Community Involvement Committee

TO:	Chair Deborah Kafoury and Board of County Commissioners	7 pages
FROM:	Community Involvement Committee	
DATE:	May 17, 2022	
SUBJECT:	Immigrant & Refugee Community Engagement Subcommittee Recommendations	

Background & Process

Immigrant and refugee communities make up a large population in Multnomah County. These communities come from diverse countries, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. In Multnomah County, they contribute to society by creating small businesses, participating in important institutions, fighting for justice, among many other things. They also face many injustices such as discrimination, harrassment, violence and many other inequities. Immigrants and refugees have been the targets of hatred, disgust and many times, unspeakable acts of racism. To make the matter worse, they are not typically or effectively engaged by City and County policy makers. With these facts in mind, we chose to focus our efforts this year to create recommendations for the County to improve engagement with immigrants and refugees.

We began our work on the Community Involvement Committee (CIC) Immigrant & Refugee Community Engagement Subcommittee in December of 2021 to better understand how Multnomah County engages with and incorporates input from immigrants and refugees. To gain a deeper understanding about the County's

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current efforts to serve immigrants and refugees, we had 7 meetings and met with the Board of County Commissioners:

- Deborah Kafoury, Multnomah County Chair
- Sharon Meieran, Multnomah County Commissioner (District 1)
- Susheela Jayapal, Multnomah County Commissioner (District 2)
- Jessica Vega Pederson, Multnomah County Commissioner (District 3)
- Lori Stegmann, Multnomah County Commissioner (District 4)

Our understanding of immigrant and refugee communities includes those who are undocumented and asylum seekers, as well as children born in the United States but have parents who are immigrants and refugees. Though their status is different when entering the country, they are an integral part of our community. Therefore, we feel it is important to call out undocumented and asylum seekers specifically because they experience challenges, barriers and discrimination that has been underrepresented in government spaces.

Equity is a core value of the CIC. Our subcommittee defines equity as making sure that everyone has the resources they need to succeed and thrive, while ensuring that those who have a greater need, get more resources. Immigrants and refugees strengthen and enrich the County, but are not typically the central focus of County programs and services. For instance, the pandemic combined with the federal changes to immigration policies and procedures and the constantly changing world climate has influenced who is immigrating to the United States and Multnomah County and when. Immigrants and refugees have faced increased violence, discrimination and a lack of accessible resources to navigate through severe weather events, among other hardships. Plus, not all immigrants and refugees have the same needs or have the same access to resources they may need. Ultimately, we feel equitable community engagement looks like deferring to communities when they state their needs, and fully meeting that need.

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To guide our conversations with County elected officials, we developed a list of questions to share with and ask members of the Board. Many of our questions were about County strategies for connecting with immigrant and refugee communities, and how that input is reflected in County programs and services.

Questions for Elected Officials:

1. How does the County define immigrant & refugees, and where do undocumented members of the community and asylum seekers fall within it?
2. How does the County ensure that immigrant and refugee voices are heard at the County leadership level?
3. How is input implemented at the leadership level?
4. What are the outreach strategies the County uses to engage with refugees and immigrants?
5. What are some engagement efforts with immigrant and refugee communities at the County, beyond providing translation (i.e. engaging in knowledge and culture)?
6. What are some of the County's efforts to empower immigrants and refugees (i.e. employment at the County, accessing services, voting, County advocacy on the state/federal level)?
7. What do you think are some strengths about the way the County currently does outreach and engagement with immigrant and refugee communities? Where do you think are areas for improvement?
8. How does the County welcome immigrants and refugees?

Recommendations

1. **Support for FY22 Program Offer Program #40000C - Mapping Study - Services for Immigrant and Refugee Communities**
We support the immigrant and refugee mapping study currently underway in the Health Department. This crucial study will survey Multnomah County's current

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efforts to reach out to, engage with and provide programs and services to immigrants and refugees. We would be interested to learn about the recommendations identified once the mapping study is complete.

The first point of contact many new immigrants and refugees have with the County is during the required health screening appointment. We hope the immigrant & refugee mapping study identifies additional ways the county can make that appointment a good experience. There could be an opportunity to provide resources or a history/interest form to newcomers that asks questions about resources they'd find helpful in areas such as career, education, school and civic engagement. Additionally, there may be ways the County can strengthen connections with local schools and in libraries, as they tend to be community hubs for many families, including immigrants and refugees.

2. **Develop a centralized and transparent way to track which contracts a community based organization (CBO) holds at any given time.**
   There is not currently a way for community members or County staff to easily see what County contracts a community based organization holds. A centralized and transparent way of tracking contracts with CBOs can show which organizations and populations tend to be represented in County contracting, and which communities are being missed. There are likely small or newly developed nonprofit organizations serving culturally specific communities that are not participating in County contracting processes. An organization's size and capacity impacts their ability to learn about, have access to, and navigate the County contracting process.

   The County puts a lot of trust and importance in community organizations because they do have an incredibly important role in connecting with and serving communities. However, the contracting process itself is incredibly complex and possibly not accessible for smaller organizations. A review of the County

contracting process might be needed in order to remove barriers for smaller, culturally specific organizations. We support the 2022 Capital Funding grant project, which separated the funding pool for larger organizations and smaller organizations to apply for. A similar model might be helpful to adopt across the County.

3. **Develop county-wide strategies to engage with immigrant and refugee communities outside of (and in addition to) County contracted CBOs.**
   While the county has invested in outreach to contracted CBOs, we feel that there is a need to expand to other potential CBOs that may or not be known to the county to create new connections within other underserved populations/communities. Outreach examples may include, and are not limited to:
   - Mutual aid groups
   - Places of worship
   - Apartment complexes or neighborhoods
   - Places of work (large organizations, care homes, anywhere immigrant and refugees are frequently employed)
   - School districts (k-12 and community colleges)/ culturally specific school clubs
   - Businesses that serve immigrants and refugees, including culturally specific grocery stores
   - Leverage any COVID communications strategies that worked for specific communities of immigrants and refugees

   The County's work supporting the East County Resilience Hub is a good example of how the County can engage communities and we support the expansion of this work. While in this work, we believe that the community groups and members should be compensated for their effort and time during the process of outreaching within their community.

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4. **Create a centralized list of community organizations and the communities they serve, that is regularly updated and audited. In this list, start tracking which departments have strong connections with specific CBOs.**

   Coordination is important to help strengthen relationships between the County and immigrant communities. It's also important to acknowledge the history of distrust with and harm caused by government entities, and how being uncoordinated and overtaxing can cause further harm. While the goal is to not overwhelm or bombard favored CBOs and to avoid duplicating efforts, it is important to foster relationships directly with the community, not just turning them to make a request. A couple of ways the County can do this are by:

   1. Increasing cross departmental communication, coordination, organization and awareness about who holds strong relationships with which organizations. This could help streamline outreach, avoid duplicating efforts and not overtax community organizations.
   2. Updating and auditing a centralized community partner list so that the County has an accurate view of an organization and what their work currently looks like at a given time.

   Additionally, a big gap identified is that the County is so siloed by department and it's nearly impossible to figure out who is doing what. As a result, if organizations don't come across the County radar until they apply for a contract, there are many organizations being missed. Therefore, it is important to update a community partner list so that the County has an accurate view of an organization (no matter what their size) and what their capacity is at a given time.

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A note on the backgrounds and life experiences of subcommittee members:

Richard Barker (he/him) is a retired Strategic Customer Consultant for IBM. He's actively involved with the Linnton Neighborhood Association and Neighbors West Northwest, and during his time in California, volunteered for the LA AIDS Project, the Laguna Shanti Project, and the Orange County Gay & Lesbian Community Center.

Angel Brophy (she/her) is a Program Coordinator/Data System Specialist with Human Solutions. Angel also volunteers her time to be a Community Health Worker for her Filipino Community to provide wrap-around services with the National Alliance for Filipino Concerns, as well as with the Pacific Coast Coalition for Seafarers.

Jenny Shadley (she/her) is a Graphic Design Supervisor and Photographer at Clark College in Vancouver, WA, where she serves on many committees including Guided Pathways, Climate Improvement Task Force, Strategic Planning committee, and chairs the Art Selection Committee. She is also a volunteer instructor with GirlStrength, teaching self-defense to girl-identified middle schoolers.

Pau Thang (he/him) Thang came as a refugee in 2009 and belongs to the Zomi and Burmese community. He worked as an Asian Pacific Islander Youth Advocate at Immigrant & Refugee Community Organization (IRCO), connecting refugee families with resources for 2 years and currently, working as INSPIRE Program Coordinator. He is also serving as the International City/County Management Association President at Portland State University Chapter, focusing on students' interaction with local government professionals and experts.

This recommendation from the Immigrant & Refugee Community Engagement Subcommittee has been approved by the Community Involvement Committee on May 17, 2022.