

**WELCOME PLAN**  
KENT COUNTY











# TABLE OF CONTENTS

4	Gateways for Growth Steering Committee
5	Introduction
6	New Americans' Top 5 Priorities
7	The Plan
13	Engaged Communities
16	Maximize The Economic Potential Of New Americans
19	Improve New Americans' Educational Outcomes
23	Provide Equitable Access To Services
28	Ensure All Kent County Residents Are And Feel Safe
31	Additional Considerations



# GATEWAYS FOR GROWTH STEERING COMMITTEE



**Patti Caudill**  
Diversity & Inclusion  
Manager  
City of Grand Rapids

*Patricia Caudill*



**Guillermo Cisneros**  
Executive Director  
West Michigan Hispanic  
Chamber of Commerce

*Guillermo Cisneros*



**Omar Cuevas**  
VP of Sales and Marketing  
Grand Rapids Chamber

*Omar Cuevas*



**Elvira Kovachevich**  
Welcome Plan Project  
Coordinator  
Samaritas

*Elvira Kovachevich*



**Lori Latham**  
Public Relations  
Director  
Kent County

*Lori Latham*



**Joel Lautenbach**  
Executive Director of  
Development  
Samaritas

*Joel R. Lautenbach*



**Stacy Stout**  
Director of Equity &  
Engagement  
City of Grand Rapids

*Stacy Stout*

## TASK FORCE

African Collaborative Network  
Bethany Christian Services  
Calvin Center for Social Research  
Cascade Engineering  
City of Grand Rapids  
City of Kentwood  
City of Wyoming  
City of Wyoming Police  
Fifth Third Bank  
Global Michigan  
Grand Rapids Chamber  
Grand Rapids Asian-Pacific Festival  
Grand Rapids Community College  
Grand Rapids Community Foundation  
Grand Rapids Public Schools  
Hispanic Center of Western Michigan  
Kent County  
Kent County Health Department  
Kent County Sheriff  
Kent District Library  
Kent Intermediate School District  
Kentwood Public Schools  
Literacy Center of West Michigan  
Marvin Law Office  
Michigan Immigrant Rights Center  
Refugee Education Center  
Samaritas  
Spectrum Health  
Steelcase  
The Right Place  
Treetops Collective  
Vietnamese Community  
Warner Norcross + Judd LLP  
Welcoming Michigan  
West Michigan Asian American Association  
West Michigan Hispanic Chamber of Commerce

A decorative graphic on the left side of the page, consisting of several triangles in teal, yellow, red, and white, arranged in a cluster.

# CREATING A WELCOMING AND INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR NEW AMERICANS IN KENT COUNTY

We know how important a broadly diverse population is for the success of our state. Immigration is key to increasing diversity in our population and boosting our economy. Without immigration growth, the state of Michigan would be poised to lose population for the second census in a row. Perhaps even more impressive, the economic power of Grand Rapids' immigrant community alone grew by more than \$100 million in just one year, and immigrants in Grand Rapids hold nearly \$1.5 billion in spending power. At the core of this initiative is the belief that Grand Rapids and Kent County are home to everyone who lives here, and it should feel like it too.

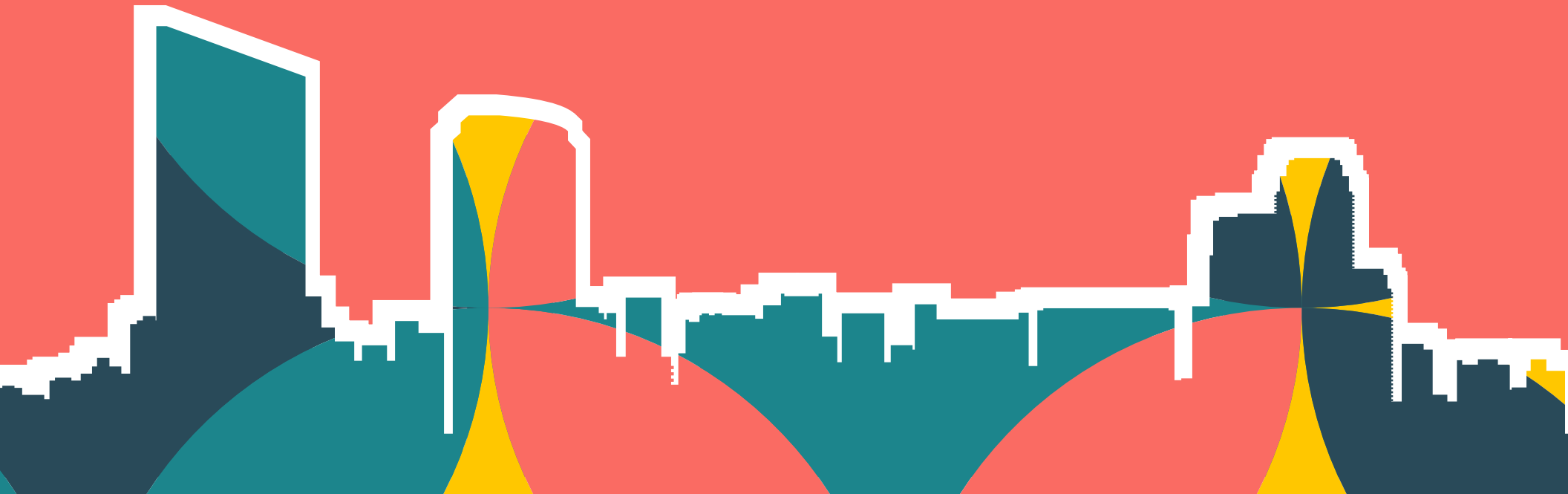
Creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for New Americans in Kent County is not only the right thing to do, it also contributes economically to the area's wellbeing. We want New Americans to stay in the area; they'll stay if they feel welcomed, included, and valued.

*Gateways for Growth Steering Committee*

[KentCountyNewAmericans.org](https://KentCountyNewAmericans.org)

# NEW AMERICANS' TOP FIVE PRIORITIES

1. Freedom to work in my desired profession
2. Freedom to maintain my culture, religion, and traditions
3. Achieving desired level of English
4. Being actively involved in my children's education, safety, and future
5. Having Americans understand my culture, religion, and circumstances





# THE PLAN

Gateways for Growth in Kent County and Grand Rapids is a community-led process aimed at implementing welcoming initiatives. This is spearheaded by 36 multi-sector organizations who value the diversity of the community and the need to celebrate and welcome all community members.

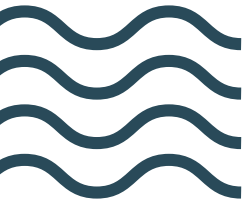
Welcoming work is not always easy. Given the global pandemic, welcoming work is even more important than ever. COVID-19 exposed and highlighted societal inequities and inequalities. Nonetheless, our community is filled with resilient leaders who recognize that now is the time to make our community better for every single person.

In 2018, Samaritas, along with the City of Grand Rapids, the Grand Rapids Chamber, The Right Place, and the West Michigan Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, applied for and received a research award from Gateways for Growth II, a national initiative focused on helping communities develop multi-sector plans to be more welcoming to immigrants and refugees. This effort collaboratively developed a report on the economic impact of New Americans in Kent County, released September 12, 2018 through two community events.  
*(Continued)*









*(Continued)*

Continuing the momentum, our community was again selected as a Gateways for Growth community in 2019, this time receiving technical assistance in strategic planning to create a Welcome Plan. Being chosen as a Gateways for Growth awardee twice demonstrates our community's commitment to building strategic and concrete plans to foster an even healthier, more welcoming community.

This Welcome Plan, and the research behind it, will help us think more proactively about creating an environment that sends a message of inclusion, maximizes contributions of all residents, and gives community members the tools they need to thrive.

To address this work in greater Grand Rapids, it was decided to assemble a multi-sector task force called the Welcome Plan Committee and to hire a Welcome Plan Coordinator.

The Welcome Plan Committee consisted of 36 multi-sector members with key representatives of health care, education, government, business, law enforcement, housing, and immigrants and refugees.

Together, members of our community gathered the voices of New Americans to identify top priorities for the Welcome Plan and ultimately create a welcoming community.

Throughout this process, a Steering Committee composed of representatives from the City of Grand Rapids, Kent County, the Grand Rapids Chamber, the West Michigan Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and Samaritas worked with the Project Coordinator to maintain forward progress and develop a Welcome Plan.

Because the goal of Gateways for Growth is to create a Welcome Plan that promotes welcoming, belonging, and overall immigrant integration, our Welcome Plan needed to come from New Americans, allowing their voices to guide the process and recommendations. As a result, beginning in January 2019, two different research initiatives (survey distribution and focus groups) helped identify New Americans' top priorities and barriers to achieving those priorities. The results were then articulated into a Welcome Plan in late 2019 and early 2020.

The Welcome Plan is structured to address each barrier within five categories: civic engagement, economic development, safe and connected communities, education, and equitable access to services.

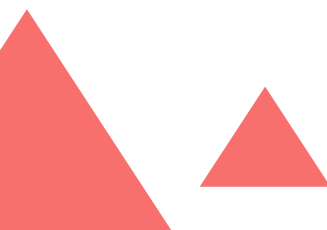
Throughout the initiative, uplifting New American voices was paramount. As such, the Welcome Plan is a sum of barriers and solutions identified and expressed by New Americans in Kent County. This reinforces that the Welcome Plan is built by New Americans, not simply for them.

Ultimately, this Welcome Plan is not a solution to all the systemic barriers that New Americans face in our community. Still, it is a living document that can be reviewed and revised according to its success and needs. Above all, this Welcome Plan is a testament to our community's commitment to welcoming New Americans.



***“The Welcome Plan is a critical component of the City of Grand Rapids’ broader strategy to make our organization and city more inclusive and equitable. Being a welcoming community, both in culture and policy, is key to embracing immigrants and long-time residents.”***

**- Stacy Stout, Director of Equity & Engagement, City of Grand Rapids**



**Immigrants make critical contributions to the county's economy.**



**In 2018, immigrants in Kent County paid**

**\$376M IN TAXES**

**leaving them with nearly**

**\$1.1B IN SPENDING POWER.**











# ENGAGED COMMUNITIES

## Goal 1:

Increase connectedness among and between communities to foster a deeper sense of belonging in Kent County.

### Recommendation 1:

Create a community-wide social media platform where networking opportunities and cultural events can be shared and open dialogue among residents encouraged.

### Recommendation 2:

Collaborate with media outlets to connect New Americans with each other and the broader community.

### Strategy 1:

Increase the frequency of earned media coverage (newspapers, television, and radio) about the stories of New Americans, community events and festivals, and achievements.

### Strategy 2:

Build capacity of New Americans to engage media partners, utilize social media, and create their own content.

### Metric:

An annual connectedness and belonging survey will be compared to initial responses and media engagement will be tracked.



***“One of our five values at the West Michigan Hispanic Chamber of Commerce is advocacy. We are committed to ensuring that our entire community benefits from a thriving economy. Every individual, organization, or business, no matter the ethnicity, should have equitable access to resources that guarantee its prosperity.”***

- Guillermo Cisneros, Executive Director, West Michigan Hispanic Chamber of Commerce



# ENGAGED COMMUNITIES

## Goal 2:

Connect community members to existing engagement opportunities.

## Recommendation 1:

Utilize existing resources to help New Americans integrate and thrive.

---

## Strategy 1:

Iterate and expand Our City Academy “New American orientation” model that covers, at a minimum, the role of local governments, emergency crisis intervention (i.e., natural disaster relief), local laws, self-advocacy, health access, and school options.

## Strategy 2:

Connect New Americans with a culturally competent person or organization to help them navigate resources, opportunities to engage, and increase knowledge of local practices.

---

## Metric:

Track the number of participants and demographics.







# ENGAGED COMMUNITIES

## Goal 3:

Support New Americans to be in elected office, on commissions and boards, and at key decision-making tables.

### Recommendation 1:

Provide board governance and leadership development for New Americans.

### Recommendation 2:

Orient New Americans on the process to run for and hold elected office.

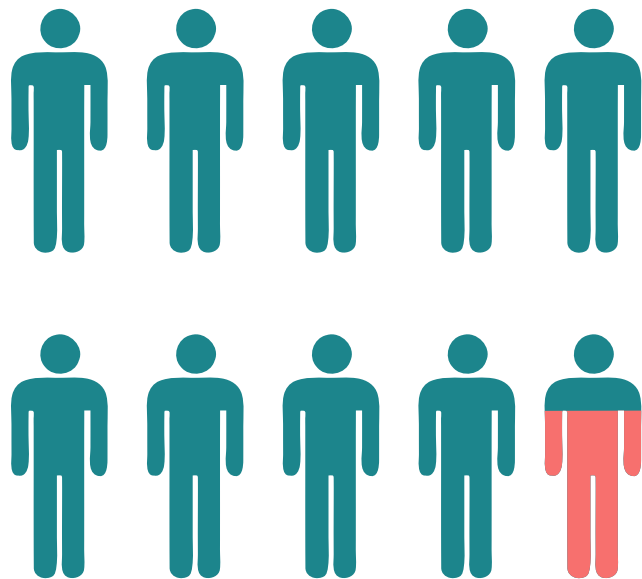
### Recommendation 3:

Assess organizational readiness, culture, and practices to identify and remove barriers to recruit, retain, and lift New American voices on the board.

---

### Metric:

10 New Americans in elected positions and boards throughout the county, inclusive of cities per year.



**AS OF 2018,**  
**55,595 IMMIGRANTS CALLED**  
**KENT COUNTY HOME.**  
**THEY MADE UP 8.6% OF THE**  
**COUNTY'S TOTAL POPULATION.**



# MAXIMIZE THE ECONOMIC POTENTIAL OF NEW AMERICANS

## Goal 1:

Enhance business resources for New American entrepreneurs and business owners.

### Recommendation 1:

Partner with entrepreneurial service organizations (ESOs) to develop a resource database for New American pre-entrepreneurs, entrepreneurs, and business owners.

### Recommendation 2:

Support investment in training, coaching, and seed money for New Americans to start their own businesses and enter the local entrepreneurial ecosystem for support and networking.

### Recommendation 3:

Support businesses owned and operated by New Americans to expand business through financial and technical training support.

### Recommendation 4:

Enhance and update existing local business directories to identify and include New American-owned businesses.

---

### Metric:

Establish baseline and measure increases in the number of New American businesses and participants in ideation organizations (e.g., Spring GR, Start Garden, etc.), businesses served by ESOs, and the number of jobs created by New American-owned businesses.



***“The successful regions of the future will be the ones who embrace inclusion as part of their economic growth strategy. In order for Grand Rapids to remain competitive, we must be welcoming to New Americans and this plan is an actionable step in the right direction.”***

- Birgit Klohs, President and CEO, The Right Place





# MAXIMIZE THE ECONOMIC POTENTIAL OF NEW AMERICANS

## Goal 2:

Help New Americans maximize and leverage their skill sets and promote best practices to hire and retain New Americans.

### Recommendation 1:

Advocate for and support flexibility in certifications and licensing to recognize foreign work experience to minimize or eliminate barriers.

### Recommendation 2:

Train employers on evidence-based hiring processes, such as HireReach and Visa programs.

### Recommendation 3:

Create a talent pipeline of New Americans for translation and interpretation services.



### Recommendation 4:

Facilitate community connections with New Americans through local welcoming events.

### Recommendation 5:

Promote affinity groups and organizations, such as the Latina Network of West Michigan, West Michigan Asian American Association, and the African Community Network, as a resource to retain and support local New American talent.



---

## Metric:

Coordinate work with available resources to create a baseline of skills needed. Work to connect New Americans to organizations that have specific needs.



**As more immigrants in Kent County naturalize and become eligible to vote, they continue to gain power at the voting booth.**



**As of 2018,  
20,649 IMMIGRANTS  
WERE ELIGIBLE VOTERS.**





# IMPROVE NEW AMERICANS' EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

## Goal 1:

Partner with community organizations, like Kent Intermediate School District (Kent ISD), to increase cultural competency and diversity among school staff, administration, teachers, and in education-system policies to promote inclusion and equity and advance the following recommendations.

### Recommendation 1:

Expand professional development for Pre-K through 12 and higher education staff and teachers/professors to include training on implicit bias, institutional and systemic racism, and cultural competency to increase communities of color's graduation rate.

### Recommendation 2:

Revise the college-education program curriculum to include structural and historical racism of the sector, microaggressions in the classroom, cultural competency, implicit bias, and other topics to maximize their awareness and skills to educate New American students.

### Recommendation 3:

Hire, develop, and retain top administrators, staff, and teachers who reflect the students' racial, ethnic, language, and cultural diversity.

## Metric:

Measure graduation rates, collegiate enrollment, and staff and faculty diversity over time.



***“Kentwood Public Schools is thrilled to be a part of the Welcome Plan. As the most diverse school district in the State of Michigan, this action plan is exactly what we believe in. It is important to not only welcome new Americans to West Michigan, but also to celebrate the wonderful tapestry of culture they bring. The Kentwood Community is proud to be a part of the Gateways for Growth initiative and we are excited to watch it in action.”***

- Michael Zoerhoff, Superintendent, Kentwood Public Schools



# IMPROVE NEW AMERICANS' EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

## Goal 2:

Improve English as a Second Language (ESL) services to adapt to New Americans' current language and life needs.

### Recommendation 1:

Strengthen communication and alignment among ESL service providers, including Kent ISD, Literacy Center of West Michigan, and Grand Rapids Community College, for greater collaboration, outcomes, and participant access (i.e., one application for all services).

### Recommendation 2:

Promote and scale workforce ESL services to foster upward mobility for participants.

### Recommendation 3:

Promote ESL opportunities more broadly.

---

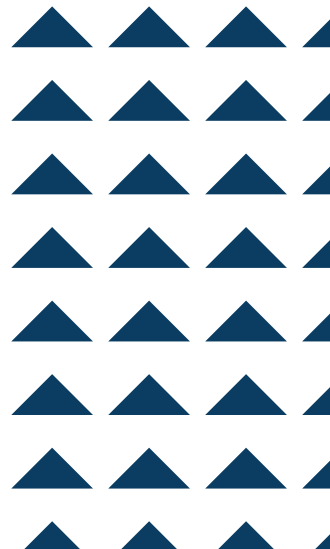
### Metric:

Increase in the number of program graduates and corporate partners.



***“The Welcome Plan brings us one step closer to building stronger connections for New Americans, highlighting the beauty of our diverse communities, and enhancing economic opportunities that are accessible for all.”***

- Valissa Armstead, Director of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, Spectrum Health





# IMPROVE NEW AMERICANS' EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

## Goal 3:

Prepare and support New Americans to successfully complete secondary education ready for college enrollment and completion, or work.

## Recommendation 1:

Increase awareness and utilization of college preparation opportunities for New American middle and high school students.

### Strategy 1:

Identify and partner with community organizations to deliver key academic and career strategies, such as curriculum/credits to graduate, dual enrollment/middle college, and post-graduation options.

### Strategy 2:

Explore school-based mentors to support students and families to navigate school and community systems. Mentors can also communicate with schools on policy impact on New Americans.



## Recommendation 2:

Increase completion of post-secondary certification training.

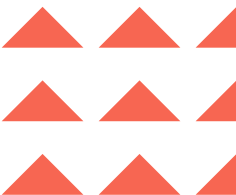
### Strategy 1:

Pilot translation and interpretation certification classes in high school and higher education, instead of foreign language classes for multilingual students.



## Metric:

Measure an increase in graduation rates in schools that implement academic and social support for New American students.



Immigrants play an important role in  
Kent County as **JOB CREATORS** and  
could help drive business growth in  
a post-COVID-19 economy.





# PROVIDE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO SERVICES

## Goal 1:

Strengthen and elevate the use of existing resources by New Americans.

### Recommendation 1:

Highlight language access resources.

### Recommendation 2:

Convene New American service providers annually to identify call trends, provider alignment, collaboration opportunities, and to update a list of providers.

### Recommendation 3:

Promote and annually update 211 with New American service providers and community leaders.

---

### Metric:

Increase the diversity of participants.



***“Grand Rapids Community Foundation seeks to help create a true sense of place and belonging for everyone in Kent County. We support the creation and implementation of the Gateways to Growth Welcome Plan and recognize its ability to help our community achieve that goal. Community designed systems change is necessary to ensure all our neighbors have equitable access to opportunity, resources, and success.”***

- Erika VanDyke, Program Officer, Grand Rapids Community Foundation



# PROVIDE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO SERVICES

## Goal 2:

Increase organizations' capacity to serve their customers through the hiring of staff with language and cultural competency skills that are reflective of the communities they serve.

### Recommendation 1:

Conduct an internal assessment of organizational readiness and environment for diverse climate and services.

### Recommendation 2:

Ensure organizational staffing model for language is proportionate to the customer service needs of the community.

### Recommendation 3:

Incorporate New American perspectives in policy and strategy development for the organization through hires or contracting.

---

### Metric:

Promote DEI training organizations and materials and measure participation.

Привет

Witaj

Hello

Ciao

Bonjour

## PROVIDE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO SERVICES

### Goal 3:

Provide quality, culturally-responsive translated materials, and communication.

#### Recommendation 1:

Provide translated materials, communications, and interpretation services as needed or requested by constituents for all to benefit from and engage with local government and essential public services.

#### Recommendation 2:

Utilize professional translation and interpretation services to ensure quality communications.

#### Recommendation 3:

Provide alternatives to written materials, such as videos and audio links, to maximize access to information.

---

#### Metric:

Increase in materials being translated and available interpretation services.



*“The Welcome Plan demonstrates how government, non-profits, schools, universities, and businesses can work together to create an inclusive and prosperous community for New Americans and all people. This plan can help everyone thrive economically, improve accessibility to resources, and build brighter futures for our community members.”*

- Mercedes Barragan, Senior Talent Programs Specialist, Spectrum Health



# PROVIDE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO SERVICES

## Goal 4:

Supplement support for refugees beyond the current three months offered by the federal government.

### Recommendation 1:

Partner with health, education, government, and other organizations' services to meet refugees' unique needs.

### Recommendation 2:

Create a support system for New Americans after resettlement agencies have placed them and ended services.

### Strategy 1:

Create a community cohort of New Americans who have already acclimated to the United States to mentor or assist those who recently arrived.

---

### Metric:

Increase in community support through cash assistance, volunteering, and gifts.



***“A Welcome Plan opens up new partnership opportunities needed to ensure that refugees that settle in Kent County receive the kind of educational, vocational, medical, and economic support services that will enable them to thrive and to contribute to our community in meaningful ways.”***

- Sam Beals, Chief Executive Officer, Samaritas



**As of 2018, there were**

**2,031**

**immigrant entrepreneurs  
in Kent County.**



# ENSURE ALL KENT COUNTY RESIDENTS ARE AND FEEL SAFE

## Goal 1:

Enhance relationships and communication between New Americans and law enforcement to better serve and protect the community and keep officers safe.

## Recommendation 1:

Increase multi-language and cultural competency skills among law enforcement and staff.

### Strategy 1:

In partnership with community organizations, provide language training for law enforcement to increase bilingual skills and cultural competency focused on basic procedures.

### Strategy 2:

Prioritize multilingual skills and cultural competency training in hires, promotions, and among all staff.

---

## Recommendation 2:

Build relationships between law enforcement and diverse cultures.

### Strategy 1:

Supplement ongoing cultural competency training with New American guest speakers and trainers.

### Strategy 2:

Partner with New American community leaders to enhance engagement and proactive interactions of law enforcement at community events.

### Strategy 3:

Foster positive youth engagement with law enforcement.







# ENSURE ALL KENT COUNTY RESIDENTS ARE AND FEEL SAFE

## Recommendation 3:

Enhance accountability and transparency for the community.

### Strategy 1:

Publicly share data on law enforcement policies, jail population, arrest, use of deadly force, and resident complaint statistics.

### Strategy 2:

Educate and promote the entire process to file law enforcement complaints with an impartial point of contact within an organization such as a corporate counsel office or human resources department or another neutral partner.

---

## Recommendation 4:

Increase New Americans' awareness and understanding of laws, the judicial system, and resources in the United States.

### Strategy 1:

Know Your Rights and Responsibilities workshops co-presented by law enforcement, lawyers, and community advocates.


### Strategy 2:

Recruit New Americans to Citizens Police Academy programs.

---

## Metric:

An annual connectedness and belonging survey will be compared to initial responses and media engagement will be tracked.











# ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

This Welcome Plan is a series of recommendations for our local community, based on research conducted over nine months. Though this was a comprehensive effort, timeline and unknown barriers still exist. Therefore, the team acknowledges there may be additional barriers not unearthed by this review.

# RESEARCH PROCESS:

The Welcome Plan Task Force was created with multi-sector organizations that had a unique reach to New Americans in our community. Each organization was instructed to distribute surveys and organize a focus group to understand the barriers New Americans faced. The Welcome Plan Coordinator facilitated the member organization with the process.

In a month and a half, organizations carried out 25 focus groups. Interpreters and facilitators received a stipend and a meal as necessary. Most groups consisted of 10 to 15 participants, but participation ranged from one-on-one meetings to groups of 20 to 40. The Welcome Plan Coordinator facilitated most of the focus groups. All focus groups centered on the key questions of, “What is your own top priority?” and “What is holding you back from achieving that priority?” with the goal of focus group participants proposing ideal solutions to be articulated in the Welcome Plan.

## *“What is your own top priority?”*

Throughout this process, we emphasized trying to organize groups of diverse participants in terms of country of origin, professional occupation, education, status, level of English, and age. Throughout the 25 focus groups, we convened participants from 33 different countries, including the top five countries of origin for New Americans in Kent County (Mexico, Guatemala, Vietnam, Bosnia and Canada).







## NOTES REGARDING RESEARCH RESULTS:

Certain issues and barriers emerged that appeared to be specific to different demographics. One barrier identified in focus groups was the fear of police and law enforcement, raised largely by Latinx and Bhutanese participants. Latinx focus group participants particularly expressed their fear and lack of faith in the law enforcement system and officials. They stressed safety, specifically for Latinx community members, and access to driver's licenses for all as priorities.

Since the Welcome Plan is a set of local community recommendations, state and federal advocacy was not included in the recommendations. This namely surrounds the call for advocating for local, state, and federal policy that is supportive of all New Americans, including building support among the business, nonprofit, and municipalities for equitable policies that increase the safety of all New Americans.

Top priorities and barriers also varied between New American immigrants and New American refugees. Immigrants predominantly focused on transferring foreign experience and education, while refugees primarily focused on navigating a new life in the United States. The concerns with adjusting to their new lives, include accessing existing resources and English language learning, difficulty attaining upward economic mobility, and wanting a better experience for their children.

The overlap between the two subgroups namely occurred around the issues of upward economic mobility; balancing and maintaining their culture, religion, and traditions while being an American; desiring to be welcomed as an American; and feeling like they belonged in the community.

Gateways for Growth research initiatives provided a glimpse into the most pressing barriers New Americans in the community face, yet also provided insight on how nuanced the barriers may be. As such, this Welcome Plan will be reviewed and revised upon implementation to decide the best way to address existing barriers and additional barriers as well.



***“There are many fibers that connect the fabric of our community, so it is important we understand the needs of our diverse populations,” said Kent County Administrator Wayman Britt. “Our goal is to create and expand opportunities for all of our residents to feel welcome, access services, and to actively participate in their communities.”***

**- Wayman P. Britt, County Administrator/Controller, Kent County**

# SUGGESTED EXAMPLE INITIATIVES

Various organizations around the country have already been engaged in welcoming work. We encourage you to explore initiatives and adopt them into your organization.

## -Kentwood Public Schools Parent Academy

In partnership with Steelcase, Kentwood Public Schools engages with business and cultural leaders in the Kentwood community to meet the needs of immigrant, refugee, and non-English speaking families in Kentwood Public Schools.

“The Academy supports parents of our English language learner students who face a variety of challenges being new to the United States. We host weekly sessions attended by nearly 50 KPS parents and family members—refugees, immigrants, and those whose native language is not English—to help them gain a better understanding of their new culture, understand the resources available to them, and be advocates for their children’s success in school.”

## -Seal of Biliteracy

This is a national initiative to encourage schools and/or states to recognize the validity of language skills many bilingual students have. The Seal of Biliteracy is given by a school, school district, or state in recognition of students who have studied and attained proficiency in two or more languages by high school graduation. The vision is to help students recognize the value of their academic success and see the tangible benefits of being bilingual as well as be able to market their skills to potential employers and college admissions offices.



***“Our commitment at the Grand Rapids Chamber is to build a thriving, prosperous West Michigan for ALL. We have been engaged in the development of this plan to eliminate barriers that impede our newest community members from fully participating in the prosperity of this economic region.”***

- Rick Baker, President and CEO, Grand Rapids Chamber





## -Nationwide examples of New American Mentors

### Natural Helpers in Portland, OR

“Natural Helpers” is a nationwide program designed to bridge the gap between residents and the resources available to them by identifying, training, and empowering local immigrants who understand the challenges of moving to a different place, learning a new language, and establishing a home in the U.S.”

### Natural Helpers in Indianapolis, IN

“Our lead volunteers are called Natural Helpers, and they help immigrants and refugees transitioning to life in Indianapolis. Natural Helpers are immigrants themselves who understand the challenges of moving to a new place, learning a new language, finding employment, and establishing a home in the United States.”



### Natural Helpers in Aurora, CO

“The nationally recognized Natural Helpers program was brought to Aurora by the Office of International and Immigrant Affairs in 2016 in response to the city’s Comprehensive Strategic Plan to expand programs for integration of refugees and immigrants. The program’s goal is to identify, train and empower local immigrants and refugees who understand the challenges of moving to a different place, learning a new language, and establishing a home in the U.S. They are then able to connect immigrants and refugees in their own communities with resources and opportunities to better integrate into the city.”



***“The Welcome Plan recommendations will help make our region more welcoming, inclusive and more successful economically for all who call this place home. The City of Grand Rapids is a proud partner in this work. We encourage all sectors to join in these efforts to transform policies, practices and programs so we can collectively make our organizations and cities more welcoming.”***

- Mark Washington, City Manager, City of Grand Rapids





[KentCountyNewAmericans.org](http://KentCountyNewAmericans.org)

