group**

*Note: This recommendation resulted from a collaboration between Crescent Community Health Center and the Community Foundation as part of an effort hosted by the National Association for Community Health Centers.*

One of the successful initiatives in the past several years aimed at immigrant youth has been the Pacific Islander Club at Hempstead and Dubuque Senior high schools. Operating as primarily an afterschool club for Pacific Islander students, the group has had several positive effects. It has given students a sense of identity and belonging, whereas sometimes immigrant students feel disconnected from school due to cultural or linguistic differences. It has enabled students to participate in larger activities, such as the students putting together a presentation about the Marshall Islands, followed by a meal with Marshallese food. And it has provided a place for students to gather after school and study, play music, and engage in other productive activities. Feedback from both Marshallese students and parents was very positive, with some asking for the Club to be expanded to middle school children as well.

While the Pacific Islander Club is limited in terms of its scope and resources, it also shows a potential opportunity: immigrant youth taking a civic role in supporting their own communities. Empowering immigrant youth to serve their own communities can produce a number of important benefits:

- 1) Provides young people with additional outlets for meaningful and compelling activities, which could improve their schoolwork, build knowledge and connection with their city and communities, and create a structured and engaging opportunity for students outside of school.
- 2) Leverages individuals with cultural knowledge, linguistic skills, and existing relationships with immigrant communities to help produce positive programming.
- 3) Develops connections between young immigrants and local colleges, nonprofits, and other organizations that might support the work. This can be very important for helping develop the next generation of immigrant leaders and allowing them to network with key stakeholders.
- 4) Allows for data and information collected by local organizations about immigrant communities to be given back to immigrant communities for their own use.
- 5) Provides an avenue for potential benefits for students that can help their academic and work careers. The most obvious example is as a tool for building resumes and college applications, but could potentially include scholarships or access to leadership events for some students.

One of the most straightforward options for developing this type of group in Dubuque would be to build off of the success of the Pacific Islander Club and create a student group focused on working to support the Marshallese community. Such a program would be structured so that local organizations would provide the students with information and data about issues that are important to the Marshallese community, support for developing programming of the students' choice around those issues, and venues for carrying out that programming. Crescent Community Health Center has explicitly stated its interest in providing data and support to the students, and other organizations have expressed their interest as well.

During this research, several ideas for projects were raised that give examples of the kind of activities that this kind of group might undertake:

- Students film Marshallese language videos about important health issues, and those videos are played on waiting room televisions at Crescent or other health-care facilities (with English subtitles).
- Students create a presentation or performance of Marshallese culture, which is then hosted for both the Marshallese community and the larger population at local venues.
- Students learn how to cook nutritious meals, and then either lead classes for Marshallese families or post videos online under a new website.

For any communities that decide to develop a program like this, there are a few additional points that should be considered:

- Having a location to hold sessions will be important, especially if any specialized equipment is necessary (like video cameras). Holding meetings outside of school

property may be the best option, though this would likely require the need to organize transportation.

- This kind of program would gain more support from students, parents, and school officials if it also created time for activities outside of the main project, such as help with studying or recreational activities. For example, it was thought that more Marshallese students would be interested if there was also an opportunity to play basketball together after the meeting. In Dubuque, the Boys and Girls Club (which has a gymnasium) expressed interest in supporting more Pacific Islander youth.
- During the research, both immigrant families and local stakeholders strongly believed that the group should be open to the wider public, and not just immigrant students. While the group could still focus on issues directly connected to the immigrant community, having students from different backgrounds, races, and ethnicities all working together on the project would be a huge benefit for building connections between students and helping the project impact the wider community.
- The program would likely require one or more adult leaders who could help direct activities, make connections with local organizations, and supervise what was taking place. This could potentially require raising additional funding.
- This program could potentially be replicated for many different immigrant populations, or for non-immigrant populations as well. A similar group could be developed for serving the Black community, Asian community, or another specific population. If initial implementations of this type of student program are successful, then stakeholders may want to consider piloting groups focused on other communities.

### **3.2.4 Support Early Childhood Reading**

Early childhood reading proficiency is one of the most important indicators of a student's educational outcomes. 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading proficiency is a leading indicator predicting high school graduation and career success. Students not proficient by the end of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school, while 88% of students who do not earn a high school diploma were struggling readers in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. This is in large part because 3<sup>rd</sup> grade is around when students shift from learning to read, to reading to learn.<sup>4</sup>

The Covid-19 pandemic had a major impact on students throughout the region in terms of reading proficiency, but the impacts are especially troubling for children from immigrant families. At the end of 2021, only 9.42% of English learners in the Dubuque Community School District were reading at grade level proficiency, almost half the rate in 2019 prior to the pandemic (18.34%). 54.46% of Hispanic students were reading at grade-level, as were

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<sup>4</sup> Weyer, Matthew and Jorge Casares. "Pre-Kindergarten-Third Grade Literacy." National Conference of State Legislatures. 17 December 2019. Available at: <https://www.ncsl.org/research/education/pre-kindergarten-third-grade-literacy.aspx#:~:text=Casey%20Foundation%20found%20that%20students,struggling%20readers%20in%20third%20grade.>

only 12.18% of Pacific Islanders.<sup>5</sup> Supporting early childhood reading education for these students will play a major role in their long-term educational outcomes.

Unfortunately, there are additional barriers that immigrant students face when it comes to reading proficiency. English language learners may struggle with reading and need additional support and practice to gain proficiency in a second language. But on top of that, some immigrant populations in Dubuque and the surrounding region also speak languages that are less frequently spoken in the U.S., resulting in fewer available books written in those languages. There are few pieces of children’s literature written in Marshallese and Mayan dialects, limiting how well non-English-speaking students and families can engage in literacy activities. On top of that, Marshallese and most Mayan dialects come from traditionally oral traditions. Reading in these languages may not be a familiar or common practice among many people within the community. This is especially true of Guatemalan Mayans, many of whom are most proficient at reading in English or Spanish, since Ixil and K’iche’ are not commonly written dialects. These challenges, taken with the disconnect from institutions and organizations that many immigrant families face, mean that promoting reading proficiency in immigrant populations is a difficult challenge.

One of the best ways to try to improve literacy for immigrant children is by engaging directly with families and social networks. Due to the limits facing schools and the barriers that already exist, local stakeholders should reach out to immigrant families and leaders to create a larger engagement in a child’s education. In addition, many immigrants live in multigenerational homes, meaning that parents, siblings, grandparents, and other relatives may be available to help support a child’s education. Involving key community leaders in educational efforts has also produced results (see models to consider). A concerted outreach to families may be the best means for engagement on reading proficiency.

Local stakeholders should also support the creation of more bilingual resources and their availability in schools, libraries, and other locations. The Community Foundation has produced a children’s book titled “Be a Healthy You! in Dubuque” that has been translated into both Spanish and Marshallese,<sup>6</sup> and there are lists online of other books that are written in Marshallese.<sup>7</sup> Having more books available that immigrant families can take advantage of is an important part of encouraging growth in literacy.

Communities should also consider dedicated literacy efforts focused on specific immigrant populations. While adding multilingual texts to existing literacy programs is an important step, utilizing specific teaching techniques and practices aimed at immigrant groups could produce the greatest results. The “models to consider” section includes potential techniques for Marshallese students that could be incorporated into a program.

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<sup>5</sup> Iowa School Performance Profiles, 2019 and 2021. Available at: <https://www.iaschoolperformance.gov/ECP/Home/Index>

<sup>6</sup> For more information, see: <https://dbqfoundation.org/news/new-childrens-book-be-a-healthy-you-in-dubuque>

<sup>7</sup> “Marshallese children’s books.” Marshallese Maniit. ([www.marshallese-manit.org](http://www.marshallese-manit.org)). Available at: <https://marshallese-manit.org/post-library-jukle/marshallese-childrens-books/>



Models to consider:

- The Pacific Islander population in Maquoketa has seen success by having strong community engagement for the education of their children. Local leaders are highly involved with the school district and participate regularly in conversations with school principals and parent-teacher conferences. This level of involvement has produced much better educational outcomes for students, and could be a valuable model to replicate, especially in areas with smaller communities with strong social connections.
- Melanie Carbine is a Doctoral Student in Multilingual Education and Literacy, Culture, and Language Education at the University of Iowa who has experience teaching in the Marshall Islands and expertise in educational techniques for Marshallese individuals. She considers the following techniques as possible strategies for improving literacy for Marshallese youth:
  - Accessing a collection of bilingual Marshallese basal readers (textbooks used to teach reading) currently being developed in the Republic of the Marshall Islands.
  - Emphasizing cooperative participant structures where children work in groups to read or write together (such as taking turns reading).
  - Utilizing storytellers and incorporating storytelling in reading and writing.
  - Incorporating oral presentations into literacy work (she notes that Marshallese are known as the speechmakers of the Pacific).
  - She has had success translanguaging at the high-school level, meaning teaching in both English and Marshallese and having students utilize both languages in their work.
  - She is also working on developing family literacy kits, Marshallese children's books, a book of nursery rhymes, Marshallese/English magnet letter sets, and audio books.
- The 2Gen approach detailed by the Aspen Institute of engaging multiple generations in an immigrant family could be a valuable tool for helping build literacy. This approach is discussed more in Recommendation 2.2.6 [on page 23](#).
  - <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/programs/community-strategies-group/family-economic-success/2gi/>

### **3.2.5 Provide Additional Workforce Development Options for Immigrant Youth (Guatemalan Unaccompanied Minors)**

*This recommendation also appears as Recommendation 3.7.6 under Workforce and Employment*

Providing immigrant students with clear pathways to family-sustaining careers should be a priority. Enabling immigrant students to pursue education and training that will connect them to high-paying, quality jobs will be a powerful driver in improving the livelihoods of immigrant families and boosting local economic growth. With immigrant populations being

some of the fastest growing demographics in the region, it is critical that young people are able to be quickly and seamlessly connected to good jobs.

A population that should receive specific attention is local Guatemalan Unaccompanied Minors. A recent change now allows individuals with Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) – a temporary status often pursued by Guatemalan unaccompanied minors – to get work authorizations. This is an important change, as it will allow many of these individuals to financially support themselves while they continue their court case. Because many of these individuals will be under the age of 18, it is very important that the community should engage with them and support them around work and career opportunities. Connecting these individuals to safe and well-paying jobs, as well as training and education that can lead to good career opportunities, is important for supporting this population and helping to provide a sustainable economic future.

Some local organizations (including NICC, the Dubuque Community School District, and Tri-State VIATS) are already working on how to best engage and support these students. This work should be continued, with an emphasis put on skills training programs for those students who are struggling to get their high school degree. Previous education levels can vary significantly for unaccompanied minors who come to Dubuque, and so helping connect those who are struggling with good career opportunities is important.

There are also other potential options that should be considered when it comes to developing education and workforce training programs for these SIJS recipients:

- Pair the unaccompanied minors, and especially girls who may face greater barriers to obtaining well-paying career opportunities, with appropriate mentors in their field of study. For example, if Guatemalan girls are considering NICC’s welding program, connecting them with a female welder from a local business who can provide additional support could provide a valuable asset in helping the participant complete their training program.
- Utilize a “Guatemalan Mentor” position to help focus on career opportunities for students still in school. The Guatemalan Mentor position is described in more detail [on page 35](#).

A challenge for this community will be to help these SIJS recipients, many of whom are still in high school, to balance the need to work with the need to study for school and improve their English. An area for future consideration would be designing a “fellowship” or work program where students were paid a living wage, learned a skill on the job, and were provided with time and support for schoolwork and/or English lessons. Such a program would need a strong host organization and would likely require additional financial support.

### **3.2.6 Achieve Greater Representation in Classrooms**

As immigrant populations continue to increase within the community, it is important that school environments are welcoming places for those students. A large part of this is students being able to see themselves reflected in the learning and curriculum that is taught in

schools. Research indicates that representation of children in toys, books, media, and the classroom can have a significant impact on their development and well-being.<sup>8</sup> Yet frequently immigrant populations are significantly underrepresented in textbooks, literature, and school curriculums. Schools across the region have made strong efforts to increase welcoming efforts for immigrant students and include greater representation in curriculum and materials. But a significant gap still exists.

Schools should work to include classroom decorations, reading materials, celebrations, and other efforts that reflect the growing diversity within the community. This can be as simple as making sure there are Latino dolls at a preschool or celebrating Marshallese Constitution Day near the end of the school year. Making sure immigrant students feel recognized and represented in school will not only make them feel more welcome but may result in improved educational outcomes.

Models to consider:

- Sioux City, Iowa, has one of the highest percentages of students from immigrant families of anywhere in the state. As a result, they have done a lot of work adapting their school district to be welcoming and support immigrant students.
  - <https://hechingerreport.org/diverse-future-of-the-midwest-has-already-arrived-in-one-iowan-school/>

### **3.2.7 Engage International College Students**

*This recommendation also appears as Recommendation 2.4.3 under Cultural Events*

Interviews and discussions during the Community Assessment suggest that connecting international college students to cultural organizations should be a focus for the region. International students are often eager to engage with new cultural offerings, but their unfamiliarity with their new home and barriers like expense and transportation can often keep them from seeking out local opportunities. The region would benefit from this population developing closer ties with local arts and culture organizations. Helping attract and retain talented international students and convincing them to make this region their long-term home will significantly benefit the local economy, culture, and community.

Outreach to this population should involve partnership between arts and culture organizations and local higher education institutions, with a specific focus on connecting to international students (or at least students who are new to Dubuque). Making the opportunities easily accessible and highly visible will be important for students who are trying to adjust to a new home. In addition, reducing barriers like transportation or the cost of attendance and arranging events at times that are the most convenient for students will be

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<sup>8</sup> Barga, Arianna. "The importance of children's representation in literature and media. *Humanium*. 22 March 2022. Available at: <https://www.humanium.org/en/the-importance-of-childrens-representation-in-literature-and-media/>

important for making programming successful. Doing this could lead to great long-term benefits as international students build a relationship with the local community.

For more information about international student retention and H-1B visas as part of workforce development, [see page 78](#).

## Health

### **3.3.1 Hire Additional Navigators**

*This recommendation also appears as Recommendation 2.3.1 under Navigators and 3.6.2 under Translation and Interpretation*

One of the most imposing barriers facing residents of this 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.<sup>9</sup> 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.

The addition of navigators can be a major benefit for helping resolve these issues. Navigators are individuals employed or utilized by service providers to help assist community members with accessing services. The best navigators are those that are both trained in the requirements of service systems and 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. 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.

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, also have staff that, while not navigators, may 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*

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<sup>9</sup> See the following link for an article discussing some of the challenges of navigating government support services: Lowrey, Annie. "The Time Tax." *The Atlantic*. 27 July 2021. Available at: <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/>

*Accomplishments Connected with the Community Assessment* in the Implementation Guide). 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.

However, while hiring navigators is an undoubtedly powerful tool for helping improve access to services for immigrant populations, it should not be seen as a substitute for capacity and power building. Navigators can serve an important role, but still 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 this region work, and navigation plays a critical role in helping to provide equitable access to systems. But it should still not be seen as a replacement for advocacy and power building within immigrant communities.

The role of navigators is especially important in healthcare. Health services can be an intimidating experience, especially if there are language and cultural barriers. Misinformation about medical issues can be common, especially during a health crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic. Understanding what information is correct or how to best engage with complex systems like insurance or medical billing can be very difficult for community leaders and volunteers that are supporting immigrant families. Having a trusted individual who is knowledgeable about health-care systems and paid to assist members of their local community can be a huge asset. Health-care providers and related organizations should consider creating more navigator positions staffed by members from immigrant communities, such as community health workers or community connectors.

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 Recommendation 2.1.3 [on page 16](#).

### **3.3.2 Provide Funds for Uncovered Medical Expenses**

The expansion of Medicaid has done a lot to help cover medical expenses, and there are other existing systems for helping with uncovered costs. Hospitals often provide significant financial support to uninsured individuals, providing care even if there is no expected payment. And many nonprofits and government offices provide additional funding to help with medical bills, often raised through grants, donations, or the allocation of government funding. This means that there are many existing services that can support individuals with uncovered medical costs.

However, many of these services have specific requirements and limitations, and understanding which are applicable can be challenging. Funding sources may not be available due to:

- The nature of the cost (if it was a cost like transportation that came outside of the hospitals system),

- The residency status of the individual (only green card holders or U.S. citizens are eligible for some funding),
- The income level of the individual,
- Whether the individual had any outstanding bills or had been helped by the program before,
- If the procedure is considered “necessary” (for example, Dubuque for Refugee Children has needed to raise money from supporters for clients to have their wisdom teeth removed); and
- Other considerations that might determine whether an individual is qualified for that funding.

Due to the confusion that exists around these different support services, having trained navigators available to help immigrant families can be very important for ensuring that funding is accessed regularly and efficiently (see the previous recommendation).

In addition, the gaps in funding mean that there are many expenses that regularly go uncovered within this region. These outstanding costs can create serious problems for immigrants such as delayed treatments or rising medical debt. Many nonprofit organizations, such as the Presentation Lantern Center, raise funds to help provide emergency support for medical needs. However, these funds are often limited and cannot cover all costs. Communities should consider creating pools of collective funding designed as a funding option of last resort for immigrant medical costs. Allowing nonprofit organizations and other service providers to apply for these funds on behalf of immigrants could improve access to care and reduce medical debt. It is important that any collected funding option is designed in a way that it does only cover those uncovered costs, as otherwise it would be simply replacing the work of already existing funding sources, instead of its intended purpose of benefiting immigrant families.

Models to consider

- The Marshallese Health Fund at the Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque provides funding to help cover otherwise uncovered costs incurred by Marshallese families related to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Fund provides support with medical bills, housing and utility assistance, and other important costs through partnership with trusted nonprofit organizations. The Fund was launched by Dr. Mark Janes, a local pulmonologist concerned about the toll Covid-19 was taking on members of the Marshallese Community.
  - <https://dbqfoundation.org/giving-center/dubuque-marshallese-health-fund>

### **3.3.3 Provide Brain Health Services**

While this region has made significant progress in providing health-care services to immigrant populations, one area where major gaps still exist is with brain health services. A recent Brain Health Needs Assessment, commissioned by Dubuque County and the Mental

Health and Disability Services of the East Central Region and conducted by the Community Foundation, found that:

- 1) There was a significant lack of counseling services within Dubuque County, leading to few available slots and long wait times throughout the region; and
- 2) An even larger gap exists for immigrants and individuals whose primary language is not English.<sup>10</sup>

Counseling is a very personal and sensitive practice, requiring trust between the counselor and the patient. This means that many practitioners in the area are understandably uncomfortable with holding counseling sessions across languages and cultures. Advocates and nonprofit organizations struggle to find brain health services for immigrant individuals, even when they are able to provide translation. This lack of services is in addition to the cultural taboos around brain health in some immigrant populations, where counseling and treatment for brain health needs are seen as something a “crazy” person would do, and not as a legitimate issue requiring medical diagnosis. This means that for many immigrants, challenges like stress, anxiety, and depression often go untreated due to either an unwillingness to seek treatment or because of insufficient available services.

Being able to fully address the brain health needs of immigrants would necessitate addressing the larger challenges around a lack of general capacity. This would require a significant increase in resources and effort, and is outside the scope of this research. However, there are several potential programs that can help address some of the needs around brain health for immigrants through more targeted interventions:

- **Recruit additional practitioners serving immigrant communities.** The most straightforward way to address this gap is to increase the number of practitioners that serve immigrants. Hiring additional counselors with language skills and the cultural competency to work with individuals from other populations will increase the availability of services for immigrants. Hiring counselors that look like or come from the same background as immigrant populations can also provide value, as it can help immigrants feel more comfortable accessing services.
- **Train existing practitioners.** There are a number of brain health practitioners in the region who can provide training to improve local capacity to serve immigrants. Dr. Naomi Ford at the Iowa Refugee Counseling Center in Iowa City has offered to provide training to interested practitioners, and other trainings may help provide additional capacity.
- **Group Brain Health Sessions.** Due to the reluctance of some immigrants to seek formal brain health services, holding free group sessions focused on trauma or other issues may be a more accessible option. Providing a less formal, free group session in the individual’s first language can help address some brain health needs and serve as an onramp to more extensive services. For an example, see the Beyond Trauma program under “Models to consider.”

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<sup>10</sup> The Brain Health Needs Assessment is available at: [https://dbqfoundation.org/pdf/resources/Dubuque\\_County\\_Brain\\_Health\\_Needs\\_Assessment\\_2022.pdf](https://dbqfoundation.org/pdf/resources/Dubuque_County_Brain_Health_Needs_Assessment_2022.pdf)

- **Additional support to students.** The region's local schools have been doing an impressive job in offering additional brain health support to students in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. It is important the school officials make sure that these services are accessible and usable by immigrant students, and that those students feel that the services are available to them.

Models to consider:

- The Iowa Refugee Counseling Center in Iowa City, which is housed by the nonprofit organization IC Compassion, provides both individual and group counseling services for immigrants and refugees. They also provide additional counseling and immigration related services such as assessments for asylum proceedings.
  - <https://www.iccompassion.org/refugeecounseling>
- The Beyond Trauma (also known as ESPERE) program uses a restorative justice model to help adult immigrants who have experienced trauma. Beyond Trauma classes, which are conducted by the group Adelante Mujeres in Oregon, use a group model that works with individuals over a series of sessions. There are individuals in Dubuque with experience providing this service in Spanish to Latino men and women.
  - <https://www.adelantemujeres.org/beyond-trauma>

### **3.3.4 Offer Training for Medical Translation and Interpretation**

*This recommendation also appears as Recommendation 3.6.6 under Translation and Interpretation*

One significant gap in this region is for licensed medical interpreters and translators, especially for languages like Marshallese that are not commonly spoken throughout much of the United States. Many health-care providers require certified medical translators to make sure that they can correctly translate the technical terms used by staff. However, in many instances these interpreters are not available, and so the providers rely on untrained community members for interpretation. At times, young children have been asked to provide translation when there is no other readily available option. Not only is this potentially inappropriate and could lead to significant mistranslations, but in many cases health-care providers are unable to compensate non-certified interpreters.

This region, and especially locations like Dubuque where languages are commonly spoken that do not have readily available translators, should work to develop the support process and funding to help interested community members become certified for medical interpretation. Courses and tests can be expensive and take extensive time, so it will be important to have individuals who can assist with navigating systems and funding to help cover costs. While the best process and programs may vary from area to area, the following is an option that communities could consider:



1. The Certification Commission for Healthcare Interpreters (CCHI)<sup>11</sup> offers several accreditations that are accepted by many health-care providers.
  - a. For Spanish, Mandarin, and French, CCHI offers its Certified Healthcare Interpreter (CHI) certification.
  - b. For other languages (such as Marshallese), CCHI offers its Core Certification Healthcare Interpreter (CoreCHI) certification. Due to the big lack of interpreters for less commonly spoken languages, this report will primarily discuss the CoreCHI.
2. Applicants for the CoreCHI and CHI certification must meet the following requirements:
  - a. Be at least eighteen years of age.
  - b. Have received a high school diploma or equivalent from any country.
  - c. Be able to demonstrate proficiency in both English and the language of interpretation. This can be done with:
    - i. A high school diploma or equivalent from a country that teaches in the language;
    - ii. Successfully passing a language proficiency test from a reputable testing organization;
      1. A list of suggested English language testing options are available at the CCHI site.<sup>12</sup>
        - a. The TOEFL Essentials test provided by ETS allows for remote testing online.<sup>13</sup>
      2. Sites such as Language Testing International (LTI) offer widely accepted language proficiency certificates.<sup>14</sup>
        - a. LTI does not currently appear to offer language testing in Marshallese. For Marshallese, the Avant STAMP WS test is available and accepted by CCHI.<sup>15</sup>
    - iii. Other options are listed in the CCHI Candidate Examination Handbook.<sup>16</sup>
  - d. Completion of a minimum of 40 hours of training (not experience) in health-care interpreting.<sup>17</sup> See “Models to consider” below:
3. The CoreCHI examination includes \$210 worth of fees. The CHI Examination includes an additional \$275 of fees.

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<sup>11</sup> [www.cchicertification.org](http://www.cchicertification.org)

<sup>12</sup> “Frequently Asked Questions.” *CCHICertification.org*. Available at: <https://cchicertification.org/certifications/faq/>

<sup>13</sup> “TOEFL Essentials Test Resources.” *ETS.org*. Available at: <https://www.ets.org/s/toefl-essentials/test-takers/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.languagetesting.com/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://avantassessment.com/stamp-ws>

<sup>16</sup> For more details, see the CCHI Candidate Examination Handbook, available at [https://cchicertification.org/uploads/CCHI\\_Candidate\\_Examination\\_Handbook.pdf](https://cchicertification.org/uploads/CCHI_Candidate_Examination_Handbook.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> A list of potential training programs are listed here: <https://cchicertification.org/prerequisite-programs/>

Models to consider:

- Heartland Regional Genetics Network provides a medical interpretation training for Marshallese interpreters that fulfills the 40-hour requirement. Several community members have taken part in this training.
  - <https://www.heartlandcollaborative.org>

### **3.3.5 Offer Training for Brain Health Translation and Interpretation**

*This recommendation also appears as Recommendation 3.6.7 under Translation and Interpretation*

Separate from medical interpretation and translation, brain health<sup>18</sup> or counseling interpretation requires additional training and commitment for an interpreter. Due to the personal nature of counseling services, an interpreter may become a major participant in any session. Any interpreter would need to have additional training on how to properly participate in counseling sessions, how to correctly interpret for the brain health specialist, and how to operate ethically and confidentially during the sessions. Trust is a key component of this kind of interpretation, so finding the correct, committed interpreter can be challenging. It is recommended that any effort to recruit translators for counseling sessions be coupled with training and a very thoughtful recruitment process. For more on brain health services for migrants and immigrants, please [see page 45](#).

Models to consider:

- The Iowa Refugee Counseling Center in Iowa City holds counseling sessions for refugees and other immigrants. As part of their counseling sessions they use interpreters who are trained by the Center. Dr. Naomi Ford, who runs the Center, is able to provide trainings for interpreters on how to be successful interpreters for brain health sessions. Dr. Ford could be contracted to provide training sessions for community members who are interested in serving as translators.
  - This training should be accompanied by a training of counselors or brain health providers as well. Both the counselor and the interpreter should understand their roles and how to work cross culturally.
  - <https://www.iccompassion.org/refugeecounseling>
- The Marjorie Kovler Center, a Chicago-based program providing trauma-informed care to survivors of torture, has previously offered training sessions for interpreters.
  - <https://www.heartlandalliance.org/program/marjorie-kovler-center/>
- The National Council on Interpreting in Health Care has produced a working paper titled "A National Code of Ethics for Interpreters in Health Care." This document provides useful information for potential translators and service providers regarding interpretation for brain health.

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<sup>18</sup> The Community Foundation uses the term "brain health" when talking about conditions related to a person's psychological and emotional well-being. The reason for this is to fight against the stigma often associated with the term "mental health."

- The manual can be accessed at:  
<https://www.ncihc.org/assets/z2021Images/NCIHC%20National%20Code%20of%20Ethics.pdf>.

## Housing

### **3.4.1 Advocate for Affordable, Quality Housing**

One of the most direct avenues for increasing access to housing for immigrant populations is to improve housing access for everyone in the community. The deficit in quality, affordable housing is a larger regional challenge, and without addressing it more broadly any immigrant-specific initiatives will be less effective. This means that organizations and individuals that support immigrant populations should also advocate for an increase in quality housing for low-income families.

Models to consider

- The Dubuque Equitable Poverty Reduction and Prevention Plan lists a number of potential recommendations for improving overall housing affordability and quality, including enacting a source of income ordinance, training resident housing inspectors, and increasing funding for legal representation for residents facing eviction. Recommendations regarding Section 8 and Housing Choice Vouchers generally only apply to immigrants who have received their green card or citizenship.
  - <https://www.cityofdubuque.org/povertyrevention>

### **3.4.2 Provide Additional Trainings on Tenants Rights**

One of the effective ways to push back on unfair or exploitative housing practices is to empower immigrants to be able to advocate for themselves. Residents are better able to protect their interests when they understand the law, what options are available, and who they can turn to for assistance regarding housing issues. While a number of tenant rights trainings have been conducted in this region, there is still a lack of knowledge and confidence among many immigrant groups. Providing interpretation or presentations in other languages would also improve immigrant advocacy. Experts looking to provide trainings should consider ways of improving outreach into immigrant communities (see the section on *Outreach* [on page 20](#)).

Models to consider:

- The Iowa Legal Aid Fair Housing Project has provided trainings on tenants' rights aimed at immigrant communities.
  - <https://www.iowalegalaid.org/issues/housing>
- The organization Centro Legal De La Raza offers both immigrant rights and tenant rights services, allowing them to help immigrant families across multiple areas. Tenant

rights trainings include both “know your rights” trainings as well as clinics that allow attorneys to learn about a tenant’s situation and provide advice and referrals.

- o <https://www.centrolegal.org/>

### **3.4.3 Practice Outreach to Landlords**

One housing challenge facing immigrants is the smaller pool of landlords who show or clearly communicate a willingness to rent to immigrant families. Landlords may feel uncomfortable renting to immigrants due to language concerns or a lack of understanding about an immigrant’s culture or legal status. Others may be willing to rent to immigrants, but have little connection with immigrant communities and are unknown by those populations. Because many immigrants may not trust an unknown landlord or may be afraid of discrimination or a hostile reception, they may rely on using only landlords they know and not pursuing new housing opportunities. These circumstances limit housing options available to immigrants, forcing them to utilize more expensive or lower quality options.

Advocates, nonprofit organizations, and government officials should conduct outreach to local landlords regarding renting to immigrant families. By having advocates and other allies make connections with landlords willing to rent to immigrants, it will create a growing pool of potential housing options which will increase household availability, quality, and affordability. This would also provide an opportunity for education on immigrant issues, reducing the concerns of landlords over renting to immigrant communities. And it would give advocates an opportunity to provide a simple screening of landlords, allowing them to quickly identify any landlords who would be particularly unwelcoming of immigrant tenants.

While this kind of outreach could be done informally by volunteers, utilizing a more formal program connected with local housing departments or nonprofit organizations may allow advocates to contact a greater number of landlords and provide greater reassurance to landlords concerned about renting to immigrant tenants.

Models to consider

- The City of Dubuque’s 2019 Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice report identifies targeted outreach and education of landlords unwilling to accepted Housing Choice Vouchers as one of its priority actions. A similar effort could be used with landlords around renting to immigrant families. The report also recommends implementing communication and trust-building activities for landlords and tenants such as “Meet and Lease” events. Similar events could also help build trust between potential landlords and immigrant tenants.
  - o [https://www.cityofdubuque.org/DocumentCenter/View/44569/City\\_of\\_Dubuque\\_2019\\_Analysis\\_of\\_Impediments](https://www.cityofdubuque.org/DocumentCenter/View/44569/City_of_Dubuque_2019_Analysis_of_Impediments)
- The International Rescue Committee launched a messaging campaign to tenants regarding the benefits of renting to refugees and Afghan evacuees.
  - o <https://www.rescue.org/announcement/landlords-renting-refugees-and-afghan-evacuees>

### **3.4.4 Form an Immigrant Housing Ally Coalition**

As noted in the previous recommendation, some landlords may be reluctant to rent to immigrants. This could be due to a lack of cultural understanding, concerns about language barriers, uncertainty about an individual's immigration status, doubts about the individual's ability to maintain a consistent income, or a host of other concerns, whether grounded in truth or not. One of the underlying causes running through each of these concerns is an absence of trust, often brought on by preconceived notions about immigrants or inexperience with that community. While this trust can be built over time through exposure and relationships with immigrant individuals, the initial barrier can make it difficult for landlords and immigrants to reach an agreement.

There may be an opportunity for advocates and allies to play a role in improving trust between landlords and immigrant tenants by serving as references and supports for immigrants. Having a coalition of volunteers or organizational staff that engages from the beginning with a landlord on behalf of an immigrant and that provides assistance during initial negotiations could be a major support to an immigrant looking to move into an unfamiliar location. Connecting a landlord with a team of two or three individuals or organizations who can help with translation, communication, and assurances about concerns like legal status may make that landlord more willing to work with immigrant families.

This support can also continue after the immigrant has moved into the new housing, providing additional advocacy and communication. For example, the coalition could work with the landlord if the tenant falls behind in rent, help explain new policies to the immigrant family, or negotiate in the case of a conflict or issue. This could provide the tenant with additional support and advocacy and reassure the landlord that the tenant will be reliable.

Models to consider

- Advocates for domestic violence survivors sometimes work with landlords in order to create partnerships that help survivors find housing and reduce the risk of conflict or eviction. Many of the strategies utilized by these advocates could potentially be valuable to advocates for immigrants as well. Safe Housing Partnerships provides a strategy guide for survivor advocates working with landlords, and Violence Free Colorado provides a toolkit that includes suggestions for engaging with landlords.
  - Safe Housing Partnerships: [https://safehousingpartnerships.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/Landlords\\_Evictions\\_Engagement\\_NASH\\_1.pdf](https://safehousingpartnerships.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/Landlords_Evictions_Engagement_NASH_1.pdf);
  - Violence Free Colorado: <https://www.violencefreecolorado.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Toolkit-for-Addressing-Housing-Barriers-for-Victims-of-Domestic-Violence-updated-9.2018.pdf>
- While this kind of support can be done by one individual or organization, it may be valuable to have a coalition of individuals and organizations work together. Multiple contacts would provide additional reassurances for landlords, reduce the burden on any one advocate, and help avoid any key-individual risks. See the section *Case Management "Networks"* [on page 29](#) for a possible model for this type of program.

### **3.4.5 Provide Support for Mortgages**

Support for home ownership is also a major need among certain immigrant communities. While the small numbers in question make it difficult for Census Bureau estimates to give exact numbers, data seems to indicate that a minority of immigrant families own their own home. For example, between 2015 and 2020, the American Community Survey estimated that anywhere from 22 to 0 Pacific Islander households in Dubuque were owned by the occupants.<sup>19</sup> Within the past year, a Guatemalan Mayan individual became one of the first in her community to obtain a mortgage and purchase a house. In Iowa, 50% of foreign-born households are owner-occupied, compared to 72% for the native population.<sup>20</sup>

Home ownership is a powerful goal for residents in this region, not only because of the stability and homelife benefits that it can bring, but also because it provides families with an opportunity to build equity in their homes. With immigrant's living in poverty at more than two times the rate of the native-born population,<sup>21</sup> this avenue of building assets could be valuable for accumulating long-term wealth. However, immigrants often face challenges obtaining mortgages due to poor credit history, debt, limited relationships with financial lenders, and other barriers. Immigration status can also be a significant challenge.

Supporting immigrants with accessing mortgages and with home ownership will help create that financial growth and increase retention of immigrant families within this area. Both immigrant support organizations and financial institutions should consider strategies to increase home ownership among immigrant populations.

Models to consider:

- The Tri-State VIATS and other Dubuque-area partners raised money to help a Guatemalan woman make a down payment for a mortgage to buy a new house. This kind of financial support can be beneficial for helping overcome initial hurdles for accessing financing.
- The International Institute of St. Louis provides multiple supports for immigrants looking to buy a home. These include trainings, such as a housing workshop that explains different loans, and a homebuyer's training course. They also offer Individual Development Accounts, where participants save money towards an asset purchase, and funds are matched by funding provided by the United Way and Office of Refugee Resettlement. For first-time home buyers, they can receive a 3:1 match of up to \$8,000 total, as long as they stay involved in the program for 6 to 24 months and participate in training at the Institute. As part of the process, the Institute also helps them access a secured loan for their home purchase.
  - <https://www.iistl.org/>

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<sup>19</sup> American Community Survey, 2015 through 2020 5-year estimates. Available at: <https://www.census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/data-profiles/>

<sup>20</sup> American Community Survey, 2020 5-year estimates. Available at: <https://www.census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/data-profiles/>

<sup>21</sup> American Community Survey, 2021 5-year estimates. Available at: <https://www.census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/data-profiles/>

- The Resurrection Project developed TRP Lending, a non-profit mortgage lender in Illinois that is aimed at providing mortgages to low- and moderate-income households that may lack access to conventional financing. Financial products offered to immigrants have low monthly payments and no requirements to pay for private mortgage insurance, among other benefits.
  - <https://resurrectionproject.org/affordable-mortgage-lending/>

## Legal Assistance

### **3.5.1 Connect with Immigration Attorneys**

One of the valuable assets in this region is the presence of attorneys who can represent individuals in immigration court proceedings. Both through immigration lawyers at organizations like Catholic Charities and Path of Hope and through dedicated private attorneys who represent immigrants in legal proceedings, the legal advocacy in the region provides an important service to local immigrants. As Figure 1 on the next page shows, of counties in Iowa with at least 100 immigration court cases currently pending (as of June 2022), Dubuque County had the second highest rate of representation at 69.6%. This doesn't necessarily show the full need for immigration legal services (due to immigrants not pursuing cases because of a lack of representation), but does give a sense of the amount of legal representation provided compared to other counties in Iowa. This support is extremely valuable for ensuring that immigrant community members are able to be represented in immigration court, or at the least to receive a consultation about their case.

Yet this level of support can be precarious. In rural communities a sudden influx of new immigrants with court cases can overwhelm the available representation, and the loss of even one attorney (due to moving, illness, etc.) can leave a community understaffed. In addition, due to the importance of legal activities that take place outside of immigration court (such as submitting I-94 forms or applying for citizenship), there is almost always a need for additional legal capacity for immigrants. Because of this, the region should place a priority in ensuring that there is sufficient access to quality legal services for immigrants. If such services become scarce, it is very possible that immigrants will face worse outcomes in court, or that immigrants will rely on unethical attorneys or those without adequate training in immigration law for their legal needs.

**Figure 1: Rate of Representation in Immigration Court by Individual's County of Residence (Minimum 100 case) - Iowa**

<b>All Pending Cases (As Of June 2022)</b>			
<b>County Name</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Represented</b>	<b>% Represented</b>
Crawford County	390	306	78.5%
Dubuque County	102	71	69.6%
Emmet County	120	83	69.2%
Woodbury County	1,328	898	67.6%
Hamilton County	203	133	65.5%
Wright County	398	260	65.3%
Muscatine County	121	77	63.6%
Marshall County	137	86	62.8%
Black Hawk County	340	213	62.6%
Wapello County	290	179	61.7%
Johnson County	634	390	61.5%
Sioux County	732	441	60.2%
Dallas County	308	180	58.4%
Polk County	2,501	1,457	58.3%
Linn County	419	234	55.8%
Pottawattamie County	151	83	55.0%
Scott County	136	71	52.2%
Allamakee County	192	100	52.1%
Clarke County	100	52	52.0%
Franklin County	133	69	51.9%
Buena Vista County	291	150	51.5%

Source: University of Syracuse TRAC System - <https://trac.syr.edu/>

Models to consider:

- A nonprofit organization called Vecina connects volunteer attorneys to immigration court cases, providing the attorneys with additional mentoring and training on immigration law as well. This increases the capacity of pro-bono legal services for immigrants while ensuring that lawyers have some training in immigration law and avoid doing anything that may harm their client.
  - <https://vecina.org/>
- The New York Immigrant Family Unit Project is working to provide a publicly funded lawyer to every detained or incarcerated immigrant in the state. Immigrants are generally not provided with a public defender for immigration court cases or deportation hearings.
  - <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/22463009/biden-new-york-immigrant-access-lawyer-court>



### **3.5.2 Provide Support for Fees & Completing Forms**

As detailed above, the amount of paperwork involved in navigating the immigration system is significant and can act as a major challenge for immigrant families and a disincentive for pursuing necessary help and services. The same is true of the fees required for immigrant applications. In addition, making mistakes or omissions on a form can lead to that application being rejected.<sup>22</sup> Being able to provide support for immigrant families looking to make legal applications can make those applications both more feasible and more successful.

Both volunteers and staff at local organizations provide support with filling out forms. Volunteers from within immigrant communities and the larger pool of immigrant activists frequently play an important role in helping prepare documentation for immigration submissions due to the unmet need that exists within the region. While their efforts should be celebrated, at times the informal nature of their work means that the process can be inefficient (because they are dealing with new paperwork they have not seen before) and may possibly lead to errors or mistakes. A better option will usually be a more formal volunteer program (where volunteers can be given training or guidance on how to fill out forms), or paid staff and social workers assisting with documents. Having dedicated resources who are compensated for their work available to help with paperwork can be a major benefit for immigrant communities. For more information on navigators, see the *Navigator* section [on page 24](#).

An additional need identified during the course of this research is around fees for family members who have been detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Individuals in detention face significant costs, such as fees for telephone calls. Maintaining communication between a detained individual and their family can be very important, but many immigrants are unable to afford these calls, especially when they are isolated from their community.<sup>23</sup> During the Covid-19 pandemic there were several efforts by local volunteers and organizations in Dubuque to raise money to help with costs and fees for immigrant families with a member in detention.

Being able to help with fee payments, either by fully covering them or reducing the amount, can have a major impact on the well-being of immigrant families. In this region this has both been accomplished by organizations utilizing grant funding to cover costs, and by fundraising to create a pool of money that can be accessed by immigrant families. Communities should consider organizing and growing a pool of available funding to help low-income immigrants cover fees.

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<sup>22</sup> For example, see "Insider alert: No more room for error in visa applications?" *Boundless Immigration*. 27 November 2018. Available at: <https://www.boundless.com/blog/insider-alert-no-room-error-visa-applications/#:~:text=USCIS%20announced%20a%20new%20policy,effect%20on%20September%2011%2C%202018>.

<sup>23</sup> Najmabadi, Shannon. "Detained migrant parents have to pay to call their family members. Some can't afford to." *The Texas Tribune*. 3 July 2018. Available at: <https://www.texastribune.org/2018/07/03/separated-migrant-families-charged-phone-calls-ice/>

Models to consider:

- Crescent Community Health Center employs both social workers and community health workers who can work with members of immigrant communities on issues like I-94 completions or passport renewals. Crescent also utilizes grant money to help offset the costs of these filings for immigrant populations.
  - <https://crescentchc.org/>
- The Presentation Lantern Center has a fund that is replenished annually through donations that is aimed at helping cover fee costs for citizenship applications or other immigration-related applications.
  - <https://thelanterncenter.org/home/>
- The Mission Asset Fund in San Francisco provides 0% interest loans for immigrant application fees like citizenship, green cards, or DACA. This provides immigrants with financial support and allows them to rebuild credit history as they repay the loan.
  - <https://www.missionassetfund.org/immigration-programs/>

### **3.5.3 Develop a Guardianship Website**

*This recommendation also appears as Recommendation 3.1.5 under Case Management*

Upon arriving in Iowa, many unaccompanied minors move forward with their immigration court case by applying for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS). This status provides the minor with a legal residency status in the U.S. and opens a pathway to applying for a green card and eventually citizenship. As part of applying for SIJS, the minor also becomes involved in a juvenile court proceeding that makes determinations that are important for SIJS. As part of this process, the juvenile court will also appoint a guardian for the minor to help ensure that the child's needs are being met. Guardians can play an important role in helping unaccompanied minors access services and navigate unfamiliar systems.

However, because there is not a formally established system for identifying guardians, this can often cause issues. It is generally the responsibility of the minor and their advocates to identify a person willing to be a guardian. This often results in the minor's attorney, a nonprofit staff person, or a volunteer soliciting help from people they know in order to secure a guardian.

This can lead to two issues. The first is that the minor and their advocates are unable to find an acceptable guardian before the minor ages out of the juvenile court system, thereby undermining their ability to apply for SIJS. In Iowa, guardianship must be established before the minor turns 18, and judges may be unwilling to grant guardianship if the minor is getting close to that age. If it takes a long time to find an appropriate guardian for the minor, it may pose a significant problem for their immigration court case. Informal systems based on personal networks may draw from a smaller pool of potential guardians.

The second issue is that this informal system of nonprofit staff/volunteers requesting help from their acquaintances sometimes leads to under-prepared guardians. These guardians may not adequately understand what guardianship entails and may be less committed to being a guardian, but instead may agree to the position out of necessity or as a favor to the person making the request. In some instances, individuals have been pressed to serve as guardian to multiple minors. Having guardians who are not fully committed to being guardians and who do not fully understand what being a guardian entails is a disservice to both the guardian and to the minor.

A solution proposed by service providers in the community is to create a more formal system where potential guardians can submit their names to a website hosted by a local organization. This website would provide information on what being a guardian entails and other important considerations, and would allow potential guardians to submit their name and contact information. This would add them to a list that could be accessed by immigration attorneys looking for a guardian for the unaccompanied minor they are representing. Such a system could also include:

- A background check to help ensure that potential guardians are appropriately screened;
- Testimonials to show the experiences of others who have served as guardians;
- Training programs, support groups, and other resources to help better support guardians in their new role; and
- Other services aimed to help the guardian or minor.

Such a system would provide a better process for referring people who are interested in being a guardian, helping to increase the pool of available guardians. It would also help ensure that potential guardians understand what they are signing up for and would reduce the pressure on nonprofit staff and volunteers to always seek out new guardians whenever one is needed. In addition, creating trainings and resources for guardians would improve the help they provide to minors as well as connecting with local social service organizations.

### **What is Guardianship?**

Guardianship in SIJS cases is not always well understood, partly because the term “guardian” often means different things in different situations. In this case, the guardian’s role is to make sure that the minor’s well-being is being addressed and to report back to the court on any issues. The guardian does not have any financial responsibility for the child, nor does the child need to live with the guardian (though there have been instances where this has happened). The guardian’s job is to try to help figure out solutions for financial, housing, and other issues the minor might face, not to take care of those issues directly. So, if the unaccompanied minor accidentally damaged school property and needed to pay the school back, the guardian would be expected to help figure out a solution but would not have to cover the payment themselves. Anyone interested in becoming a guardian or learning more should speak with a qualified legal professional for more precise information.

Models to consider:

- In Dubuque, the Multicultural Family Center (MFC) has been in conversations with Catholic Charities, the Community Foundation, and other advocates about hosting a guardian website. The language and content for the website would be developed by immigration attorneys and other support organizations, while the MFC would conduct background checks and hold the list of potential guardians. Immigrant advocates could then refer potential guardians to the website in order to gain more information and to submit their information. The MFC could also then offer services and opportunities both to the guardians and to the unaccompanied minors.
  - The guardian list would only be accessible to immigration attorneys representing a minor seeking SIJS to help protect the privacy of those on the list.
  - After multiple discussions with statewide organizations and advocacy groups, this research has not identified another website serving this role within Iowa. It could be a model to be used by other Iowa communities.

### **3.5.4 Build Trust with Local Law Enforcement**

One of the common misconceptions about immigrant populations is that they are frequently responsible for increases in crime. A 2020 study found that immigrants (both undocumented and documented) were much less likely to be arrested for violent crimes, drug offenses, and property crimes than the general population.<sup>24</sup> This agrees with earlier studies on arrest rates of immigrants<sup>25</sup> as well as evidence that halting refugee resettlement<sup>26</sup> and increasing deportation<sup>27</sup> does not reduce property or violent crime rates. The most recent data from the University of Syracuse Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC) database shows that a majority (70%) of individuals in immigrant detention in the summer of 2019 had not

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<sup>24</sup> Moyer, Melinda Wenner. "Undocumented immigrants are half as likely to be arrested for violent crimes as U.S.-born citizens." *Scientific American*. 7 December 2020. Available at: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/undocumented-immigrants-are-half-as-likely-to-be-arrested-for-violent-crimes-as-u-s-born-citizens/>

<sup>25</sup> Nowrasteh, Alex. "Illegal immigrants and crime - Accessing the evidence." *Cato Institute*. 4 March 2019. Available at: <https://www.cato.org/blog/illegal-immigrants-crime-assessing-evidence>

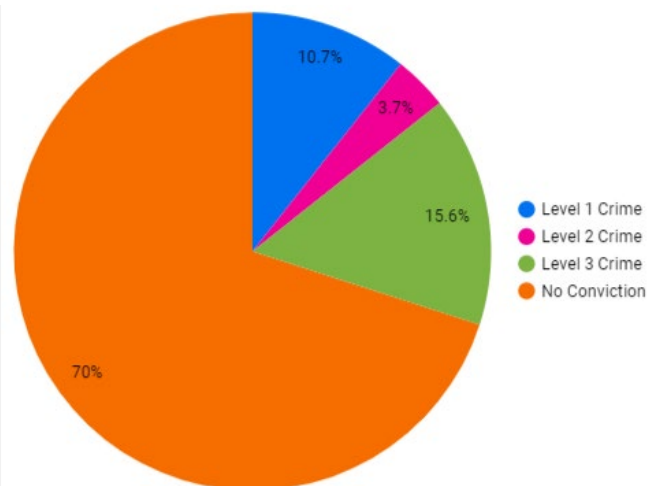
<sup>26</sup> Masterson, Daniel, and Vasil Yassenov. "Does Halting Refugee Resettlement Reduce Crime? Evidence from the US Refugee Ban." *American Political Science Review*, vol. 115, no. 3, 2021, pp. 1066-1073., doi:10.1017/S0003055421000150. Available at: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/american-political-science-review/article/does-halting-refugee-resettlement-reduce-crime-evidence-from-the-us-refugee-ban/E111764FC700841C5E5FD3FAA2A6BE8C>

<sup>27</sup> Flagg, Anna. "Deportations reduce crime? That's not what the evidence shows." *The New York Times*. 23 September 2019. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/23/upshot/deportations-crime-study.html>

been convicted of a crime, and approximately 10.7% (or less than 6,000 nationwide) were designated as having a serious criminal conviction on their record.<sup>28</sup>

Yet a deficit of trust between immigrant populations and law enforcement may result in challenges that can impact a community. If immigrant populations are unwilling to speak with law enforcement, it could prevent them from providing information about other crimes. A lack of familiarity with local laws and miscommunication with law enforcement can also lead to some immigrants getting into avoidable legal trouble. In interviews several law enforcement personnel expressed a desire to improve communication with immigrant populations and explain common issues in order to reduce these types of problems.

**Figure 2: Individuals in detention by most serious criminal conviction, June 2019 - U.S.**



Source: TRAC Immigration and Customs Enforcement Detention – Available: <https://trac.syr.edu/phptools/immigration/detention/>

There have also been instances within Dubuque County of law enforcement officials targeting or even seeking to intimidate immigrant communities. This kind of activity, even if it does not directly lead to arrests, can have a chilling effect on immigrants of all immigration statuses. Fear of increased police presence can undermine participation in social services and other programming, and may create a significant setback to efforts to build connections between immigrant populations and the larger community. In smaller and rural communities, even the actions of a single law enforcement official can have a major impact on a community's relationship with its immigrant populations.

For these reasons improving the rapport and communication channels between immigrant communities and law enforcement can have significant benefits for the community as a whole. Potential options for programming include:

- Hosting information sessions for immigrant communities about common legal and public safety issues.
- Hosting listening sessions where immigrants can provide feedback to law enforcement about questions and concerns.
  - While these sessions may focus on specific immigrant communities at different times, they should be made available to as wide an audience as possible

<sup>28</sup> "Decline in ICE detainees with criminal records could shape agency's response to Covid-19 pandemic." Syracuse University TRAC Immigration System. 3 April 2020. Available at: <https://trac.syr.edu/immigration/reports/601/>

(especially regarding authorization status) and should be held repeatedly and consistently to increase immigrant trust in the process.

- Establishing an immigrant advisory group to help provide input and direction to law enforcement bodies, as well as key points of contact within the community.
- Developing, with the assistance of members of immigrant communities, a clear and publicly visible protocol for how to use city and/or county resources when required to assist federal immigration authorities. Outlining policies can be an effective way to build additional trust with immigrant communities while reducing the potential for miscommunication.
- Adopting clear rules for when and how local officers can inquire into immigration status. This can give better direction to officers about how to use their discretion to ask about immigration status and can increase trust with immigrant communities.

Models to consider:

- In Iowa, the police department in Storm Lake has had success in conducting outreach to immigrant populations and building trusted channels of communication.
  - <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2019/oct/5/storm-lake-police-chief-wants-immigrants-to-feel-w/>
- The Immigrant Legal Resource Center put together a series of recommendations for Texas law enforcement offices designed to help improve policies and practices when working with immigrant populations.
  - [https://www.ilrc.org/sites/default/files/resources/2019.08\\_ilrc\\_moving\\_texas\\_forward\\_final.pdf](https://www.ilrc.org/sites/default/files/resources/2019.08_ilrc_moving_texas_forward_final.pdf)
- The National Immigration Forum's program titled Bibles, Badges and Businesses for Immigration Reform engages with law enforcement leaders (as well as business and religious leaders) around issues concerning immigration and immigration reform.
  - [https://immigrationforum.org/landing\\_page/bibles-badges-business/](https://immigrationforum.org/landing_page/bibles-badges-business/)

### **3.5.5 Advocate for an Independent Immigration Court System**

One common misperception about immigration is that the immigration court system is a separate and independent court system like other U.S. courts, such as district courts where criminal charges are filed or U.S. Tax Court. Instead, immigration courts are part of the executive branch and the Department of Justice, serving under the Attorney General instead as part of the judicial branch. This has raised several concerns regarding how well immigration courts are able to effectively provide justice to immigrants. Such concerns include:

- 1) Their placement under the executive branch can make them highly susceptible to political influence, with court decisions changing dramatically depending on who is

the Attorney General. The American Bar Association has stated that, "Our current immigration court system cannot meet the standards to which justice demands."<sup>29</sup>

- 2) This system leads to dramatic disparities in the outcome of immigration court cases based on where the court is located and who is serving as a judge.<sup>30</sup>
- 3) Legal representation is not guaranteed, and therefore whether an immigrant is able to obtain an immigration attorney to represent them in court has a significant impact on whether the immigrant can secure a successful outcome.<sup>31</sup>
- 4) Legal standards for immigration judges are significantly different for judges in other court systems. For example, immigration judges are not required to have previous experience with immigration law.<sup>32</sup>

These and other concerns have led many advocates to push for the U.S. to change the immigrant court system to an independent system within the judicial branch of the government. Such a change would have an immense impact on local immigrants who are participating in the immigration court system, could reduce the expenses associated with immigration court (such as finding representation for immigrants), and would allow immigrants and immigrant support organizations to have a greater degree of confidence in court outcomes. In addition to advocacy, highlighting the current state of the immigration court system may help the general public better understand the barriers facing recent arrivals.

The argument to reform the immigration court system is highlighted in a 2019 report from the American Bar Association that states, "In light of the fundamentally changed nature of the threat to the immigration court system, the overall conclusion of this Update Report... is that the current system is irredeemably dysfunctional and on the brink of collapse, and that the only way to resolve the serious system issues within the immigration court system is through transferring the immigration court functions to a newly-created Article I court."

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<sup>29</sup> "ABA urges Congress to create separate immigration courts." American Bar Association. July 2019. Available at: <https://www.americanbar.org/news/abanews/aba-news-archives/2019/07/aba-urges-congress-to-create/>

<sup>30</sup> "2019 Update Report, Volume 2 - Reforming the immigration system: Proposals to promote independence, fairness, efficiency, and professionalism." *American Bar Association Commission on Immigration*. March 2019. Pg. 64 (UD 2-5). Available at: [https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/publications/commission\\_on\\_immigration/2019\\_reforming\\_the\\_immigration\\_system\\_volume\\_2.pdf](https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/publications/commission_on_immigration/2019_reforming_the_immigration_system_volume_2.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> Markowitz, Peter, et al. "Accessing justice: The availability and adequacy of counsel in immigration proceedings." *New York Immigrant Representation Study*. December 2011. Page 3. Available at: <https://justicecorps.org/app/uploads/2020/06/New-York-Immigrant-Representation-Study-I-NYIRS-Steering-Committee-1.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> Rappaport, Nolan. "How many of our immigration judges are amateurs at immigration law?" *The Hill*. 23 November 2020. Available at: <https://thehill.com/opinion/immigration/527104-how-many-of-our-immigration-judges-are-amateurs-at-immigration-law/>

### **3.5.6 Issue Community-Based ID Cards**

One additional barrier facing many immigrants is needing to obtain a valid photo ID to access services. Photo IDs can be necessary for everything from qualifying for government programs to applying for utility services to receiving medical care. They can be especially important when working with law enforcement agencies and emergency services. But for many immigrants, obtaining valid photo ID can be challenging. Regulations and requirements in Iowa can make it difficult to obtain a driver's license. This is certainly true for undocumented immigrants or those still waiting for their immigration court case, but can also be true for documented immigrants as well. For example, Marshallese residents who need to replace their I-94 form are unable to get a driver's license until it is replaced. Given the difficulties residents have faced receiving an updated I-94, this can limit those individuals' ability to obtain a valid photo ID (for more on I-94s, see the informational box in the Legal Assistance section of the Immigration Community Assessment Implementation Guide).

Several communities have worked to resolve this problem by issuing community-based photo IDs. These IDs are not a replacement for a driver's license but can provide residents access to services and resources from which they otherwise might be excluded. There are many models of ID cards (see "Models to Consider" below), but all generally involve local agencies, businesses, and other organizations agreeing to utilize the ID cards as acceptable forms of identification for services. Community-based ID cards can also often be useful for other populations that may struggle to obtain valid photo ID, including elderly people, formerly incarcerated individuals, and people experiencing homelessness. Experience from other community-based ID programs shows that it is best to develop the cards to be useful for as wide a population as possible. This not only makes them more ubiquitous and more widely accepted, but can help avoid any stigma that cards might be "only for immigrants" or "only for the homeless."

A community-based ID card could be a valuable addition for Dubuque and for other communities in the region. With a broad enough coalition of government departments, nonprofit organizations, and businesses supporting the cards, it could provide real value to immigrant groups and to entities like law enforcement and emergency services. There are a number of different models for these type of community-based ID card systems (several of which are located below), and a further analysis and discussion of these systems would be necessary to identify which would best meet local needs.

Models to consider:

- The FaithAction ID program is run by FaithAction International House across several states, including the Central Iowa Community ID Card Program in Story County and Marshall County, Iowa. The program is focused primarily on immigrants with limited legal status. This program is run by a nonprofit organization in close cooperation with local churches and law enforcement agencies.
  - <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/CommunityBasedID.pdf>
  - <https://sites.google.com/view/communityid/home?pli=1>



- The Johnson County Community ID card is a card issued by the local government in Johnson County, Iowa. While it has many similarities to the Central Iowa program, a key difference is that the card is administered by the County Auditor's office.
  - <https://www.johnsoncountyiowa.gov/communityid>
- In Texas, San Antonio and Houston use "Enhanced Library Cards" as community-based ID cards. The ID cards include the individual's photograph, address, and date of birth. Basing the card out of the local library system creates several advantages, including connecting the card to an important public resource, utilizing an existing infrastructure for ID cards, and helping avoid stigma surrounding the ID cards.
  - <https://guides.mysapl.org/enhancedlibrarycard>
  - The following links go to two videos regarding the San Antonio library card in [English](#)<sup>33</sup> and [Spanish](#).<sup>34</sup>

## Translation and Interpretation

### **3.6.1 Compensate Community Members for Translation and Interpretation**

The first recommendation has less to do with increasing the availability of translation and interpretation in the region (though it may help in this regard), and more to do with making sure that those who provide translation and interpretation are fairly compensated. Knowing more than one language is a valuable skill, and individuals who use that skill should be paid for their services whenever possible. It may not always be appropriate or practical, but it is a best practice that should be considered the norm in this region. Doing so not only helps those community members who volunteer their services, but also encourages additional immigrants and multilingual people to offer their services.

One common problem for both interpreters and organizations is an uncertainty around how much these services should cost. Many factors go into this calculation, including the experience the individual has, any technical requirements, the necessary timeline for the translation, etc. The appropriate value will also likely change over time. However, a good template may be that used by the City of Dubuque. For translation and interpretation, they provide:

- 19 cents per word for written translations,
- 25 cents per word for translations that must be completed in 24 hours or less, and
- \$30 per hour for interpretations or making short videos.

These numbers should be reassessed in future years, as appropriate compensation for 2022 may be inadequate in the future due to inflation and other rising costs.

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<sup>33</sup> Video available at: <https://youtu.be/JLmbxF4nsPg>

<sup>34</sup> Video available at: <https://youtu.be/n1ki8CPJUwM>

### **3.6.2 Hire Additional Navigators**

*This recommendation also appears as Recommendation 2.3.1 under Navigators and Recommendation 3.3.1 under Health*

One of the most effective ways for organizations to ensure available translation or interpretation is to hire staff from within immigrant communities who can serve as navigators. Navigators help resolve one of the most imposing barriers facing residents of this region: 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.<sup>35</sup> 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.

The addition of navigators can be a major benefit for helping resolve these issues. Navigators are individuals employed or utilized by service providers to help assist community members with accessing services. The best navigators are those that are both trained in the requirements of service systems and 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. 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.

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, also have staff that, while not navigators, may 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* in the Implementation Guide). 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.

However, while hiring navigators is an undoubtedly powerful tool for helping improve access to services for immigrant populations, it should not be seen as a substitute for capacity and power building. Navigators can serve an important role, but still are meant to move forward the mission of the organization they work for and follow the direction of their (usually non-

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<sup>35</sup> See the following link for an article discussing some of the challenges of navigating government support services: Lowrey, Annie. "The Time Tax." *The Atlantic*. 27 July 2021. Available at: <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/>

immigrant) managers and bosses. This is a very valuable and necessary part of how service organizations in this region work, and navigation plays a critical role in helping to provide equitable access to systems. But it should still not be seen as a replacement for advocacy and power building within immigrant communities.

The role of navigators is especially important in healthcare. Health services can be an intimidating experience, especially if there are language and cultural barriers. Misinformation about medical issues can be common, especially during a health crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic. Understanding what information is correct or how to best engage with complex systems like insurance or medical billing can be very difficult for community leaders and volunteers that are supporting immigrant families. Having a trusted individual who is knowledgeable about health-care systems and paid to assist members of their local community can be a huge asset. Health-care providers and related organizations should consider creating more navigator positions staffed by members from immigrant communities, such as community health workers or community connectors.

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 Recommendation 2.1.3 [on page 16](#).

### **3.6.3 Utilize Available National and State Translation and Interpretation Services**

Sometimes accessing national and state services can be the simplest way to communicate with immigrant populations. For example, many organizations in this region (such as hospitals) utilize LanguageLine Solutions<sup>36</sup> to have consistent access to interpretation services for clients. These options can be valuable resources, especially for organizations that require frequent translation and interpretation services. However, they can also be expensive, and interpretation is generally considered most effective when it is done in-person. Having an interpreter from the community that is known to the client can also be valuable for building trust. So while these options should be utilized as needed, it is also important for communities to develop local resources for interpretation and translation.

Some potential options that are available include:

- Language Line Solutions ([www.languageline.com](http://www.languageline.com)) offers a wide variety of languages for interpretation, and includes the use of technology like teleconferencing.
- Capital Linguists ([www.capitalinguists.com](http://www.capitalinguists.com)) provides translation and interpretation services, including in Marshallese and several Afghan languages.

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<sup>36</sup> [www.languageline.com](http://www.languageline.com)

- The Iowa Interpreters and Translators Association, Inc. ([www.iitanet.org/](http://www.iitanet.org/)) is an organization with a membership of accredited Iowa-based interpreters and translators, and includes a directory of interpreters and translators.

### **3.6.4 Create a Local Translation and Interpretation Database**

As discussed above, there is often a local need for interpreters and translators who can be available to assist in different situations. There are currently a number of individuals in this region who provide these services, some of whom have specialized skills like training in medical translation. While most of these individuals do not have the accreditation to be listed and used by organizations as a licensed translator or interpreter, they still provide incredibly valuable services on a regular basis. Yet it would be a significant benefit if these translation services became more standardized and easily accessible. Currently in many parts of this region, if someone needs translation or interpretation, they either reach out to one or two community members they have a relationship with, or else contact local organizations looking for referrals. This can lead to certain individuals being overused, or challenges if a regularly used interpreter is not available. It can also result in reliance on interpreters and translators of poor quality or who may struggle with more technical interpretation.

In addition, outside of institutions that have set policies around payment for translation and interpretation, many organizations and individuals are uncertain about rates and the other details that are relevant for hiring a translator or interpreter. This can lead to informal agreements that may not include fair-market rates, or any compensation at all. It can often mean that the translators and interpreters may have very little training or understanding about what is required of a translator and interpreter, which could lead to issues.

A possible way to lessen these issues is through the development of a centralized database that lists translators and interpreters as independent contractors. This list could contain names, contact information, languages, translation specialties (medical, legal, etc.), and any special requirements that translators and interpreters may have. It could also be displayed publicly or be available through contacting the host organization. The site could also list expected interpretation and translation rates, as well as guidelines about rush requests, work over the weekend, and other additional factors.

Such a database would likely require a lead organization that would host and maintain this site, adding and removing interpreters as needed. This effort may require funding both for the site and for the staff person directing the work. The host organization may also have several additional responsibilities, including:

- 1) Briefly screening new interpreters to make sure they had sufficient language skills to be interpreters (this could be something with which other interpreter/translators on the list could assist).
- 2) Serving as a place for responses or complaints in case there are issues with a specific interpreter or translator. Any host organization should remember to set a policy about this that all interpreters and translators will understand (such as a three strikes policy).

- 3) Providing training, either through staff or selected volunteers, for new interpreters looking to be part of the database. This would help provide each of the interpreters with additional support, and would help them with some difficult issues, such as:
  - a. Rates
  - b. Rush jobs/weekend jobs
  - c. Setting agreed upon products
  - d. Possible certification and other advancements
  - e. Basic invoices/other documents people may need

Models to consider:

- The City of Dubuque is putting together a list of local translators and interpreters that it will place on its Equity and Human Rights website.
- This research was unable to identify other community-based databases of local interpreters and translators constructed in exactly this manner. However, the following are examples of some ways in which this database could operate:
  - The Iowa Interpreters and Translators Association, Inc. is an organization with a membership of accredited Iowa-based interpreters and translators, and includes a directory of interpreters and translators that includes languages spoken.
    - [www.iitanet.org/](http://www.iitanet.org/)
  - The University of Iowa Human Subjects Offices provides a list of translators in the Iowa City-Coralville area who were willing to have their contact information shared with investigators.
    - <https://hso.research.uiowa.edu/list-translators-iowa-city-coralville>

### **3.6.5 Offer Basic Interpretation Training**

While the most important part of translation and interpretation is being able to speak multiple languages, there are other skills, pieces of knowledge, and ethical considerations that are important for being an interpreter. Often when community members interpret, they may do things that often feel very natural, but can create confusion and misunderstanding. For example, they might modify what one person said in an attempt to make it more understandable, or they might try to answer questions separately without translating. While in some cases these decisions do not cause problems, in others they might lead to misinterpretation and significant issues.

One option is for communities to develop a short, basic training regarding interpretation and translation. While there are many national trainings on interpretation that should be considered (see the next section, *Medical Translation and Interpretation*), these may not be necessary for community members who regularly volunteer to provide translation or interpretation. A shorter training by someone familiar with translation and interpretation could provide valuable guidance to amateur interpreters. Such a training could also be included in the previous recommendation, *Local Translation and Interpretation Database*.

### **3.6.6 Offer Training for Medical Translation and Interpretation**

*This recommendation also appears as Recommendation 3.3.4 under Health*

One significant gap in this region is for licensed medical interpreters and translators, especially for languages like Marshallese that are not commonly spoken throughout much of the United States. Many health-care providers require certified medical translators to make sure that they can correctly translate the technical terms used by staff. However, in many instances these interpreters are not available, and so the providers rely on untrained community members for interpretation. At times, young children have been asked to provide translation when there is no other readily available option. Not only is this potentially inappropriate and could lead to significant mistranslations, but in many cases health-care providers are unable to compensate non-certified interpreters.

This region, and especially locations like Dubuque where languages are commonly spoken that do not have readily available translators, should work to develop the support process and funding to help interested community members become certified for medical interpretation. Courses and tests can be expensive and take extensive time, so it will be important to have individuals who can assist with navigating systems and funding to help cover costs. While the best process and programs may vary from area to area, the following is an option that communities could consider:

1. The Certification Commission for Healthcare Interpreters (CCHI)<sup>37</sup> offers several accreditations that are accepted by many health-care providers.
  - a. For Spanish, Mandarin, and French, CCHI offers its Certified Healthcare Interpreter (CHI) certification.
  - b. For other languages (such as Marshallese), CCHI offers its Core Certification Healthcare Interpreter (CoreCHI) certification. Due to the big lack of interpreters for less commonly spoken languages, this report will primarily discuss the CoreCHI.
2. Applicants for the CoreCHI and CHI certification must meet the following requirements:
  - a. Be at least eighteen years of age.
  - b. Have received a high school diploma or equivalent from any country.
  - c. Be able to demonstrate proficiency in both English and the language of interpretation. This can be done with:
    - i. A high school diploma or equivalent from a country that teaches in the language;
    - ii. Successfully passing a language proficiency test from a reputable testing organization;

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<sup>37</sup> [www.cchicertification.org](http://www.cchicertification.org)

1. A list of suggested English language testing options are available at the CCHI site.<sup>38</sup>
  - a. The TOEFL Essentials test provided by ETS allows for remote testing online.<sup>39</sup>
2. Sites such as Language Testing International (LTI) offer widely accepted language proficiency certificates.<sup>40</sup>
  - a. LTI does not currently appear to offer language testing in Marshallese. For Marshallese, the Avant STAMP WS test is available and accepted by CCHI.<sup>41</sup>
  - iii. Other options are listed in the CCHI Candidate Examination Handbook.<sup>42</sup>
  - d. Completion of a minimum of 40 hours of training (not experience) in health-care interpreting.<sup>43</sup> See “Models to consider” below:
3. The CoreCHI examination includes \$210 worth of fees. The CHI Examination includes an additional \$275 of fees.

Models to consider:

- Heartland Regional Genetics Network provides a medical interpretation training for Marshallese interpreters that fulfills the 40-hour requirement. Several community members have taken part in this training.
  - <https://www.heartlandcollaborative.org>

### **3.6.7 Offer Training for Brain Health Translation and Interpretation**

*This recommendation also appears as Recommendation 3.3.5 under Health*

Separate from medical interpretation and translation, brain health<sup>44</sup> or counseling interpretation requires additional training and commitment for an interpreter. Due to the personal nature of counseling services, an interpreter may become a major participant in any session. Any interpreter would need to have additional training on how to properly participate in counseling sessions, how to correctly interpret for the brain health specialist, and how to operate ethically and confidentially during the sessions. Trust is a key component

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<sup>38</sup> “Frequently Asked Questions.” *CCHICertification.org*. Available at:

<https://cchicertification.org/certifications/faq/>

<sup>39</sup> “TOEFL Essentials Test Resources.” *ETS.org*. Available at: <https://www.ets.org/s/toefl-essentials/test-takers/>

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.languagetesting.com/>

<sup>41</sup> <https://avantassessment.com/stamp-ws>

<sup>42</sup> For more details, see the CCHI Candidate Examination Handbook, available at [https://cchicertification.org/uploads/CCHI\\_Candidate\\_Examination\\_Handbook.pdf](https://cchicertification.org/uploads/CCHI_Candidate_Examination_Handbook.pdf).

<sup>43</sup> A list of potential training programs are listed here: <https://cchicertification.org/prerequisite-programs/>

<sup>44</sup> The Community Foundation uses the term “brain health” when talking about conditions related to a person’s psychological and emotional well-being. The reason for this is to fight against the stigma often associated with the term “mental health.”

of this kind of interpretation, so finding the correct, committed interpreter can be challenging. It is recommended that any effort to recruit translators for counseling sessions be coupled with training and a very thoughtful recruitment process. For more on brain health services for migrants and immigrants, please [see page 45](#).

Models to consider:

- The Iowa Refugee Counseling Center in Iowa City holds counseling sessions for refugees and other immigrants. As part of their counseling sessions they use interpreters who are trained by the Center. Dr. Naomi Ford, who runs the Center, is able to provide trainings for interpreters on how to be successful interpreters for brain health sessions. Dr. Ford could be contracted to provide training sessions for community members who are interested in serving as translators.
  - This training should be accompanied by a training of counselors or brain health providers as well. Both the counselor and the interpreter should understand their roles and how to work cross culturally.
  - <https://www.iccompassion.org/refugeecounseling>
- The Marjorie Kovler Center, a Chicago-based program providing trauma-informed care to survivors of torture, has previously offered training sessions for interpreters.
  - <https://www.heartlandalliance.org/program/marjorie-kovler-center/>
- The National Council on Interpreting in Health Care has produced a working paper titled "A National Code of Ethics for Interpreters in Health Care." This document provides useful information for potential translators and service providers regarding interpretation for brain health.
  - The manual can be accessed at:  
<https://www.ncihc.org/assets/z2021Images/NCIHC%20National%20Code%20of%20Ethics.pdf>.

### **3.6.8 Make Use of Translation Technology**

Recent years have seen impressive developments in new technology that assists with translation and interpretation. As the technology continues to improve, it will be important to look closely at new products to understand how they can fill existing gaps. However, for the near-term at least, it is also important to not let pursuit of new technology products draw attention away from developing local interpretation and translation capacity. This research was not able to identify a technology that is satisfactorily able to address all of the needs of local communities and organizations, especially when it comes to speaking Marshallese or Mayan dialects. Translation technology can be a useful tool, but attempts to treat it as a panacea should be viewed skeptically until additional research and pilot programs demonstrate their true utility.



Models to consider:

- The City of Dubuque is currently conducting a review of LanguageLine<sup>45</sup> usage within the City, and with external partners. Findings from this assessment could provide valuable translation support options for local organizations, especially with Spanish.
- Several organizations and individuals in Dubuque have begun piloting the use of Timekettle translation earbuds. These earbuds provide interpretation for two people wearing the earbuds, allowing them to talk back and forth without needing to have an interpreter present. At the time of this writing, the earbuds do not support translation for the Marshallese language or Mayan dialects. While this report cannot currently state whether these will be valuable tools for local service providers and other stakeholders due to a lack of experience with the devices, local partners should share their experiences to determine what role they these earbuds could play in the community.
  - <https://www.timekettle.co/>

## Workforce and Employment

### **3.7.1 Develop Employer Toolkits and Assistance**

To assist employers with making the needed changes to their business procedures so they can better hire and retain members from immigrant communities, the region should develop toolkits and/or a consulting capacity to help with changes and recommendations. This capacity could then be used by interested employers to institute new policies and practices and to gain connections to local immigrant populations. It would also help create work environments where immigrant employees can thrive and be successful. And by making the changes at the employer level, it reduces the reliance on individual employees gaining the necessary skills to be more employable (language skills, “soft skills,” etc.). It may be easier and less resource intensive for one employer to adapt their policies than for a dozen potential employees to significantly improve their English skills, for example.

Examples of the services and benefits offered by the toolkit/capacity include:

- Directions for how to modify job postings, safety manuals, job instructions, and other important documents into different languages.
- Analysis of how a company might be able to successfully pair a bilingual employee with several other employees who are not proficient in English.
- Education on unknown cultural differences that could cause friction if not identified.
- Suggested changes in policies or procedures that will limit immigrant employee attrition.
- Recommendations for communication plans and other policies to help ensure that needed changes are adopted throughout the business.

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<sup>45</sup> [www.language.com](http://www.language.com)

- Explanations of legal or document requirements, and how the business can best support their new employee in these areas.

It is likely that the details of the toolkit or training would need to be specifically tailored to the immigrant group in question (recruiting employees from the Latino community is different than recruiting from Afghan refugees). NICC has some ability to do this kind of work with local businesses, but a more extensive and formal capacity should be developed that local employers can utilize.

Models to consider:

- Several local employers have already successfully made some of these changes and could serve as excellent templates for any toolkit. Examples include:
  - Guttenberg Industries in Garnavillo successfully revised their policies and processes in order to hire from the local Latino community.
  - Hormel Foods and other food processing companies have had success in Dubuque employing Marshallese workers.
  - During focus group sessions, both Romper Stompers Child Care Center and Miracle Carwash on Dodge St. were identified as good at working with Marshallese employees.

### **3.7.2 Adopt a Natural Helper Program**

*This recommendation also appears as Recommendation 2.1.3 under Capacity and Power Building*

One of the key assets located in this region’s immigrant communities are dedicated volunteers. Many of the key leaders, connectors, and translators working to support immigrant communities are volunteers who put in long hours to help improve their communities. They are often trusted both by community members and local nonprofit organizations, and serve as a key point of outreach and input. These volunteers should be acknowledged and celebrated for their work.

Yet such reliance on volunteers is not ideal. Rarely are they compensated for their efforts, which means that they often work other jobs to support themselves, leaving limited time to help other community members, attend meetings, etc. Many are also untrained regarding the systems and institutions they are connecting to and may lack information about how best to efficiently direct other immigrants to services. These factors create bottlenecks around connections between immigrant communities and service organizations and increase the likelihood of misinformation and navigational challenges.

One program that has been successful in helping address some of these issues is a “Natural Helper” program. In a Natural Helper program, key volunteers (who are usually multilingual) are trained on local systems and services and are often provided with greater access to local resources and important connections. They are also compensated for their participation in this program, which might include stipends, recognition, and certificates or credentials from

local educational institutions that can be valuable for their careers. The volunteers then agree to remain a part of the program for a period of time (often at least a year) after receiving their training.

Natural Helper programs connect key volunteers with local institutions, provide them with training and clear resources for answering questions, and then work to compensate them for their involvement. These programs have also been found to give many participants a greater sense of belonging to where they live and a sense of connection to local organizations and service providers. It is also a good way to identify leaders for additional civic participation, such as taking roles on boards or advisory committees.

Establishing and resourcing a natural helper program can provide a more formal structure to the frequent work done through immigrant volunteer leaders and can improve the services provided through those leaders. It also helps recognize and compensate dedicated volunteers, which can increase their satisfaction and participation and encourage others to step into leadership roles.

Natural helpers could be particularly beneficial for connecting immigrants to workforce opportunities, as demonstrated by a new local pilot program (see “Models to consider”).

Models to consider:

- Northeast Iowa Community College (NICC) is currently developing a pilot program aimed at training and compensating individuals from underserved populations so that they can connect members of their community with job training opportunities. This includes working with members of immigrant populations. The NICC pilot program, which is still in development, goes beyond many other models listed in this report by providing stipends for trainings and financial incentives for each individual who is successfully connected to an NICC program. The combination of empowering individuals to serve their community and compensating them for their time and effort is an exciting design that should be supported by the community.
- City of Portland, ME - Office of Economic Opportunity: The City of Portland runs a Natural Helpers Leadership Program that trains Natural Helpers to better support their communities. The program provides participants with a stipend, and partners with the University of Southern Maine to provide everyone with a credential (previously a certificate, now a “badge”).
  - <https://www.portlandofopportunity.com/natural-helpers>
- Immigrant Welcome Center: The Immigrant Welcome Center in Indianapolis utilizes a Natural Helper program.
  - <https://www.immigrantwelcomecenter.org/get-involved/volunteer/>
- Welcoming America Community of Practice: Welcoming America has previously launched a community of practice to provide additional support to communities developing Natural Helper programs.
  - [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1CyeeT08scAunaLQCpm0bCebgN2lnPLWPSwuF\\_NjDwYl/edit#](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1CyeeT08scAunaLQCpm0bCebgN2lnPLWPSwuF_NjDwYl/edit#)

### **3.7.3 Add Navigators, Success Coaches, and Immigrant Outreach Staff**

A local success story around workforce development is NICC's Success Coach model, which utilizes people with relationships and lived experiences to connect to underserved populations and help them navigate workforce development programs. NICC has recently worked to bring on Success Coaches and other staff focused specifically on extending this model to immigrant population. This use of navigators has found success for a number of local health-care organizations, and has the potential to create a similar benefit for workforce programs.

Models to consider:

- Iowa State University Extension and Outreach has employed Latino staff who work as navigators supporting immigrant entrepreneurs in rural communities.
  - <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/communities/latino-business-and-community-development>

### **3.7.4 Offer Additional Non-English Workforce Training Options**

One existing bottleneck for many immigrants looking to gain additional skills is the reliance on English proficiency to take workforce training courses. While some workforce trainings are offered in languages other than English, many are not. This can be a significant limitation for immigrant jobseekers, as it requires them to first successfully take English language courses before they can be upskilled for employment. But gaining proficiency in English can take time, and for immigrant members who have multiple other responsibilities like working or raising a family, gaining the necessary English skills can seem like an impossible task.

Being able to offer trainings in languages other than English can allow immigrants to gain new skills and education without first relying on them completing English proficiency classes. However, to ensure that participants who graduate from these programs are successful, this should be paired with the recommendation *Employer Toolkits and Assistance* [on page 72](#).

Models to consider:

- The technology company EnGen focuses on providing language instruction for potential workers that is centered around their area of study. The goal is to focus on developing the language proficiency needed to be employed in that position, instead of a broader English proficiency.
  - [www.getEnGen.com](http://www.getEnGen.com)

### **3.7.5 Implement a RISE AmeriCorps Program**

The AmeriCorps<sup>46</sup> program has provided local institutions (including the Community Foundation) with additional support from hard working graduates interested in helping meet community needs. Recently, EMBARC in Des Moines has begun administering another AmeriCorps program called RISE AmeriCorps,<sup>47</sup> which is focused on pairing AmeriCorps “members” who are immigrants with non-profits that serve immigrant communities. The program is primarily focused on education and workforce development, and provides AmeriCorps members with a living allowance as well as some funding for future education. A program like this could be a great way to utilize young people with language skills to help serve local immigrant communities.

However, implementing this program in Dubuque could raise several challenges, which would be important to consider before pursuing this program:

- The RISE program often recruits members from around the state with appropriate language skills to be able to engage with immigrant populations. In Dubuque, this would be most useful for engaging with Spanish-speaking communities. However, because of the relative scarcity of people around the state who speak Marshallese and Mayan dialects like Ixil, any program focused on the Marshallese or Guatemalan communities might be best served by identifying a candidate from within Dubuque.
- The compensation for the RISE program is focused primarily on providing a living allowance, totaling a maximum of \$19,000 for the year, with the potential for a \$6,000 scholarship for future education. This compensation may not be enough to attract many local immigrant young people, who often face intense pressure to earn a living and support themselves or family members. Additional compensation options should potentially be considered, including:
  - Publicizing the position to make it more prestigious.
  - Connecting the position to potential future employment, or creating numerous opportunities for networking and building connections with local employers.
  - Host organizations are able to provide “retention bonuses” or “performance bonuses” that could help increase the compensation and make the position more attractive.

### **3.7.6 Provide Additional Workforce Engagement Options for Immigrant Youth (Guatemalan Unaccompanied Minors)**

*This recommendation also appears as Recommendation 3.2.5 under Education*

Providing immigrant students with clear pathways to family-sustaining careers should be a priority. Enabling immigrant students to pursue education and training that will connect them to high-paying, quality jobs will be a powerful driver in improving the livelihoods of

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<sup>46</sup> <https://americorps.gov/>

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.embarciowa.org/services/rise-program>

immigrant families and boosting local economic growth. With immigrant populations being some of the fastest growing demographics in the region, it is critical that young people are able to be quickly and seamlessly connected to good jobs.

A population that should receive specific attention is local Guatemalan Unaccompanied Minors. A recent change now allows individuals with Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) – a temporary status often pursued by Guatemalan unaccompanied minors – to get work authorizations. This is an important change, as it will allow many of these individuals to financially support themselves while they continue their court case. Because many of these individuals will be under the age of 18, it is very important that the community should engage with them and support them around work and career opportunities. Connecting these individuals to safe and well-paying jobs, as well as training and education that can lead to good career opportunities, is important for supporting this population and helping to provide a sustainable economic future.

Some local organizations (including NICC, the Dubuque Community School District, and Tri-State VIATS) are already working on how to best engage and support these students. This work should be continued, with an emphasis put on skills training programs for those students who are struggling to get their high school degree. Previous education levels can vary significantly for unaccompanied minors who come to Dubuque, and so helping connect those who are struggling with good career opportunities is important.

There are also other potential options that should be considered when it comes to developing education and workforce training programs for these SIJS recipients:

- Pair the unaccompanied minors, and especially girls who may face greater barriers to obtaining well-paying career opportunities, with appropriate mentors in their field of study. For example, if Guatemalan girls are considering NICC's welding program, connecting them with a female welder from a local business who can provide additional support could provide a valuable asset in helping the participant complete their training program.
- Utilize a "Guatemalan Mentor" position to help focus on career opportunities for students still in school. The Guatemalan Mentor position is described in more detail [on page 35](#).
- A challenge for this community will be to help these SIJS recipients, many of whom are still in high school, to balance the need to work with the need to study for school and improve their English. An area for future consideration would be designing a "fellowship" or work program where students were paid a living wage, learned a skill on the job, and were provided with time and support for schoolwork and/or English lessons. Such a program would need a strong host organization and would likely require additional financial support.

### **3.7.7 Provide Workforce Support to International Students**

Dubuque’s higher education institutions are a major asset for the region, and the international students who study there are an important and valuable part of this community. Being able to retain those students and have them work and live in the region should be a local goal. However, there are a number of barriers that limit the ability of international students to build long-term careers in Dubuque. In addition to a frequent disconnect between international students and the larger Dubuque community, the process for granting graduating students a work visa to work for Dubuque companies (most commonly the

#### **H-1B Visas**

H-1B visas are one of the primary ways that immigrants with a bachelor’s degree or higher are able to gain authorization to work for U.S. companies. To sponsor an immigrant for an H-1B visa, a company must demonstrate that they are unable to fill the position through non-immigrant candidates and must go through a lengthy application process. H-1B visas can lead to permanent legal residence (green cards).

Only 85,000 H-1B visas are made available each year. In FY2023 the U.S. government received 483,927 registrations, meaning that only 17.6% of registrations were met by the available cap space. Completing H-1B visas also appears to be more challenging for smaller communities. In an analysis of FY2021 H-1B visa activity in the U.S., Dubuque accounted for less than 0.002% of H-1B worker activity, or 6.33% of what would be expected given the size of the population.

H-1B Visa) can be challenging to complete, often requiring the assistance of an immigration attorney. Many companies who would be interested in retaining international students are unable to do so because of the complicated process or the fees that are involved. On top of this, only a certain number of H-1B visas are released each year, meaning that students and companies that do go through the process are not guaranteed to be successful.<sup>48</sup>

Establishing a local resource focused around retaining international students could address some of these issues. Such a resource could help support international students, assist businesses with navigating the H-1B process, and work to create connections between international students and local employers. Potential areas of focus include:

- Building relationships with international students and connecting them with local businesses and local cultural activities.
- Advocating for increased use of OPT authorization and providing information to both students and businesses interested in this option.
  - The Optional Practical Training (OPT) program allows a student graduating with a bachelor, masters, or doctoral degree to work full-time in the United

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<sup>48</sup> Numbers for number of FY2023 H-1B registrations are available <https://www.uscis.gov/working-in-the-united-states/temporary-workers/h-1b-specialty-occupations-and-fashion-models/h-1b-electronic-registration-process>. FY2021 visa activity rates were calculated using number of total worker positions for H-1B visas from the LCA Disclosure Data for FY2021, available at: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/foreign-labor/performance>

States for up to 12 months for a non-STEM<sup>49</sup> degree holder or 36 months for a STEM degree holder. While 12 months is a limited time frame, this pathway allows for a much easier connection for graduating students and businesses, as well as creating time for students to access a longer-term visa through the H-1B process or another route (such as marriage or family petitions).

- Providing resources and advice to businesses looking to hire international students, such as referrals to immigration attorneys to help with the H-1B process.
- Granting funding to help cover fee costs for either students or businesses that may be otherwise discouraged from pursuing an H-1B visa.

Such a resource could be provided by a government entity or a local organization focused on workforce development or immigration. It could also potentially be provided by a collaborative group of organizations - including those focused on education, workforce, and immigration - in order to develop collective resources and a shared expertise.

Models to consider:

- The Michigan Global Talent Retention Initiative (GTRI) has dedicated staff that work to retain international students in the state. GTRI engages with both employers and students, promotes awareness of opportunities, and works to create a welcoming environment for international students within the local business community.
  - <https://globaldetroitmi.org/gtri/>
- The St. Louis Mosaic Project is a collective effort that builds partnerships with businesses, universities, and other key stakeholders in order to connect foreign students with local businesses.
  - <https://www.stlmosaicproject.org/>

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<sup>49</sup> STEM refers to Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics.