Congratulations on being selected for a Gateways for Growth Technical Assistance grant! The Gateways for Growth Team has put together this toolkit to help guide you through the process of building a comprehensive strategic plan for immigrant integration. While every community planning process has its own challenges, after helping awardees through the first few rounds of G4G, we noticed a few questions that arose in many communities around the country. The information we shared in response—how to organize the initial stages of the planning process, how to best incorporate community feedback, how to structure the written plan, etc.—forms the backbone of this best practices toolkit. Please read this toolkit in full before any formal planning meetings are held, and look forward to working with you this year!

For more information, contact your G4G point person or email Challenge@GatewaysForGrowth.org.

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CHAPTER ONE: ORGANIZING THE PROCESS

You have been selected for a G4G Technical Assistance grant because you have shown commitment from local partners across sectors to build a comprehensive strategic plan for immigrant integration. Ideally, you have partnerships between local government, community leaders, and the business community to help lead this effort. It is important to keep these partners actively involved throughout all steps of the planning process, from beginning to end, and even after the plan is completed. How to do that is outlined in this chapter.

STEP 1: Lay the Groundwork
Ensure an individual is able to devote at least five hours per week to lead the planning process from start to finish. This person should begin by connecting with key government, community, business, and philanthropic partners about potential needs and establishing an initial vision for the process. Identify resources for staffing and running the process. By the time you begin working with the Gateways for Growth Team, much of this work will already have been completed.

STEP 2: Establish the Planning Team
Successful planning processes bring many partners to the table. Some processes engage 15 to 20 people; others engage 100 or more. No matter the number of people you want to involve, a smaller group of core partners that convene and support the work behind the scenes (a “planning team”) is needed to give direction to the process. This is a smaller group than the full task force or steering committee (discussed in the next chapter) that will help guide the process substantively. You may also wish to hire an outside coordinator to help manage the process and handle meeting logistics.

1. Identify members of the planning team. This should be a small team (usually two to four individuals) who will make key decisions regarding the planning process and be the points of contact with the Gateways for Growth Team.

2. Set expectations with members of your planning team. How many work hours do you think they will be required to work on the process? How many times do you anticipate needing to meet? These can be estimates; A formal schedule will be decided later. We recommend planning teams touch base for at least one hour per week to move the process along.

3. Identify an outside coordinator. Many communities find it helpful to hire an outside coordinator to handle logistics like setting agendas, leading meetings, and meeting deadlines. This is recommended if your budget allows. If you received a matching grant through G4G, those funds can be used to hire this person.

STEP 3: Design the Process
At this phase, the core team and coordinator (if you have one) design the planning process, answering questions such as: Who else should be involved? Who makes final decisions and how? How long will the
process last? How will the results be shared with the community? What information is needed to make sound decisions? A key part of this step is creating a timeline with key milestones to keep you on track. This is likely to change over time but whatever you come up with at this stage will be a good reference point.

**SPOTLIGHT ON**

**AKRON, OH**

The International Institute in Akron, OH (G4G Round I) began their planning process with a high-level leadership summit hosted by the mayor and the county council president in June 2016. The process culminated with the release of the Strategic Welcoming Plan for Akron and County of Summit: Phase One in October 2017. Implementation is ongoing.

*See a detailed version of this timeline and others in the Appendix.*

**CHAPTER TWO: ENGAGING PARTNERS AND COMMUNITY FEEDBACK**

**STEP 1: Identify and Engage the Planning Participants**

After you design the process and the timeline, key participants are identified and recruited. This may result in the creation of a formal body, such as a steering committee, which would be made up of community leaders from multiple sectors (e.g. government, business, non-profit). Later, you may choose to further break out your steering committee with sub-committees or working groups focusing on specific issues areas.

1. Meet with your planning team to decide the structure of your steering committee. At this stage, decide

**BEST PRACTICES**

- **Be sure to include representatives from the immigrant and refugee communities on your steering committee.** Other taskforce members can come from education, government, business, legal, immigrant and refugee serving, transportation, faith, and healthcare organizations, or other sectors, but it is important to include direct representation of the immigrant community in the process.

- **Planning committees will often focus the work of planning processes into themes, and sub-committees will reflect those themes.** Members of the working group or task force will break into smaller groups according to their expertise and interest area, and lead more in-depth, often community-focused conversations. We recommend the following: Equitable Access to Services, Economic Development and Education, Civic Engagement, and Safe and Connected Communities.

- **Consider using Welcoming America’s Welcoming Standard as a framework for planning.** The Welcoming Standard provides a comprehensive roadmap for immigrant inclusion and serves as the backbone of Welcoming America’s Certified Welcoming program, a formal recognition of welcoming for city and county governments. Planning around the Standard can set communities up for certification should they chose to seek it down the road.
how many people your steering committee will include, what sectors will they represent, if you will include sub-committees or working groups, and what members will be responsible for throughout the process.

2. Set expectations with members of your steering committee, like goals of the process, work hours expected, and number of meetings required.

3. Create a system where decisions made by the working groups are funneled up to the steering committee (e.g. by having a member of the steering committee sit in on each working group meeting).

4. Set and share a meeting schedule. Prepare for meetings by writing an agenda, sharing relevant materials, and reserving a comfortable meeting space.

5. Kick-off the planning process with a public event or press conference and invite steering committee and members of the community.

**STEP 2: Gather and Assess Data on Community Needs and Assets**

Before drafting recommendations, you should ask the following questions: What is the area currently doing to attract, welcome, and integrate immigrants, and where are the gaps? Research partners like local professors or research-oriented nonprofits can be great collaborators in providing additional data, particularly around business or economic case to both inform and strengthen support for efforts. Many planning committees also place a strong emphasis incorporating community or resident input through surveys, focus groups, town halls, and other forms of dialogue. Members of the steering committee will also have important insights on what needs should be addressed through the planning process.

**STEP 3: Conduct the Process**

Length of the planning processes has ranged from 12 weeks up to a year or more and involves regular and well-facilitated interactions among participants. The process should culminate in the creation of a written plan that identifies a community vision, goals, strategies, and tactics, benchmarks, as well as the resources that exist or are needed to achieve them. A few key parts of the process are outlined here, and you may refer to Welcoming America’s Community Planning Process Guide for additional detail.

1. Assess strengths, needs, and resources. An important part of the process will be to lean on subject matter experts and to identify areas of strength and the availability of community assets that your plan can build on; unmet

**SPOTLIGHT ON**

**INDIANAPOLIS, IN**

The Indianapolis Immigrant Welcome Center in Indianapolis, IN (G4G Round I) worked with a team of graduate students to develop and distribute a survey to immigrants in the city. The results of that survey played a major role in the plan Indianapolis ultimately produced.

*See results from this and other surveys in the Appendix.*

**BEST PRACTICES**

- NAE has developed a best practices guide with tips for getting community input, as well as examples of surveys from communities across the country. Our partners have used town hall meetings, focus groups, and surveys to solicit feedback from residents on their experiences and priorities. These feedback tools can help identify where there are gaps in services or barriers to accessing services and inform a strategic plan to create a more welcoming environment where all residents can succeed. See that resource here.
needs within your community that are limiting the achievement of its full potential; and resources that either have the potential to promote the execution of your plan or that need to be developed in order to overcome a potential roadblock.

2. Establish goals and objectives. Based on your detailed assessment of strengths, needs and resources, you should set priorities for action. These priorities will lead you to establish your goals and objectives. Goals come first: they are high level overarching principles that represent an ideal, or something close to it. Objectives support the goal with tangible, measurable outcomes.

3. Design action steps for achieving objectives. Just as every goal will be supported by a number of objectives, every objective will be accomplished by taking a well-defined set of action steps.

4. Measure progress and evaluate outcomes. Although tracking outcomes and measuring success are really continuous elements of your planning process, most of the focus on outcomes will be at the end of the planning process. This step brings the entire process back to the beginning (full circle) in that outcomes relate inextricably to the goal.

CHAPTER THREE: WRITING AND PUBLISHING YOUR PLAN

STEP 1: Writing the Plan

This step is in many ways the culmination of all your work of the last few months. You should devote six to eight weeks to solely drafting the plan, and expect a few rounds of revisions as you receive recommendations from your steering committees or working groups, compile them, and share them with your planning team.

1. Include any available data as rationale for why an immigrant integration plan is necessary in your community. If you are receiving a Research Award from the American Immigration Council through Gateways for Growth, information from the award may fit well in an opening section of your strategic plan.

2. List or describe the partners involved.

3. Summarize data from community feedback portion of the planning process, including gaps and challenges identified.

4. Explain your recommendations for immigrant integration.
   a. State your goals followed by recommendations to reach them and a list of clear action steps for each. Keep the language here brief and easy to understand.

   b. If you have settled on more than 20 recommendations, prioritize 10 to 15 key ones to feature at the top of this section.

   c. Make sure to standardize the drafting process across working groups (both as they are being written, and by having the planning standardize language once the steering committee leads or working groups submit their drafts.)
d. Include the lead organization(s), timeline, and budget consideration for each recommendation. Prioritize actions in short term, mid-term, and long term categories.

5. Design your plan. Designing the plan with graphics, clearly defined sections, and photos can make the document more accessible and easier to understand.

STEP 2: Finalize, Publish and Disseminate the Plan

Transparency and communication are hallmarks of a successful effort, and once completed, it is important to share the plan not only with participants and partners leading implementation, but with the wider community to highlight the expected impact and benefits for all community members, both recent arrivals to and long-term residents.

1. Create a communications strategy for the release of your plan. This should include agreeing on the messages that you think will resonate with key audiences in the community. Communications framing that emphasizes how all residents will benefit from the plan (not just immigrants) typically work best, and engaging highly credible spokespeople from your task force in the communications effort is also beneficial.

2. Hold an event to mark the release of the plan. Ideally, the plan should be released at a public event featuring leaders from local government, the community, the business community, and any other organization that has played a large role throughout the planning process, or who you would like to be involved in its implementation. Some communities choose to have their G4G staff site visit occur in conjunction with this event, seeing it as a way to strengthen local and national recognition of their work.

3. Notify press of the release of the plan to maximize chances of it being covered in local news outlets. Send out a media advisory or a press release about the plan release event. Encourage partner organizations to do the same.

4. At the same time, plan an initial meeting with all stakeholders to make sure they remain aware of expectations for implementing various parts of the plan. Consider holding regular meetings and designing a work plan to ensure each piece of implementation stays on track (discussed in the next chapter).

CHAPTER FOUR: IMPLEMENTING YOUR PLAN

STEP 1: Implement, Monitor and Adjust the Plan

Well-designed plans involve many partners in implementation, which means there may be significant coordination and often a staggered approach to implementation because some activities may be easily carried out, while others require resource development or further design. Plans should be viewed as living documents that can be revisited, and from time to time, updated in consultation with the community.

1. Make sure someone remains in charge of the process to keep implementation moving forward.

2. Continue to convene your planning team to monitor efforts and ensure that the plan is carried out, meets established goals and metrics, and is refined as needed.

SPOTLIGHT ON

SALT LAKE COUNTY, UT

In June 2018, a year after completing their Gateways for Growth grant and publishing a strategic plan for immigrant integration, Salt Lake County (G4G Round I) was deemed Certified Welcoming by Welcoming America. SLC0 was the first community in the country to receive this distinction.
3. Keep in regular contact with partner organizations to make sure they understand their role in the plan’s implementation.

4. Publish formal quarterly or biannual progress reports. This provides accountability to the planning team and keeps community partners informed on how implementation is progressing.

5. After six to twelve months have passed since plan implementation begins, consider having your community’s integration work evaluated through existing programs like Welcoming America’s Certified Welcoming or check your progress on the NAE Cities Index.

CHAPTER FIVE: EXAMPLE RECOMMENDATIONS

Many communities have already undergone a strategic planning process and produced strategic plans for immigrant integration. The Gateways for Growth Team alone as helped produce 16 strategic plans in communities large and small around the country, so we know firsthand that communities do best when they learn from each other. Besides best practices for the planning process, plans and programs out of other communities are excellent resources for you to consult as you decide how to address the needs of your own immigrant and refugee populations. The NAE Cities Index Best Practices Guide, which summarizes some of the best integration strategies, initiatives, and programs from around the country, is one place to start collecting this information. Welcoming America offers its own Community Planning Process Guide, and G4G recipients are also encouraged to explore WA’s Welcoming Standard.

CHAPTER SIX: OTHER WAYS TO STAY CONNECTED

Many participants recognize the value of being part of a peer network of leaders who are working to advance welcoming efforts across the nation. Through G4G, you have the opportunity to join the Welcoming America Network, where you can engage with local governments, nonprofits, and others working to advance inclusion in their communities.

To learn more about the network and how to get more involved, visit WelcomingAmerica.org.
Appendix

Here you can find examples from immigrant integration plans from around the country.

Chapter One, Step 2: Establish the Planning Team

**Our Process**

The People

- **Core Team** brought resources and energy to drive the development of the roadmap. The core team included a wide range of stakeholders.
  - First Lady of Anchorage, Heather Rehfeld
  - The Municipality of Anchorage, Office of the Mayor, Anchorage Parks and Recreation, Anchorage Master Planning, and Municipal Services.

A representation of knowledgeable and engaged stakeholders was crucial. These stakeholders included community leaders, government agencies, non-profit organizations, businesses, community members, and other individuals and organizations who represented Anchorage’s diverse community. Together, they formed a strategic planning team.

The process involved the following steps:

1. **Identification of Needs and Priorities:**
   - An initial assessment of Anchorage’s needs and priorities was conducted.

2. **Development of a Strategic Plan:**
   - A comprehensive strategic plan was developed to guide the implementation of the roadmap.

3. **Implementation and Evaluation:**
   - The strategic plan was implemented, and its effectiveness was evaluated regularly.

**Anchorage, AK**

**Akron, OH**

**Baltimore, MD**

Chapter One, Step 3: Design the Process

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**Akron, OH**

**Northwest Arkansas**
Chapter Two, Step 2: Gather and Assess Data on Community Needs and Assets

Key Findings - Barriers to Building a Welcoming Community
In many communities, barriers that need to be eliminated for Austin to truly become a welcoming community include:

- Lack of integration between residents
- Limited access to resources
- Language barriers

In addition, many community leaders believe that there is a need for more comprehensive planning and collaboration among different stakeholders.

Chapter Three, Step 1: Writing the Plan

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For more information, download the full plans for each of these communities:

Akron, OH  Anchorange, AK  Aurora, CO
Austin, MN  Baltimore, MD  Dallas, TX
Indianapolis, IN  Northwest Arkansas

More strategic plans can be found at GatewaysForGrowth.org/map/strategic.