

ponceagency[®]

A Singular Voice *for* Today's Plural World.SM

advertising | marketing | public relations | multicultural | government

RESEARCH REPORT

PREPARED FOR

Office of International Initiatives

City of Aurora, Colorado
City Manager's Office
15151 E. Alameda Parkway, Ste. 5900
Aurora, Colorado 80012



July 31, 2015

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	Executive Summary	3
II.	Introduction and Objectives	4
III.	Methodology	5
IV.	Findings (Focus Groups)	6-14
	A. Perceptions and Needs	
	B. City Services	
	C. City Perception and Brand Appeal	
	D. Voice of Authority Discussion	
	E. Communication Vehicles	
	F. Driving Motivators	
	G. Advice from Immigrants and Refugees to the City	
V.	Key Findings (Surveys)	15
VI.	Recommendations	17

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Aurora (the City), in conjunction with the Office of International Initiatives, sought to conduct primary community-based research among immigrant and refugee communities within its boundaries. The main goal of the research was to assess and prioritize services and programs for the aforementioned populations. The qualitative and quantitative research consisted of six focus groups targeting diverse populations from various ethnicities, races, languages and ages.

As part of its quantitative research, the City conducted two online surveys. One survey was disseminated to refugees and immigrants and another survey was distributed among local service providers. The online surveys were released to a total of 800 potential respondents. During the two week data collection period, a total of 145 were completed surveys, (57 from immigrants and refugees and 88 derived from service providers) for an 18% response rate.

In order to reach additional members of the community, focus groups were also conducted. Focus group #1, was conducted with service providers; focus group #2 included members of the Aurora International Round Table, Aurora Sister Cities, Aurora Immigrant and Refugee taskforce and community leaders; focus group #3 took place with young refugees and immigrants; focus group #4 was held in Spanish with members of the Aurora Hispanic Community; focus group #5 involved, mostly, older English-speaking refugees; and, focus group #6 consisted of older non-English speaker refugees and various interpreters, who were present to help facilitate the discussion with limited English proficiency participants.

Among the findings, one can observe that in terms of perceptions and needs, refugees and immigrants see themselves as valuable contributors to the society as taxpaying individuals who want to integrate into the community. They trust their faith-based leaders, family and service providers for information. When effectively communicating with immigrant and refugee populations in Aurora, it is important to consider age, country of origin and education level as the research indicates that not all groups receive information through the same channels.

All participants indicate that the City should be involved in their integration and welcome more involvement. The research also indicates that there is a clear need for the City to communicate the vital role the City plays in the integration and inclusion of refugee and immigrant populations. It should be noted what services are within the City's office versus other organizations.

Increased awareness of the City's partnerships, which demonstrate a commitment to serve the immigrant and refugee residents of Aurora, would be beneficial to their inclusion and integration. In addition, the research indicates that refugees report high levels of trauma among their community and are in need of mental health services. The most important services as ranked by participants in the focus groups and the online survey are: public safety, education/ESL, economic development and civic participation.

II. INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

This report contains the results of community-based research among immigrant and refugee communities of the City of Aurora, Colorado. The City of Aurora (the City) sought to:

1. Gain insight into the perceptions and attitudes of refugees and immigrants, toward local government and its services, programs and efforts in order to prioritize potential implementation according to perceived needs;
2. Evaluate the desirability of the City itself among immigrants and refugees. In order to accomplish this particular research objective, we wanted to go beyond the rational train of thought by beginning to explore attitudes, perceptions, and emotional variables of the respondents concerning their perceptions of the City;
3. Learn and confirm who the influencers are among refugees and immigrants. Who do they trust? Who holds the voice of authority, and what is the best means of communication with them?
4. Explore the potential motivators in the lives of refugees and immigrants, what encourages them to thrive, and what advice would they give to the City to better integrate them into the community as a whole.

This research is intended to help the City of Aurora create the right framework for selected services and initiatives, avoiding unnecessary costs while saving time and energy.

III. METHODOLOGY

This report includes the findings and recommendations resulting from qualitative and quantitative research. Ponce conducted six (6) focus groups and two (2) online surveys. The City of Aurora was responsible for e-mail distribution of the survey link and the recruitment of the focus group participants to represent a variety of age ranges, gender and origins of country. Fulfillment of participants was realized through a partnership with community agencies and the Office of International Initiatives, City of Aurora. The groups were assembled based on their role in the community and language preference. The chart below indicates the participation by focus group.

Group Number	Date	Description
1	7/16/15	Community service providers and leaders, English speakers (10)
2	7/16/15	Aurora Roundtable members, Immigrant and Refugee Taskforce, Sister cities' members, English speakers (10)
3	7/17/15	Refugees, English speakers (6), ages 18-24
4	7/18/15	Hispanic community, Spanish (7), ages 25-60+
5	7/18/15	Refugees, Bhutan, Burma Limited English Proficiency (7), ages 40+
6	7/18/15	Refugees, Limited English Proficiency (6) ages, 35-55+

The same experienced moderator was used for all groups. The group interviews were conducted in English with translators provided for those with limited English proficiency to help ensure full participation by all groups, with the exception of the Hispanic focus group (#4), which was conducted in Spanish. Focus group #4 consisted of six participants from Mexico and one from Guatemala. Participants were asked to share their thoughts freely while the moderator and other observers took notes. Data was obtained about the perceptions of the City by using a mental image exercise. This allowed participants to select a word and its corresponding image. This method was particularly helpful with the limited English proficiency population to determine their feelings about their experience with the City by going beyond the rational train of thought.

Two online surveys were developed in collaboration with the Office of International Initiatives, City of Aurora. One survey was developed for the Refugees and Immigrant Community and another one was created for Service Providers. Both online surveys contained a multiple choice question format to gather information about the communities' needs and perceptions about the need and awareness of city services. The online surveys were also designed to gain a broader scope of participants. The online survey for the refugee and immigrant community reflects a diverse Hispanic population that was not obtained during the initial focus group interviews. The potential participants were given the option to answer the survey that related the most to them. Each survey was provided via a separate link for both community service providers and refugee populations in Aurora and surrounding areas.

IV. FINDINGS (FOCUS GROUPS)

A. Perceptions and Needs

All six focus groups revealed various insights and wants (whether real or perceived) among immigrants and refugees. The importance about this segment of the focus groups is that they expose how immigrants and refugees see themselves as a community and how they propose that the City relates to them as a group. We started this section with the following philosophical and open-ended question:

Why is it so important to help immigrants and refugees?

- **Self-worth:** The responses by the participants, while from different demographic and ethnic groups, indicate that helping immigrants and refugees should be a top priority of the City. Focus groups revealed that refugees and immigrants see themselves as a large and important population group in the City.
- **Support System:** Refugees and immigrants believe that it would “benefit the city” to provide services to them, yet immigrants and refugees communicated the need of “a support system,” (focus group #2).
- **Isolation vs. Integration:** Among the service providers, the input was that the immigrant and refugee population is perceived as “living in isolation not integration” (focus group #1) and as “tax payers” (focus groups #1 and #2). They should be fully aware of their rights and responsibilities as citizens. There is a desire across all focus groups for more integration and participation in the community as a whole, so everyone would benefit.
- **Tax Paying:** The topic of being a taxpayer was also present among the immigrant and refugee population groups; however, the overarching theme was the perceived need for knowledge of services and available resources. “Aurora has a different system or way of life,” (focus group #5).
- **Purchasing Power:** The immigrants and refugees themselves indicated that they contribute both economically through business and culturally through their way of life. “We (Hispanics) have an enormous purchasing power and contribute significantly to the economy of the country; we pay taxes (regardless of our immigration status), and we cannot overlook the role of Hispanics in the local economy,” (focus group #4).
- **Clinical & Mental Health:** In addition, there are many needs due to the suffering and trauma that refugee populations have endured prior to their arrival to Aurora and the need for clinical and mental health services. “Our suicide rate among the Bhutanese community is among the highest among refugees and we need counseling,” (focus group #5). “Refugees are helpless and need to learn how to navigate the system,” (focus group #6).

B. City Services

This section about city services and areas of work by the City of Aurora uncovered the need to create awareness about accurate information regarding city services by Aurora. Appropriate education is not only necessary among refugees and immigrants but also among service providers. As aforementioned in our first objective, the City sought to gain insight into the perceptions and attitudes of refugees and immigrants, toward local government and its services, programs and efforts in order to prioritize potential implementation according to perceived needs. Here are the findings:

- **Access and Awareness** - The need for access to and awareness of city services was mentioned by all groups as a top priority.
- **Public Safety** - This ranked high for all groups regardless of background.
- **Civic Participation** - While present in all groups, it was less important to non-Hispanic immigrants and refugees. Service providers and roundtable participants indicated a higher need than the refugees themselves.
- **Small Business and Economic Development** - Like with civic participation, this was less important to refugees, both young and old.
- **Education/ESL** - While this is not a city-provided service, it is perceived as such and was highly ranked by all.
- **Sports and Recreation** - The interest and need for sports and recreation information and participation was a high priority for participants.
- **Arts and Culture** - All groups were interested in participating in and finding more information about services related to art and culture.

C. City Perception and Brand Appeal

Participants were asked to select an image/word that represents how they feel when they hear the words “City of Aurora.” The majority of the responses were positive (63%) compared to the negative selections (37%) for all groups. When factoring in only the refugees’ and immigrants’ perceptions of the City of Aurora, the positive responses decline to fifty-nine percent (59%) and forty-one percent (41%) conversely. It is important to note that the responses from Focus Group 5 from the Bhutan and Burma show a majority of negative responses. See the table below for the breakdown and choices by group.

Focus Groups 1 and 2 (Service providers and Roundtable members, non-native English speakers)	
POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
Interest, like, gratitude, thankful, hope, dream, found faith, proud	Confused, skeptical, hopeless, desperate

Focus Group 3 (Young Refugees and Immigrants, non-native English speakers)	
POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
Happy, wishful, hopeful, free, surprised and amazed	Lonely, ignored, frustrated, confused

Focus Group 4 (native-Spanish speaking Hispanics)	
POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
Love, nice, beautiful, clean, happiness, peaceful, diverse, happy, safe, liked	Afraid, disappointed, confused

Focus Group 5 (Refugees, non-English speakers)	
POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
Happy, believe	Confused, disappointed, afraid, guilty, worried

Focus Group 6 (Refugees, non-English speakers)	
POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
Happy, love, respect, wishful, gratitude	Disappointed, discouraged

D. Voice of Authority Discussion

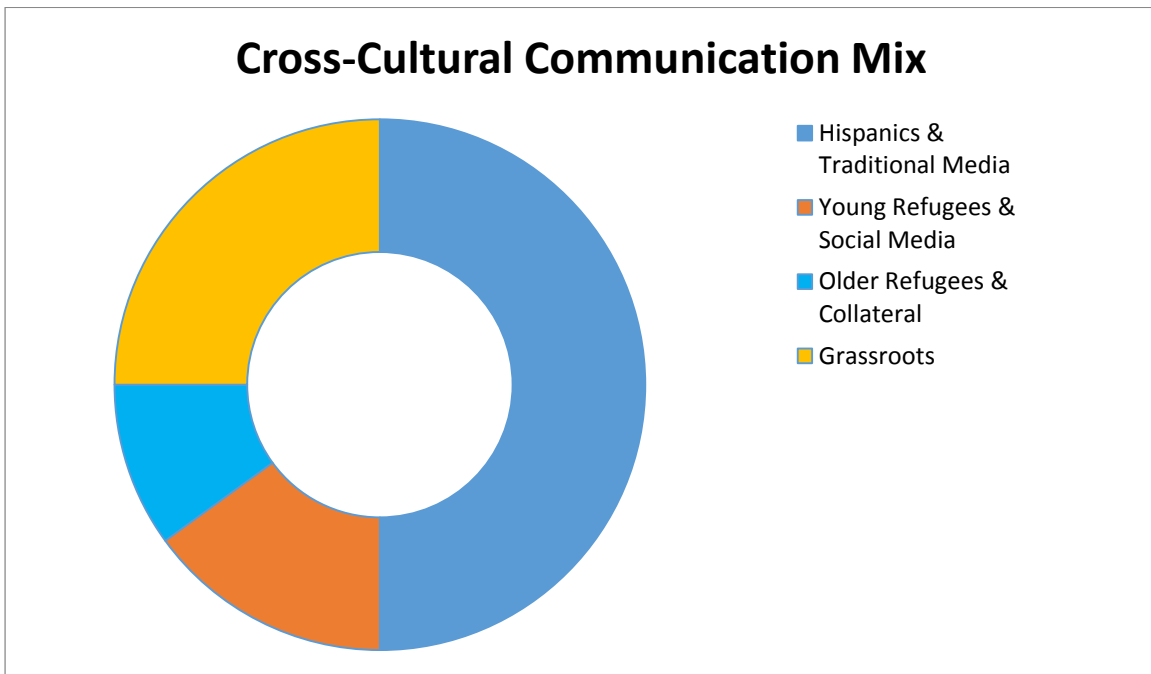
Participants were asked to create a map of influence of the greatest influencers in their life. Who do they listen to and respect? Among the Focus Groups 3-6, it was reported that they rely predominately on faith-based organizations and leaders, followed closely by community organizations and service providers. A list of the specific influencers can be found as follows.

Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2	Focus Group 3
Other immigrants and refugees	Church (Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu)	Parents
Faith and community	Family	Mentors (teachers and counselors)
Teachers	Community elders and leaders	Siblings
Service Providers (navigators)	Friends	Police
Co-workers	Kids & Parents (teachers)	Professional Connections
Family	Refugee resettlement agencies	Pastor/Priest
Ethnic-specific organization		Friends
Focus Group 4	Focus Group 5	Focus Group 6
God	Family	Counselor
Community organizations	Friends	Bible
Spanish-speaking police (2)	Case manager	Elder
Union	Internet/Web (for information)	Community agencies
Friends	Police officers	Pastor/Spiritual leader
	Pastor/Hindu priest, Buddhist	Close friend
	Counselors	Lawyer
	Community leaders	

E. Communication Vehicles

In this section, participants were asked to indicate the communication channels in which they received information. The moderator took notes and had participants indicate how they stay informed. The findings from this brief discussion led to the following observations:

- **Social media** is used by younger refugees. It was observed that among the younger non-native English speaking refugees in focus group 3, the use of modern technologies and social media is the preferred method of obtaining information. They reported daily use of Twitter, Facebook and internet news websites.
- **Spanish language media** is consumed by Hispanic immigrants. The participants in the Hispanic group (focus group #4) indicated that they rely on traditional Spanish language media such as billboards, radio, television, newspapers and some online media.
- **Multilingual print media** was indicated as the most effective way to reach to non-English-speaking refugees (focus groups #5 and #6), which were comprised of an older refugee population. These participants indicate little use of traditional media outlets (because of the lack of presence in the market) and predominately rely on word of mouth, community grassroots, and print media in their language.



F. Driving Motivators

This section of the focus groups was designed to help understand what encouraged immigrants and refugees to thrive in life.

During the discussion, the moderator captured these thoughts about what was most important to each group of participants and what motivates them to achieve and persevere. The importance of this information is for the City of Aurora to better understand the population it serves. With the newfound insight, the City can now create a narrative that connects emotionally with immigrants and refugees.

Regardless of age, race, or religious background, family was one of the most important motivators followed by financial or economic stability-- "to be able to stand on my own two feet," (focus group #2). Furthermore, all groups expressed a desire to help give back or contribute to the community as a whole. "A strong community where people are helping others in need was seen as a motivator to find fulfillment in life." Participants in groups 5 and 6 are not only concerned about their current basic needs, such as housing, education and safety, but they also have a keen sense of obligation to help others succeed.

Common aspirations among refugees and immigrants:



See listed responses as follows.

FOCUS GROUP 1	FOCUS GROUP 2	FOCUS GROUP 3
Family and Children	Hope	Accomplish my goals
Opportunity to provide something different	Take advantage of the opportunities that America has to offer	Professional career
Meaningful work		Spend time with family and be healthy
Justice		To be able to stand in my own feet
Personal security		Social equality
Giving back to the community		I like to see people be happy
		Better future for next generation
		Opportunities
FOCUS GROUP 4	FOCUS GROUP 5	FOCUS GROUP 6
Better life	Peace	Good health
Financial stability	Family	Peace
Faith (give thanks to God for being alive)	Economic stability	Education
My family	Learning opportunities	Housing
My children	Help people in other countries	Communication with community
My community	Well-being of their community	Get a nice job
		Safety

G. Advice from Immigrants and Refugees to the City

The dialogue in this section sprung from the idea to seek input from immigrants and refugees in regards to perceived actions required from the City to serve their communities. All tips can be summed up in two meaningful recommendations:

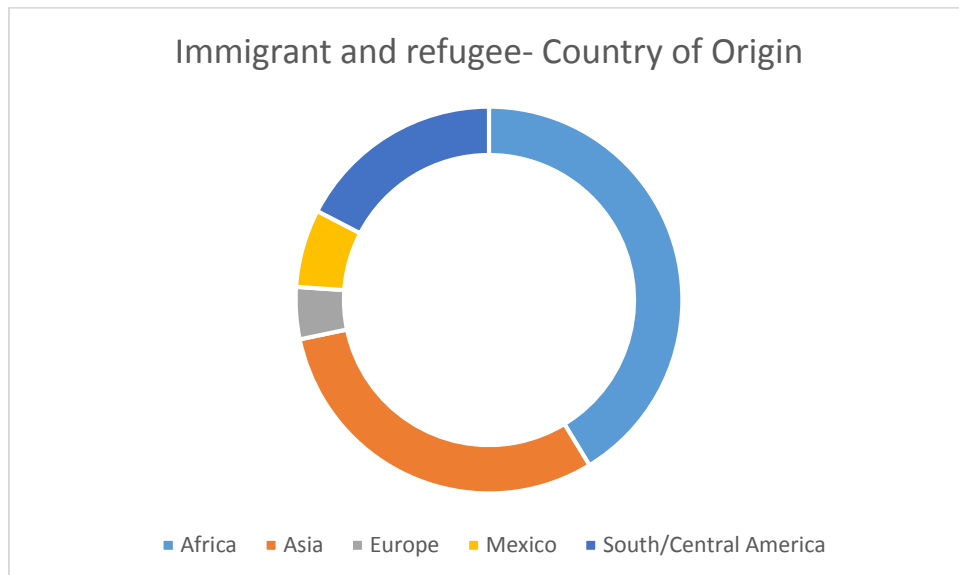
- 1) Communicate
- 2) Engage

Engagement is impossible without clear and effective cross-cultural communications. Below you can find some thoughts shared by immigrants and refugees. We have added the letter C for communication and the letter E (for engagement as an action).

FOCUS GROUP 1	FOCUS GROUP 2	FOCUS GROUP 3
Provide opportunities E	Provide equal services to everyone C	Communicate commitment C
Remove barriers E	City leadership should reflect diversity in the city E	Move community base E
Avoid tokenism C	Embrace diversity E	Build relationships E
	Break down language barriers C	Empower people E
	Find ways to integrate new comers E	Find leaders in communities E
	Improve the quality of life C	Make people feel welcome C
	Work with resettlement efforts C	
FOCUS GROUP 4	FOCUS GROUP 5	FOCUS GROUP 6
Build relationship b/w city and Community E	Build Community Hall E	More resources and employment opportunities E
Open participation of City Commissions regardless of immigration status (citizens vs. non-citizens) C/E	Temple to practice their religion C	Better housing C
Include ESL and support community organizations with city budget C	Refugee resettlement C	Increase minimum wage C
Classes to citizenship and civic participation (awareness) C	More opportunity for education and ESL E	More multi-cultural staff E
Housing for Sr. Citizens C	Citizenship efforts E	
Build trust and communicate trust E	Drunk driving prevention C	
Pay attention to diversity C		

V. KEY FINDINGS (SURVEYS)

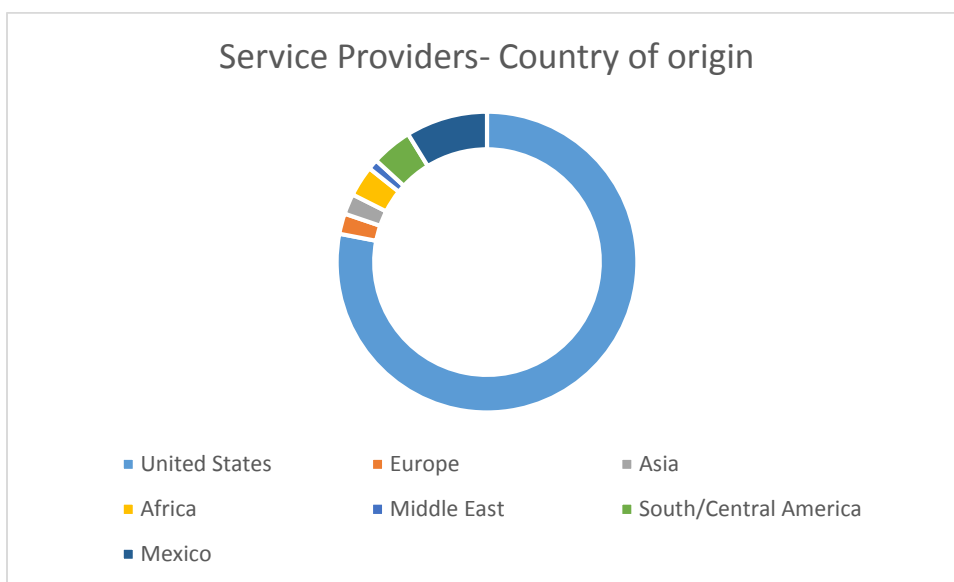
The participants for the immigrant and refugee online survey were 58% male and 41% female. Completed surveys indicated that our participants were educated individuals that have obtained a college or undergraduate degree (43%) or a graduate degree (31%). Also, the largest groups of the individuals that completed the online survey work in the service, management and non-profit sectors and were of African (36%) or Hispanic (24%) descent followed by Asian (22%). When asked to select the statement that “best describes you”, seven percent (7%) responded “I am a current refugee”, forty-seven (47%) selected “I am an immigrant (non- refugee)” and thirty-six (36%) selected “I am a naturalized U.S. Citizen” while ten percent (10%) indicated that they were born in the United States and were not allowed to continue the survey. Most participants were between the ages of 24 and 44 years of age with the majority of participants being married (48%) followed closely by single (36%) individuals. Most participants reported that they have lived in Aurora for two to five years (43%) or ten years (24%).



The immigrant and refugee survey participants are divided equally in their responses to the City of Aurora’s involvement with their community, but indicate that the City should be “very involved” in helping the immigrant and refugee populations within their borders. The participants rank their knowledge of city-provided services as a five (5) on a scale of 1-10 which indicates the need for more awareness and grassroots communication about what the City is doing to help the immigrant and refugee communities. The data reflects that the City should be actively involved in supporting the immigrant and refugee

populations' community integration. The survey analysis indicates that public safety, more education/ESL and economic development are among the top priorities. Detailed data and individual responses have been directly reported to the Office of International Initiatives, City of Aurora.

The data collected in the online survey that was distributed to service providers that work with refugees and immigrants within the borders of Aurora was completed by primarily females (66%). The majority of participants were born in the United States and currently work with organizations that provide services to immigrants and refugees in Aurora, but fifty percent (50%) live in the surrounding areas. Most participants in the service provider survey were between the ages of 25 and 64. Participants were sixty-two percent (62%) white, twenty percent (20%) Hispanic or Latino, seven percent (7%) African- American, six percent (4%) Asian and seven percent (7%) of multiple races or other.



The data indicates that increasing the awareness of local city services was either ranked as “important” or “very important” and that the current awareness among the service providers themselves of the city services is high (6-8 on a scale of 10) but that the civic engagement of the immigrant and refugee communities is perceived as moderate to low. In addition, the data also indicates that the City should be “very involved” in integrating immigrants and refugees into the community.

The participants in the service provider survey also indicate the increased need for awareness of the city services and rank public safety, education/ESL as the greatest needs followed closely by housing and healthcare. Detailed data and individual responses have been directly reported to the Office of International Initiatives, City of Aurora.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Increase communication with immigrant and refugee population:**

The survey data, together with the focus groups' results reveal that there is a significant need to create understanding about the areas of work and responsibilities held by the City of Aurora. Participants in both the focus groups and surveys were not secure in their understanding of what role the city has in various aspects of their daily life. This need can be met by developing a strategic, cross-culturally sensitive, and integrated communications plan (develop multi-media campaigns in target languages with grassroots efforts) that takes into consideration each group's preferred communication methods to create awareness among service providers, refugees and immigrants. Such plans should have measurable objectives and timelines for execution, and should take in consideration cultural, language and literacy barriers.

2. **Public Safety, Education and Economic development is important:**

Prioritize plans based on research. Public safety was revealed as the top priority among immigrants and refugees and service providers. Look into the areas that make sense for each community, such as child safety, domestic violence, crime prevention and economic development. Education and ESL were also mentioned across all focus groups as a high priority. The City of Aurora should work with appropriate government entities to help facilitate immigrants and refugees in the educational system and help facilitate ESL classes and computer literacy classes especially for older immigrants those not of school age.

3. **Respond to the need for emotional well-being:**

Connect the refugee population with licensed counselors. Mental health was a top priority among all refugee groups. They have experienced trauma. Create channels of communication that these populations can have access to available community resources. Implement mechanisms of awareness that educate the public about the seriousness of mental illness, as well as prevention and treatment.

4. **Continue to build networks:**

Share this newfound data with established City networks working with immigrants and refugees, such as the Aurora International Round Table, Aurora Immigrant and Refugees' Taskforce, and Aurora Welcome Center, among other groups partnering alongside the City. Establish programs that allow immigrants and refugees to participate in giving back to the community. Immigrants and refugees are concerned for one another and want to be fully included in the community, rather than feeling isolated from the community at large. Engage other city departments by creating synergy, working towards a unified goal of serving immigrants and refugees better in Aurora.