



**OFFICE OF  
IMMIGRANT &  
REFUGEE AFFAIRS**  
DENVER HUMAN RIGHTS &  
COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS



**2021**

**YEAR END  
REPORT**

# Introduction

Since 2005, our office has worked to promote the well-being of immigrant and refugee communities and advocates for inclusive and meaningful integration into Denver's civic, economic, and cultural life. We do this through various programming, policy development and advocacy, community partnerships, and with national allies. Our strategic priority areas include Advocacy, Capacity Building, Civic Engagement, Partnerships, and Research. We are excited to share our 2021 year in review and accomplishments.



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# Capacity Building and Partnerships

## Integration Sponsorship Program

In 2015, the Denver Office of Immigrant & Refugee Affairs (DOIRA) started the Immigrant Integration Mini-Grants with the simple intention of bringing diverse communities together. We asked the community to bring forward their most creative ideas for community bridging, learning, sharing, and understanding. Denver organizations, neighborhood groups and passionate individuals responded to the call and produced impactful events and activities bringing together newcomers and receiving community. This year, the office awarded \$25,500 to twenty-eight organizations. In total, organizations matched these awards with an additional \$75,292 in funds for a total of \$100,792 contributed for events and projects. Organizations reported a total of 3,649 volunteers for more than 1,316 hours spent on planning and implementing these projects. Due to the pandemic, most organizations were not able to hold in-person events. A combination of in-person events, virtual meetings, and the use of social media reached approximately 83,755 people.



# Capacity Building and Partnerships

## My City Academy

My City Academy (MCA) was created to engage immigrant and refugee Denver residents, help them learn about resources, and participate in their government. The program's goal is to connect Denver residents to their communities by providing them with tools to successfully navigate city services while becoming leaders in their communities. This year, cohort 6 focused on providing essential information regarding City services and community resources to service providers and community navigators who work directly with immigrant and refugee communities. The full report will detail the experiences of our participants this year.

### 2021 MCA Highlights

- Average of 18 community participants per session
- 18 presenters including; 13 City agencies, 1 City Council Member, 4 members from Denver Health and Denver Public Library
- 5 sessions completed
- 7.5 hours of programming in total

# Capacity Building and Partnerships

## My City Academy (continued)

Supplemental Session - Denver Participatory Budgeting: On December 20, we held a supplemental virtual information one-hour session about Denver Participatory Budgeting (PB), a program where residents help lead the process of distributing public money to community projects. We had five people register and two participants attend this event. Spanish Interpretation was provided.

MCA Welcome Video – DOIRA has created an Afghan Newcomer video that covers services presented in our MCA resident track to support cultural orientation, and has been translated into Pashto and Dari.



## Community Engagement

DOIRA staff participated in several presentations and trainings throughout the year to inform, share, and engage with community partners and national and regional partners. Some highlights include: Two staff were guests on [Mujeres de COLOR](#), a Spanish radio show run by Denver's Colorado Organization for Latina Opportunity and Reproductive Rights (COLOR); presenting with [National Partnership for New Americans](#) on advancing Language Access policies, presenting with Denver Nature and Science Museum on [Changing Climate, Changing Livelihoods](#), and participating with [New American Economy](#) on a community survey project.

# Civic Engagement

## New American Economy Survey - Listening Sessions

In 2021 DOIRA had the opportunity to partner with the New American Economy in order to survey our immigrant and refugee communities regarding their feelings surrounding Denver's response to community needs as we continue to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 Community Impact Survey, conducted between February and May of 2021, asked 264 immigrants and refugees in Denver about the essential needs of their families; any help they may have received from local government and community organizations; how they may have engaged in community affairs; and if COVID-19 affected their sense of belonging. Results of the NAE survey have been shared with immigrant and refugee communities through 3 listening sessions that have been conducted this year. An additional 6 session in 2022 will help shape the priorities of DOIRA in 2022 and beyond.

Key findings from the survey indicate that Denver's immigrant and refugee communities have been, and continue to be, negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Approximately 25% of respondents report that they have lost their jobs in the past year due to COVID-19, while 36% reported a reduction in hours. While a large majority of respondents (77%) said that they received adequate help from the Denver government to protect them from COVID-19 and prevent its spread, more than 56% of individuals reported that they primarily utilized community and local organizations to aid in securing basic necessities like healthcare, food, and housing. Additionally, more than 37% of immigrant respondents reported tension in their community related to differences based on race or ethnicity. You can read more about the findings of this important survey in the [published report](#).

# Advocacy

## Language Access Program

2021 brought substantial and exciting movement for Denver's first Language Access program. DOIRA hired a grant funded Language Access Coordinator to assist the City in understating its current state of language access programming, processes, and standard and how best to support a citywide Language Access framework. Through this work, DOIRA was successful in conducting a Language Access toolkit training to support city agencies with developing language access plans and was most recently was approved to expand the LA program with three full time positions to build out this work.

Denver Language Thresholds\*\*

Languages spoken by 1,000 or more LEP Denver Residents (ACS, 2019)	Languages frequently in contact with CCD agencies	Languages containing 35% or more LEP speakers (ACS, 2019)
Vietnamese	American Sign Language (ASL)	Korean
Russian	Burmese	Urdu
Chinese (incl. Mandarin, Cantonese)	Farsi	Haitian
Amharic*	Karen	Khmer
Spanish	Nepali	Armenian
Arabic	Somali	Swahili
French (incl. Cajun)		

\*Total % of CCD LEP population per the 2019 ACS includes Somali (598) and other Afro-Asiatic languages (625). Best educated guess is that Amharic has the most LEP population due to the microdata in the 2019 ACS. It is also the most encountered language by city agencies and the language line.

One of the largest pieces of the Language Access work that was completed this year was a demographic analysis of our City and County's limited English proficiency (LEP) populations. We utilized data from numerous City and County Agencies, the American Community Survey from the US Census Bureau, and information from IT Services from the City and County. The compilation and analysis of this data determined the top 12 languages, of which 7 have over 1,000 LEP residents in each respective language, and the other 5 that are most encountered by CCD agencies or departments. This analysis also identified 7 languages that have at least 35% or more LEP residents who will be most impacted if language assistance is not provided given the significant percentage of LEP residents within these identified languages.

# Advocacy

## NATIONAL ADVOCACY

### Cities for Action



**CITIES**  
*for*  
**ACTION**

[Cities for Action](#) (C4A) is a coalition of almost 200 U.S. mayors and county executives advocating for pro-immigrant federal policies and promoting inclusive local policies and programs, and is led by a steering committee that ensures shared leadership among the most active C4A mayors, including in the City of Denver. C4A's Regional Coordinator is based in Denver and assists the Coalition with municipal re-engagement and recruitment, drafting advocacy tools based on federal immigration policies and action that can be used by municipalities for pro-immigration policies, and organizing meetings, convening, and spaces to share best practices for implementation of these policies on a local level. This year, Denver co-hosted the [7th annual Cities for Action convening](#) in December, which saw nearly 50 participants representing 40 different localities from 22 states in attendance. The two-day virtual event, led through the work of the Regional Coordinator, brought together C4A members for a briefing on the national immigration landscape, local approaches to national policy developments, with some local partners from Denver contributing to policy discussions on refugee resettlement and climate migration, access best practice guidance and resources, and strategize on collective advocacy.

DOIRA engaged the Mayor and the City and County of Denver and by extension Denver's immigrant and refugee community, on nine (9) different sign-on opportunities covering several national immigration topics. On behalf of the City and County of Denver two (2) written comments were submitted to [the Federal Register](#) in 2021 responding to identifying barriers the immigrant and refugee communities of Denver may face to accessing United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) benefits, as well as the notice of proposed rulemaking issued by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) concerning the DACA program. Mayor Michael Hancock signed on to two (2) unique sign-on opportunities in August and December 2021. The first opportunity called on the Biden Administration to protect immigrants from 15 countries using temporary protected status (TPS) and Mayor Hancock was one of 30 mayors from across the country to sign this letter. The second opportunity called on the Biden Administration to expand parole protections for Afghan and Haitian migrants and provide federal funding to assist welcoming communities and Mayor Hancock was one of 26 mayors from across the country to sign this letter. All sign-on opportunities and comments allowed Denver to uplift some of the key immigration-related priorities affecting Denver's immigrant and refugee residents, including Dreamers, TPS holders, and essential workers.

# Advocacy

## LOCAL ADVOCACY

### **Left Behind Workers' Fund**

The Left Behind Workers' Fund (LBWF) is assistance provided to Denver residents who were previously employed but due to COVID-19 have lost employment and are neither eligible for federal relief through the CARES Act nor are eligible for state unemployment insurance with cash assistance. Since its inception in 2020, Denver's partner Impact Charitable and trusted community organizations, have disbursed one-time \$1000 grants to support eligible Denver residents for a total of 3 million in CARES Act dollars, with 2 million expected to be disbursed in 2021. In terms of the unmet need for direct cash assistance, Impact Charitable estimates that in total, there are around 9,400 workers in Denver that qualify for this grant with 50% anticipated to be assisted through this Fund by the end of 2021. Approximately 1800 additional grants are expected to be made with the \$2 million funding in 2021. Anticipated resident use for basic needs in order of needs were: 1. Housing, 2. Food assistance, 3. Utilities, 4. Bills and expenses, 5. Healthcare, and 6. Transportation. We look forward to continuing this work in 2022 and working with other city agencies on supporting access to these identified basic needs for our communities.

### **Denver Immigrant Legal Services Fund**

The Denver Immigrant Legal Services Fund (DILSF) funds qualified organizations that provide direct legal representation to low-income, unauthorized individuals who are current residents of Denver and are subject to potential deportation. Resources can also be used to help nonprofits expand the pool of pro bono or low-bono attorneys to provide assistance. As due process in deportation proceedings and access to immigration legal services continues to be paramount for our Denver residents, the City in partnership with City Council has increased the DILSF funding to an annual allocation of \$500,000 from its \$300,000 one-time commitment last year and previous annual commitments of \$200,000 since 2018. There will also be an addition of a new 1 year renewable legal fellowship of \$250,000 for 2022 and 2023 to support the increased need for deportation representation and other legal resources needed during the course of representation. Read the 2020 DILSF report.

# In Conclusion...

2021 has been a challenging year for us all as the pandemic continues and as everyone does their best to stay safe and healthy. DOIRA's collective impact centered around the inclusive integration of immigrants and refugees in Denver and will continue to guide our work. This year has given us an opportunity to better understand community needs, build on our existing and new partnerships, and plan for more responsive and collaborative opportunities in 2022.

-DOIRA Staff

