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# **Building the New American Community**

Newcomer Integration and  
Inclusion Experiences in  
Non-Traditional Gateway Cities

Migration Policy Institute

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**Building the New  
American Community**  
**Newcomer Integration and Inclusion  
Experiences in Non-Traditional  
Gateway Cities**

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**Sponsored by the Office of Refugee Resettlement  
(ORR)**

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## Executive Summary

### Background

The 1990s was an extraordinary decade in terms of the number, origins and cultural diversity of migrants who arrived in the United States. Immigration's influence on the social, economic and political institutions of the nation has matched these demographic changes, and there is every indication that refugees and immigrants will continue to be a major force for change in the years to come. The influence of newcomers and their children on local communities, as well as the ways in which communities affect newcomers' integration trajectories, lies at the heart of many social and economic changes in American society.

The foreign born today comprise approximately 11.5 percent of the American population, and most settle in long-established gateway cities like New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Boston, Miami and Houston. During the 1990s, however, a much greater number of newcomers settled in "non-traditional" states and cities where relatively few migrants have resided since World War II. The three cities at the core of the Building the New American Community Initiative – Portland (OR), Nashville (TN) and Lowell (MA) – are illustrative of places that since the 1980s have attracted record numbers of refugees and immigrants, and today are working to build communities that are inclusive as well as economically, socially and culturally dynamic.

### Building the New American Community Initiative

The Building the New American Community (BNAC) Initiative aims to foster the successful integration of refugees and immigrants at a community level. In the absence of a national integration policy, the Initiative is also an experiment in how governments and civil society can co-operate to achieve positive integration outcomes. Coalitions to develop and experiment with integration strategies were formed in Lowell, Nashville and Portland, and assisted by a national team of policy analysts, advocates and researchers from the National Conference of State Legislatures, the National Immigration Forum, the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center, The Urban Institute, and the Migration Policy Institute.

This three-year initiative, funded primarily by the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement, focused on building relationships among organizations and institutions affiliated with the refugee/immigrant and receiving communities in order to capitalize on existing resources and opportunities, as well as to foster two-way integration. As such, integration is a process that involves an entire community, not just its newest members. It is also a long-term one built on daily two-way interactions between refugees/immigrants and members of the receiving community – in workplaces, schools, neighborhoods, places of worship, shopping malls etc. Integration fundamentally depends on institutions and organizations putting in place the enabling conditions that allow newcomers to achieve economic self-sufficiency and meaningful civic participation.

Four principles underlie the BNAC Initiative's concept of successful integration:

1. New Americans should be involved significantly in decision-making processes;
2. Integration is a two-way process that implicates and benefits both new Americans and receiving community members;
3. Coalitions are among the vehicles that can foster effective and meaningful collaborations in order to tackle the numerous challenges and opportunities associated with socio-economic, cultural and demographic change. These involve public-private partnerships that reach across levels of government and include a broad array of non-governmental organizations, as well as institutions and individuals from many different segments of society; and
4. Resources should be devoted to integration-focused interventions, as well as coalition building and training opportunities, which lead to systemic change.

The Lowell, Nashville and Portland demonstration sites developed multiple-issue integration agendas, and each coalition was compelled as a consequence to build a diverse membership from the outset. This meant that while coalitions had a core of refugee- and immigrant-serving organizations (mutual assistance associations (MAAs), community-based organizations, resettlement agencies), they also included representatives of various government departments and agencies (state, county and city), business associations, faith-based organizations, and neighborhood and social service providers. Over time, as the integration agendas were developed and activities initiated, new refugee, immigrant, and receiving-community groups joined the coalitions, while some founding members withdrew. In most sites, however, a broad representation and involvement was achieved.

### **Action Agendas: The Local Qualities of Integration**

Each demonstration site developed its own particular set of issues and projects that guided coalition activities.

- In Lowell considerable attention was given to civic engagement, namely encouraging naturalized citizens to vote in municipal, state and federal elections and organizing candidate forums. The One Lowell Coalition also developed a focus on youth and adult education programs, especially with respect to learning English and encouraging parental involvement in the school system.
- From the outset the Chamber of Commerce was an important member of the Nashville Coalition, and consequently activities in Nashville had a workforce and business development orientation, in addition to family- and refugee-community strengthening activities.
- Portland concentrated on building the internal capacity and structures of the African and Slavic/Ukrainian communities, as well as services for school-aged youth and their families, civic engagement with municipal and state agencies and public officials, neighborhood socio-economic development, and cross-cultural communication.

The sites did have a number of issues in common, such as civic engagement programs and a desire to raise awareness among local and state legislators of the contributions made by newcomers to social, economic and political life in each community. But the number of issues particular to each site also highlights the local qualities of integration – that it is a process which is highly responsive to local economic conditions and opportunities, as well as contingent upon long-established “ways of doing things” that structure the everyday qualities of social, political and cultural participation. These entrenched behaviors frequently are resistant to change and may pose the greatest challenges to achieving newcomer inclusion.

### **Main Findings and Policy Implications**

**Coalitions as Vectors for Integration:** Integration occurs over a long timeframe and it was necessary for the coalitions to refine, if not redefine, their missions and structures. BNAC local demonstration site partners were acutely aware of changing national and community priorities in the wake of 9/11 and spent substantial time revisiting their core mission.

Engaging in integration work through a coalition structure also means constantly discovering new institutions, organizations, individuals and practices that influence the experiences of newcomers. In spite of the challenges that the BNAC sites encountered in developing their base membership, each site did incorporate diverse groups, including representatives of the refugee, immigrant and receiving communities, and attempted to develop mechanisms to encourage the participation of new members.

Sound management is an important element for a successful integration coalition. In the three sites, the BNAC coalitions grappled with finding the right management structure – questioning whether their manager should function as a leader or a facilitator or if the management position should be part-time or

full-time. Given the range of issues and the challenge of moving many of them forward simultaneously, a full-time, fully funded manager and reasonable management infrastructure are needed to support the activities of a coalition. For coalitions to work well, leaders also must encourage the sharing of authority, recognition and responsibility among all coalition members.

**Institutions and Integration:** Integration is often gauged by individual socio-economic status or language competency measures, but organizations and institutions set the policy and practice context in which integration occurs. The BNAC Initiative facilitated and/or enhanced the quality of relations between refugee/immigrant and receiving community organizations. By working directly with organizations and institutions as diverse as refugee MAAs, city planning departments and business associations, coalitions saw long-established practices begin to change, as well as the development of stronger responses to the needs of newcomers. Integration requires that the laws, rules, practices and norms of organizations and official institutions, which may have been formulated decades before a new wave of refugee/immigrant settlement arrives in a city, not impede two-way integration. Building knowledge and relationships between organizations, and enabling refugee and immigrant leaders to participate in this building process, was a core focus of BNAC activity that enabled newcomers and long-established residents to capitalize on emerging relationships.

**Refugee and Immigrant Leadership:** Leadership Skills Development was one of the main activities of the coalitions in all three sites from the inception of the Initiative. To ensure that newcomers have the confidence and skills they require to assert and articulate their respective communities' needs, assets, and concerns successfully, each coalition put significant energy into leadership skills building. The goal was to produce effective leaders by providing them with training on organizational and membership development, as well as on such critical integration issues as access to jobs and social services, promotion of civic engagement, knowledge of refugee/immigrant rights and responsibilities, access to English-language training, and youth development and education. The coalitions sought to build strong and stable newcomer organizations as a true reflection of effective refugee/immigrant leadership development.

**Civic Engagement:** One of the major goals of the BNAC Initiative was to educate policymakers about newcomer communities and their integration experiences in localities, as well as to bring refugee and immigrant voices to the table on a range of policy issues. This has been one of the most successful aspects of the Initiative, with newcomers not only learning about the American electoral system and the importance of voting, but also participating as partners with public agencies in the coalitions. In practical terms, refugee and immigrant organizations played a direct role in crafting policies and programs that directly influence their communities as well as the receiving community. In turn, through trainings and direct interactions, newcomers developed greater confidence and security in communicating with public officials. This also gave many policymakers a better understanding of newcomer communities, the particular challenges faced by refugees/immigrants and their children as they become Americans, and how public policies could facilitate (or impede) productive integration.

**Persistent Integration Challenges:** There are many integration issues rooted in the particular economic, social and political circumstances of cities. However, the newcomer communities in every BNAC site identified three sets of issues as fundamental to their integration and the social mobility of their children: i) English training, ii) employment/vocational skills, in relation to credential and education attainment recognition and skills upgrading, and iii) youth development opportunities, especially in the educational system. The inability to utilize training acquired abroad because of reluctance on the part of many receiving community institutions, licensing boards and employers to recognize foreign credentials was repeatedly identified as a major barrier to integration.

Likewise, the quality and content of education and opportunities for youth to develop their skills were identified as major integration problems that merit community-wide attention. Included under the youth development umbrella are issues pertaining to English-language training, linguistic limitations that impeded children's ability to develop their skills in subjects such as mathematics and science, an absence of culturally appropriate after-school and recreation programs for girls and boys, and language and cross-cultural communication difficulties encountered by parents when interacting with school systems and teachers.

English training, employment, and youth development integration challenges are generic to each site, but they are also examples of issues that are tailor-made for coalition action. In each site the coalitions took steps to address pieces of these large and complex issues. By facilitating interactions between newcomer and receiving community organizations, Nashville was able to begin unraveling the complexities of the accreditation process for foreign-trained engineers, and Lowell fostered a program that encourages refugee parents to become involved in the school system. Similarly, refugee/immigrant groups played a significant role in shaping Multnomah County's (Portland) School-Aged Policy Framework and the ways services will be provided to youth and their families.

**Policy Responses for Integration:** The BNAC Initiative highlights the range of social and economic conditions that influence integration opportunities across the country. The history of newcomer settlement in the BNAC sites has tended to be episodic rather than continuous. In addition, relative to large gateway cities, they tend to have less fully developed institutional relationships and networks that facilitate integration. Other cities are in a much stronger position due to a long history of providing settlement services, while still others have much more limited capacity and expertise. If the federal government is to embark on a broad integration program, one of the most salient lessons to be drawn from the BNAC experiment is how the "uneven geography" of refugee and immigrant settlement, as well as the availability and quality of resources within a city, requires innovation in policy development and delivery. Engaging the resources of several levels of government and their agencies, businesses, private organizations and a broad spectrum of community-based partners is an intensive and demanding way to build social policy, but it is one that will be tied to local conditions and needs. It is also one that by its very nature demands a tolerance for variation in policy objectives, program development and delivery across the nation. Such a collaborative, if differentiated, policy approach is absolutely essential in this period of high and highly diverse immigration.

## **Chapter 1: “Building the New American Community” Initiative – an Experiment in Newcomer Integration**

Our societies, in all latitudes, are and will be multicultural and the cities ... are the places in which the greatest diversity is concentrated. Learning to live with this situation, succeeding in managing cultural exchange on the basis of ethnic difference and remedying the inequalities arising from discrimination are essential aspects of new local policy in the conditions arising out of the new global interdependence (Borja and Castells 1997, 89).

The cultural and linguistic heterogeneity that characterizes many contemporary societies – from the United States to European nations – is a social reality that will only grow in the coming decades and play an ever more influential role in processes of socio-economic and cultural change. As Borja and Castells (1997) point out, diversity is most profoundly experienced in cities, where people from many different cultures rub shoulders in the course of everyday life. In the United States, the majority of refugees and immigrants continue to settle in long-established gateway cities like New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Boston, Miami and Houston and maintain the distinctiveness of these places as multiethnic urban environments.

During the 1990s, however, a significant number of newcomers also began to settle in “non-traditional” states and cities where relatively few migrants have built new lives and communities since at least World War II (Singer 2004). States such as North Carolina, Georgia, Nevada, Arkansas, Utah, Tennessee, Nebraska and Colorado saw the foreign-born population grow by over 150 percent (North Carolina led with a 274 percent increase). Moreover, year 2000 census data also indicate that not only are more refugees and immigrants settling in non-traditional cities, they are becoming suburbanites, often bypassing ‘traditional’ inner-city reception neighborhoods for well-developed (or “urbanized”) suburban locations with good access to employment and schools. In only 32 of the 100 largest metropolitan areas in the United States did the growth of the foreign-born population in the central city exceed that in the suburbs during the 1990s (Ray et al., 2004). Very few communities in urban America failed to experience first-hand the social and cultural changes brought about by migration during the last decade.

The 1990s was an extraordinary decade in terms of the number and socio-cultural diversity of refugees and immigrants who arrived to live in the United States. From 1990 to 2000, gross legal (or authorized) permanent immigration averaged 966,536 entries, and was the most significant component of the migration flow to the United States. Refugees are a component of the permanent migration flow to the country. Including both resettled refugees and asylum seekers whose applications received a positive determination, the number of people in the refugee category declined in a fairly consistent manner throughout the decade from a high of 109,593 in 1994 to 68,925 in 2001. Never a huge segment in the overall flow of migrants to the United States, refugees do face some of the most difficult settlement challenges due to the trauma of displacement, the inability to plan their move to the United States, few portable economic resources, and for many, an absent or weak kin and friend support structure in the places where they settle.

Partially due to tight labor markets in the low value-added manufacturing and personal services sectors, the 1990s also saw strong growth in the number of illegal migrants in the United States. Estimates range from 6.9 million (US Immigration and Naturalization Service, 2003) to 9.3 million (Passel et al., 2004) undocumented migrants living in the country, and it is thought that up to 5 million of these people arrived during the 1990s. Latin Americans account for approximately three-quarters of all illegal migration, and the majority of these migrants are from Mexico (70 percent) (Fix and Passel 2001).

Migrants to the United States during the 1990s also continued to make the country more ethno-culturally diverse. In 1960, 74.5 percent of the foreign-born population originated in Europe and only 9.3 percent and 5 percent were born in Latin American and Asia, respectively. Compared to the early post-World War II decades, the source countries for migrants today are almost completely different: 15.8 percent of migrants come from Europe and 51.7 percent and 26.4 percent from Latin America and Asia, respectively.

It was in this context of social and cultural change that the Building the New American Community (BNAC) Initiative was launched in 2001. The BNAC Initiative is an experiment in fostering the successful integration of newcomers – refugees and immigrants – at a community level in three demonstration sites. The sites – Lowell (MA), Nashville (TN) and Portland (OR) – are ideal examples of the profound changes that have occurred in emerging gateways of immigrant settlement in urban America, and are also places in which many organizations have been exploring ways to create greater cohesion between newcomers and the native-born population. The Initiative was to a certain degree born out of the absence of a national integration or *immigrant* policy, and seeks to build relationships between governments and civil society to achieve positive integration outcomes for newcomers and the places that receive them. Coalitions of organizations from many different segments of society were formed in Lowell, Nashville and Portland to pursue integration projects, and they were assisted by a national team of policy analysts, advocates and researchers from the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), the National Immigration Forum, the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC), The Urban Institute, and the Migration Policy Institute (MPI).

The BNAC Initiative began in October of 2000 and the three demonstration sites were selected by May 2001. The Initiative was funded primarily by the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) and ran for just over three years. The three demonstration sites actually were not selected and funded until several months into the first year of the Initiative, and due to the time that they required to plan and build coalitions, their activities for the most part only had a two-year time span. The national partners engaged in an extensive process to select the demonstration sites, provided the sites with various kinds of technical assistance, were responsible for guidance of the coalitions with respect to management, outreach, coalition building, and the development of integration projects and their execution. NCSL was the lead national partner and fiscal agent, and together with SEARAC and the National Immigration Forum, provided various forms of technical assistance and monitoring to the demonstration sites. The Urban Institute and the Migration Policy Institute were primarily responsible for research papers about various facets of integration, and charted the evolution of the coalitions and the activities that each site undertook.<sup>1</sup>

The BNAC Initiative focused on building relationships between organizations and institutions affiliated with the refugee/ immigrant and receiving communities in order to capitalize on existing resources and opportunities, as well as to foster *two-way* integration. In many ways, it would be more appropriate to label it a process of multi-way integration because of the number of organizations

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<sup>1</sup> The Urban Institute produced the following background papers for the project:

Lotspeich, K., M. Fix, D. Perez-Lopez and J. Ost 2003a. *A Profile of the Foreign-Born in Lowell, Massachusetts*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

Lotspeich, K., M. Fix, D. Perez-Lopez and J. Ost 2003b. *A Profile of the Foreign-Born in the Nashville Economic Market*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

Lotspeich, K., M. Fix, D. Perez-Lopez and J. Ost 2003c. *A Profile of the Foreign-Born in the Portland Tri-County Area*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

Fix, M., K. Lotspeich, J.S. Passel and J. Reardon-Anderson (in press). *Civic Integration of America's Immigrants: Naturalization, Voting and Beyond*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

involved and cross-cutting relationships between them. Relationships were developed not just between organizations representing foreign-born and US-born individuals, but between refugee and immigrant organizations and among a significant number of organizations more strongly affiliated with the receiving community that had never worked together. For conceptual clarity, the national partners chose to frame integration as a two-way process, given that greater cohesion between refugees/immigrants and organizations and individuals of the receiving society was the Initiative's fundamental goal. In short, the BNAC Initiative conceives of *integration* as a process that involves an entire community, not just its newest members. It is also a long-term practice built on the daily two-way interactions between refugees/immigrants and receiving communities in places that range from workplaces, schools and neighborhoods to places of worship, shopping malls and baseball fields. In addition, it depends on organizations and institutions putting in place the enabling conditions that allow newcomers to achieve economic self-sufficiency, social mobility and meaningful civic participation.

Four principles underlie the BNAC Initiative's approach to integration:

1. New Americans should be involved significantly in decision-making processes;
2. Integration is a two-way process that implicates and benefits both newcomers and receiving community members;
3. Coalitions are among the vehicles that can foster effective and meaningful collaborations in order to tackle the numerous challenges and opportunities associated with socio-economic, cultural and demographic change. These involve public-private partnerships that reach across levels of government and include a broad array of non-governmental organizations, as well as institutions and individuals from many different segments of society; and
4. Resources should be devoted to integration-focused interventions, as well as to coalition building and training opportunities, which lead to systemic change.

Integration is often measured by individual socio-economic status or language competency, but the success of individual efforts depends strongly on the actions of organizations and institutions that set the policy and practice parameters in which integration occurs. The BNAC Initiative focused on facilitating and/or enhancing the quality of relationships between refugee/immigrant and receiving community organizations. By working directly with organizations as diverse as refugee mutual assistance associations, city planning departments and business associations, the intent was to change long-established practices so as to utilize the human potential of refugees and immigrants, and better respond to their needs. Building knowledge and relationships between organizations, and enabling refugee and immigrant leaders to participate in this building process, does construct a social environment in which more and more newcomers and long-established residents alike can realize the opportunities of a diverse American society.

Each BNAC demonstration site is a coalition of many different kinds of organizations, and the national partners devoted considerable energy throughout the Initiative to building and enhancing the broad alliances among organizations that are directly involved in refugee and immigrant settlement, as well as with those whose mandate is broader and not necessarily exclusively focused on newcomers. The organizational structure of each coalition was slightly different, as were their membership and project goals, but every coalition gave considerable attention to building leadership strength and organizational capacity amongst nascent refugee and immigrant Mutual Assistance Associations (MAAs). A principal objective of the BNAC Initiative was to enhance the organizational capacity of MAAs to enable them to work as equal partners with receiving community organizations such as chambers of commerce, school boards, neighborhoods associations, and non-profit organizations, as well as state and local government departments and agencies.

The intent of the BNAC Initiative has never been to create more government. Instead, the BNAC Initiative has fostered ways in which strong *governance* relationships between different kinds of organizations can be built at the local level to respond to the particular socio-economic, cultural and political integration challenges that exist in the places where immigrants settle. Effective governance relationships inherently mean innovation in the ways in which national, state and local governments communicate, share power, and deliver programs. It also entails thoughtful approaches to the ways in which governments at all levels interact with the non-governmental sector and social groups that often do the lion's share of short-term settlement and integration work with newcomers. The cultural diversity of cities is well recognized, but the ways to structure the components of a local governance environment to provide opportunities for individuals, families and youth, promote leadership within marginalized social groups and organizations, and remedy inequities that arise from discrimination are far less self-evident. The BNAC Initiative outlines some of the opportunities, as well as the constraints and limits, to inventing new forms of governance that respond to these kinds of issues and challenges in multi-ethnic cities.

### Report Outline and Methodology

The chapters that follow provide an overview of the three demonstration sites, the composition of the coalitions, objectives and plans for fostering integration, and some of the activities that were pursued. Chapter 2 reviews the process by which the demonstration sites were selected and compares and contrasts the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of each place, with a particular focus on the foreign-born population. The chapter concludes by sketching the broad objectives and organizational composition of each coalition. In Chapter 3, the focus shifts attention to the coalitions and reviews the community action plans that were developed in Lowell, Nashville and Portland, as well as the kinds of organizational structures that each coalition put in place to govern their actions and execute individual projects. Chapter 3 also examines the kinds of relationships that developed between organizations that were members of the coalitions, as well as the response of the coalitions and their member organizations to the significant changes in local conditions brought about by the economic downturn following the terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001. The actual integration projects that the coalitions undertook over the two final years of the Initiative are highlighted in Chapter 4. It is impossible to review in detail the many and varied projects that each coalition pursued, so instead three to four innovative attempts to generate two-way integration in each site are discussed. The final chapter of the report briefly outlines recommendations that might be considered and/or developed should other sites or institutions seek to pursue two-way integration projects on a local scale.

The report draws on information from a variety of sources. Early in the development of the BNAC Initiative, the research team made the strategic decision to hire a project "diarist" in each site who would act as the principal monitor of the Initiative's evolution at a local scale. The research team realized that much of their work would involve examining the ways in which an integration *process* unfolds over time, and that someone in each site who could report on the coalition's progress and project implementation would be indispensable. The monthly diarist reports helped the national BNAC partners to maintain ties with the coalitions and to chart the progress of integration projects. The reports are a principal data source and have been key to writing this report.

In addition to their reports, the local diarists also provided the research team with a large quantity of newspaper reports that dealt with immigration issues in each community generally and the work of the coalitions specifically. These newspaper reports have been instrumental in allowing the research team to develop a sense of the local context in which immigration, integration and ethnic diversity issues are presented and debated. The research team also had access to monthly

demonstration site reports and more detailed six-month reports that the local coalitions provided to the national BNAC partners. Reports produced by the technical assistance team about their activities in each site were also used as a data source. In addition to these written materials, the research team conducted interviews with key organizations and individuals that were directly or tangentially connected with the coalitions. These interviews were carried out during several site visits over the life of the Initiative and proved to be extremely valuable as they enabled the research team to enhance its understanding of each coalition's on-the-ground organization and activities. The interviews from these visits have come to inform the report in a myriad of ways, and they had a further benefit of encouraging relationships between the research team and many local organizations. Over time several organizations and individuals turned to the research team for information and resources as they formulated proposals for funding or responded to issues and events in their community. Finally, results from the 2000 Census also have informed this report. Although the research team recognizes that many foreign-born and ethnic communities dispute the results furnished concerning the size and characteristics of particular communities, the Census is still the most comprehensive and detailed source of information about newcomers, and it is relied on here to outline the overall socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the demonstration sites.

## **Chapter 2: The Demonstration Sites – Lowell, Nashville and Portland**

The BNAC Initiative deliberately selected demonstration sites in which encouraging two-way integration would be especially challenging because of the relatively recent arrival of many refugees and immigrants, and the absence of a sustained and continuous history of newcomer settlement. The Initiative avoided cities that have a long history of immigration – the demonstration sites are not simply smaller versions of New York, Boston or Chicago. Instead, the demonstration sites are places in which refugees and immigrants are changing socio-demographic and cultural profiles of communities, and challenging, if only as a function of numerical growth and size, the ways in which residents have traditionally understood their cities. On a somewhat larger scale, the most recent wave of newcomers is also forcing people who live outside of the traditional immigrant gateway cities to confront identity and policy issues associated with the United States' growing cultural and linguistic diversity as part of their daily experience.

This chapter begins by reviewing the process that led to the selection of Lowell, Nashville and Portland as the BNAC Initiative's demonstration sites. Attention then shifts to describing in broad terms the socio-economic and refugee/immigrant characteristics of each city in order to establish some of the local parameters that the organizations in each site encountered in formulating integration agendas, goals and activities in their community action plans. The chapter also outlines the operating principles that structured relationships between groups and the mandate of each coalition, and concludes by describing the broad objectives and major organizations that made up the coalitions.

### Selection of the Demonstration Sites

The three demonstration sites were selected through an open and competitive process in the early months of 2001. Given the widespread movement of new refugees and immigrants to non-traditional reception cities and towns during the 1990s, a large number of potential demonstration sites existed. Likewise, the socio-economic, political and demographic diversity within the universe of cities where immigrants settle was daunting. The National Partners chose to carve down the number of potential candidate cities, as well as some of the heterogeneity in terms of institutional capacity and experience with newcomers, by restricting the competition to:

- “Non-traditional” places of refugee/immigrant settlement – cities in which the number of foreign-born residents grew significantly during the 1990s and the refugee/immigrant population in 1990 was small;
- Places where there was a need for assistance with newcomer settlement but an insufficient infrastructure to facilitate the process; and
- Cities in which there was little recent historical experience in responding to newcomers. Many cities in the United States settled large number of immigrants during the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but due to changes in immigration policy and population migration within the country, immigration became part of many cities' heritage rather than an integral aspect of daily life.

These criteria meant that metropolitan areas in the top receiving states – California, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New York and Texas – were excluded. Moreover, each city's foreign-born population had to be between 15,000 and 500,000 individuals. For larger cities (population over 1.25 million), the percentage of foreign-born individuals who arrived in the 1990s had to be greater than 40 percent, and for smaller cities (population less than 1.25 million) the percentage had to be greater than 20 percent.

Refugees also had to constitute at least 5.5 percent of foreign-born individuals who arrived during the 1990s.

In response to these criteria, the National Partners received 68 letters of interest. Based on the degree to which the letter of interest met the Initiative's criteria for multi-dimensional and multi-directional integration, broad community involvement across for-profit and non-profit sectors and levels of government, and refugee/immigrant engagement, 12 coalitions in 10 cities were invited to submit full proposals. In two cities, Portland (OR) and Atlanta (GA), the two lead agencies were encouraged to collaborate and were informed that only one grant would be awarded in any one metropolitan area.

The final proposals were reviewed by a group of experts in refugee/immigrant issues who represented a range of sectors: federal, state and local governments, philanthropy, voluntary agencies, faith-based organizations and community-based organizations. The top five highest-scoring proposals as determined by the expert panel were then considered as finalists and received a site visit from members of the National Partners team and an ORR staff member. The finalists were Baltimore (MD), Denver (CO), Lowell (MA), Nashville (TN) and Portland (OR). A generic protocol based on the proposal components (vision, outcomes, organizational capacity, community resources and work plan) was developed to evaluate each site, and this was supplemented with questions raised by the review panels. Based on the full proposals and the field visit, the National Partners and ORR selected the three demonstration sites: Lowell, Nashville and Portland.

#### Lowell: New Immigrants in an Emerging Post-Industrial City

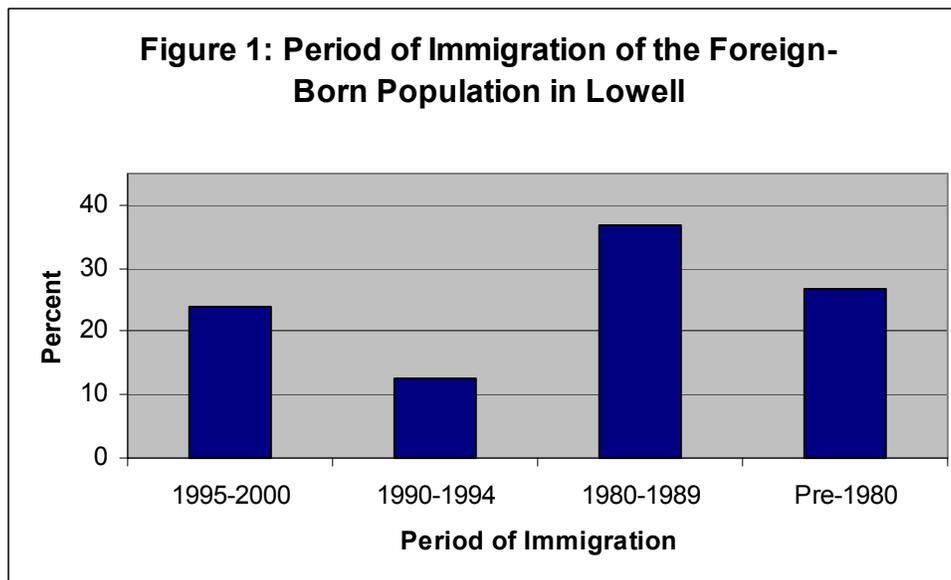
Although it is an important contemporary immigrant reception site, Lowell is perhaps better known as the birthplace of the American industrial revolution and the building of planned communities around massive textile mills in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The power generated by the Pawtucket Falls on the Merrimack River encouraged entrepreneurs to establish the first textile mills in the United States, which in turn launched the American industrial revolution in the 1820s and 1830s. Immigrants were an influential factor in the city's development, with French Canadian, Irish, and Central and Southern European immigrants working in the mills and factories in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. By the 1920s the textile mills began to close and eventually the city became a place of high unemployment and growing poverty. The general downturn in the economy, coupled with a more restricted national approach to immigration after World War I, meant that by the 1970s Lowell saw immigrants as a part of its heritage rather than as an important segment of everyday economic and social life.

Since the end of World War II, a number of events have influenced the overall prosperity of Lowell's economy and the community's ability to attract, retain and integrate immigrants. The decline of the textile industry after World War II led to a protracted period of economic decline and unemployment, and forced the city to fundamentally change its employment base. Lowell's proximity to Boston and the emergence during the 1970s of a high technology sector in the greater Boston region, which was often boosted by defense spending, was instrumental in re-establishing the city's economy. Between 1975 and 1980, Lowell experienced a 400 percent growth in employment, and firms such as Wang, Digital Equipment Corporation and Data General became major employers and the harbingers of a new post-industrial economy (Best and Farrant 2001, 274). The boom years, however, were not to last. By the late 1980s, the computer industry experienced a major downturn and defense spending was cut substantially. As a consequence, in Lowell manufacturing employment declined by 28 percent between 1985 and 1992. Indicative of the depth of the economic downturn in the computer industry in the early 1990s was the sale of the Wang Towers located in downtown Lowell – constructed at a cost of \$23 million, the complex was sold for \$500,000 in 1992 (Best and Farrant 2001, 274).

Since the mid-1990s, the Lowell region’s economy has improved. A number of firms that perform contract electronics manufacturing and assembly for other high-technology firms have been established, and there are hundreds of small to mid-sized metalworking, software, telecommunications, and computer networking firms. Lowell is not a center of technological innovation and invention, but it is a hub that turns ideas into durable goods and services for a knowledge-based economy. By 2000, the unemployment rate in Lowell was 2.5 percent, which matched that of Massachusetts (2.6 percent). The rate increased significantly with the onset of the most recent recession: 4.1 percent (2001), 6.5 percent (2002), and 6.8 percent (2003).<sup>2</sup>

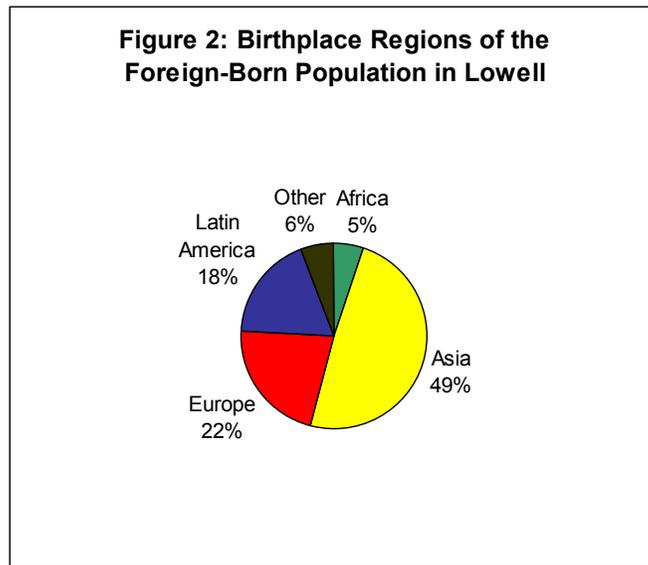
In 2000, 20.5 percent of Lowell’s labor force was employed in manufacturing industries, 19.2 percent in education, health and social service industries, and 12.0 percent in professional, management and administrative industries. To place the importance of the manufacturing sector in Lowell into context, only 12.8 percent of the labor force in Massachusetts is employed in this industrial sector.

The manufacturing economy has been instrumental in attracting and retaining recent refugees and immigrants to the city. Equal shares of the foreign-born population arrived in Lowell in the 1980s (36.6 percent) and 1990s (36.5 percent), but migration increased significantly after 1995 – approximately 24 percent of the foreign born entered during the latter half of the 1990s (Figure 1).<sup>3</sup> According to the 2000 Census, 22 percent of Lowell’s population is foreign-born, which is twice the national average (11 percent) and higher than the proportion of foreign born in Massachusetts (12 percent). The majority of immigrants in Lowell come from Asia (48.6 percent) and Cambodians in particular constitute a very important share of the total foreign-born population (16.9 percent) (Figure 2). The Cambodian population in Lowell is the second-greatest concentration in the United States, and this fact alone makes Lowell stand out as an important site of refugee integration. Latin American immigrants (18.4 percent) for the most part come from Brazil, Colombia, and the Dominican Republic. European immigrants (22.0 percent) are predominantly from Portugal and most have been in Lowell for many years if not decades. African immigrants comprise 5.2 percent of the foreign-born population in Lowell, but it is worth noting that this proportion is twice the national average (3 percent).



<sup>2</sup> US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Local Area Unemployment Statistics*, [http://policyresearch.gc.ca/page.asp?pagenm=rp\\_sc\\_index](http://policyresearch.gc.ca/page.asp?pagenm=rp_sc_index)

<sup>3</sup> Data on the foreign-born population and labor force characteristics of the population at large from the 2000 US Census (Summary File 3). For Lowell and Portland, the data are presented for the primary metropolitan statistical area (PMSA) and in the case of Nashville for the metropolitan statistical area (MSA).



Source: US Census, Summary File 3, 2000.

The diversity of Lowell’s foreign-born population is also reflected in the diversity of languages spoken in the community. The most common foreign languages spoken by youth in Lowell are Spanish (7 percent), Khmer (6 percent), Portuguese (2 percent) and Laotian (1 percent). Approximately one-third of youth (5 to 17 years old) who speak Spanish, Asian and Pacific Islander languages, and other Indo-European languages are limited English proficient. Among adults, Spanish (5 percent), French (2.8 percent) and Khmer (2.8 percent) are also the three most common foreign languages, but the other two languages of the top five are Portuguese and Greek. Reflecting the more limited linguistic abilities of adult foreign-language speakers, 61 percent of individuals speaking Asian and Pacific Islander languages and 45.5 percent of Spanish speakers have only limited proficiency in English.<sup>4</sup>

There are many reasons for concern about the relatively high rates of limited English proficiency among both adults and youth in Lowell, but the most critical is that poor English skills are strongly correlated with weak socio-economic status and labor force performance. In addition to being more likely to work in low-paying, low-status jobs and being more susceptible to unemployment, it has also been found that people with limited proficiency in English are highly correlated with food insecurity and other household hardship measures (Capps et al. 2002).

In Lowell, 8 percent of the total population lives below the federal poverty level (\$17,050 for a family of four in 2000), which is less than the national rate (12 percent). Among the foreign born, 13.6 percent live in poverty, and this is only slightly higher than the rate for the US-born population (7.2 percent).

Finally, naturalization rates among many foreign-born groups are well below the national average. Only 32.5 percent of Asian immigrants in Lowell are naturalized compared to 51 percent nationally. The low rate of naturalization is somewhat surprising given that 65 percent of Asians arrived in the United States as legal permanent residents before 1990 and are therefore eligible for naturalization. It is believed that the low rate may be a function of the limited English language proficiency of many Asian refugees/immigrants. Less than 50 percent of Latin American and African

<sup>4</sup> “Limited English Proficient”, as defined by the Census, refers to persons who speak a language other than English and who do not speak English “very well”.

refugees/immigrants have naturalized (45 percent and 22.5 percent, respectively), although belonging to these two groups are many individuals who arrived after 1990 and may not have been eligible to naturalize by 2000.

### Nashville: Explosive Immigrant Growth in a Southern Metropolis

The socio-economic context of refugee and immigrant settlement in Nashville is sharply different from that of Lowell in some important ways. In general, Nashville has seen significant population and economic growth during the 1990s and its employment base is quite diversified. The City of Nashville is located in Davidson County and shares the same metropolitan government with the county. The Nashville Economic Market outperformed that of the state and nation during the 1990s and continued to do so throughout the 2002-2003 economic recession. Given a low unemployment rate and consistent job growth, Nashville has become an important destination for people moving within the United States and for refugees and immigrants arriving from abroad.

The establishment in Middle Tennessee of the Nissan, Saturn and Dell Computer manufacturing plants has done a great deal to raise the economic and employment profile of Nashville. The city's major industries include publishing and printing, banking and insurance, health care management, higher education, and tourism and music (most notably country music). In terms of employment, 18.8 percent of the labor force is employed in education, health and social services industries, 13.5 percent in manufacturing and 8.8 percent in professional, management and administrative industries. Importantly, retail trade is the third-largest industrial sector by employment (11.6 percent). The proportional representation of Nashville workers in the service and entertainment and information sectors, as well as the finance, insurance and real estate sector, exceeds that for Tennessee.

In part a function of a fairly diversified economy that includes manufacturing, entertainment and high-skill management and professional occupations, Nashville's unemployment rate was low throughout the last half of the 1990s (often below 3 percent) and remained below the national and state rates during the economic downturn of 2002-2003. The region's economic and population growth rate during the 1990s generated over 160,000 new jobs, especially in the service and construction industries, both of which hire large numbers of foreign workers. Education is a major factor that influences wage rates among workers. Tennessee does not have a state minimum wage law and as a consequence workers who do not have the equivalent of high-school education typically earn no more than \$7.50 an hour (and usually substantially less).<sup>5</sup> In 2000, Nashville's unemployment rate stood at 2.8 percent, below that of Tennessee (3.9 percent). With the recession, the unemployment rate increased to 3.3 percent (2001), 4.0 percent (2002) and 4.4 percent (2003).<sup>6</sup>

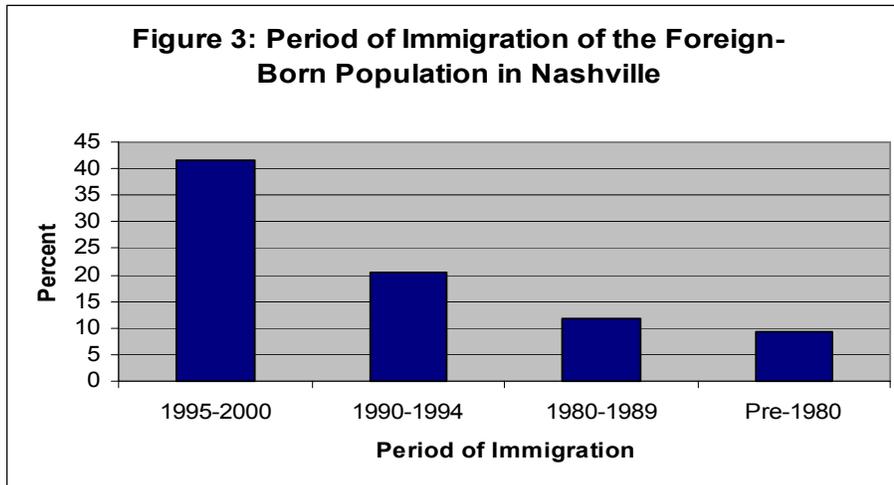
One factor that influences the economy and the revenues of the government is the absence of a state income tax. Instead, a 8.25 percent sales tax is applied to most purchased goods, which means that low-income households tend to devote a greater proportion of their incomes to paying taxes than do high-income earners. Given that state revenues are tied so strongly to consumption, the government tends to have relatively little surplus revenue and public institutions such as schools are usually under-funded. Schools in Nashville are usually better than in most of the state; however, they still perform below the national average.

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<sup>5</sup> The current federal minimum wage is \$5.15 per hour.

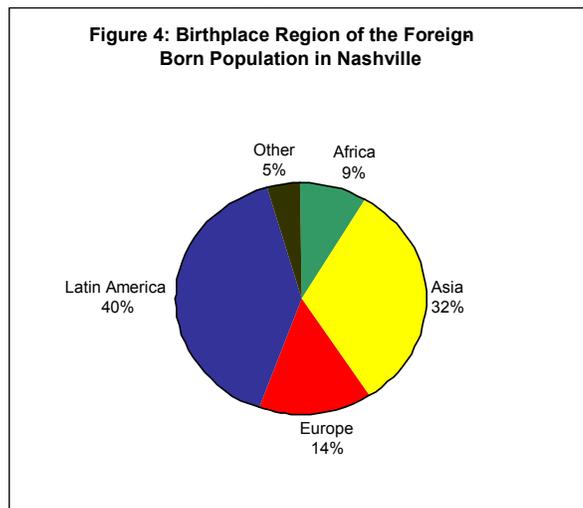
<sup>6</sup> US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Local Area Unemployment Statistics*, [http://policyresearch.gc.ca/page.asp?pagenm=rp\\_sc\\_index](http://policyresearch.gc.ca/page.asp?pagenm=rp_sc_index)

The foreign-born constitute only 5 percent of the total population in metropolitan Nashville – well below the national average of 11 percent. However, the number of foreign-born individuals living in metropolitan Nashville during the 1990s exploded – between 1990 and 2000 the foreign-born population grew by 213 percent. Forty-one percent of Nashville’s refugees/immigrants arrived after 1995, compared to 24 percent nationally, which means that the foreign-born population is exceedingly recent. In fact, only 39 percent of the foreign born arrived prior to 1990. Nashville exemplifies characteristics typically associated with new immigrant gateway cities in the United States: strong economic growth coupled with rapid foreign-born population increases from a very tiny base of refugees and immigrants who resided in the city in 1990.



Source: US Census, Summary File 3, 2000.

Latin Americans constitute the largest foreign-born group in the Nashville metropolitan area (40.3 percent), but a significant number of people are also from other world regions: Asia and the Middle East (32.4 percent), Europe (14.3 percent) and Africa (8 percent) (Figure 4). Mexico is the largest sending country by far (27.6 percent), followed by Germany, Korea, Laos, Canada, India and Iraq. It should be noted that Nashville has one of the largest groups of Kurdish refugees/immigrants in the United States – approximately 50 percent of people in Nashville who indicate a “West Asian” ancestry are Kurdish. This is a much higher proportion than in cities such as Detroit, Chicago and San Diego that have much larger West Asian/Middle Eastern populations.



Source: US Census, Summary File 3, 2000.

Given that such a large proportion of the foreign-born population migrated from Latin America, it is not surprising that Spanish is the most common foreign language spoken in Nashville. Among Spanish-speaking youth and adults, 43.5 percent and 53.6 percent, respectively, are limited in their English proficiency. Roughly comparable proportions of youths and adults who speak Asian and Pacific Island languages are limited English proficient – 43.2 percent (youths) and 54.1 percent (adults). Much smaller proportions of youths and adults who speak Indo-European languages other than Spanish are limited in their English proficiency (28.7 and 31.7 percent, respectively).

The fact that so many foreign-born individuals recently settled in Nashville from abroad means that the rate of naturalization is quite low when compared to cities with a long and continuous history of immigration. Twenty-nine percent of immigrants are naturalized citizens, which is well below the national average (40 percent). Europeans have the highest rate of naturalization (41 percent), followed by Asians (38 percent). Latin Americans have the lowest naturalization rate (17 percent) and lag well behind the national naturalization rate for Latinos (30 percent). In part owing to the newness of the foreign-born population in Nashville, the naturalization rate of almost every group in the city is lower than the national average.

Even though Nashville has a relatively low rate of unemployment, poverty is still significant, especially among new refugees/immigrants. Ten percent of Nashville's population lived below the poverty line in 2000, but among the foreign-born population the proportion stood at 18.3 percent compared to 9.7 percent for the US-born.<sup>7</sup> Poverty rates were most acute among non-citizens (22.3 percent) and largely reflect both the recent arrival of many refugees and immigrants and the ability of people who have spent at least five years in the United States to pass the citizenship test.

#### Portland: Asian Refugees and Other Newcomers

The City of Portland is known throughout the United States for its high quality of life. The Portland Development Commission boasts that in 2002, the editors of CNN and Money Magazine ranked Portland, with its strong sense of community, mild climate, low crime, low property taxes, and education resources as the second-best place to live in the United States (New York City was ranked number one). The city also ranks number two among the top ten least expensive United States cities according to a survey conducted by the New York-based Mercer Human Resources Consulting firm.

Portland has one of the more diversified economies on the West Coast of the United States, with a broad base in manufacturing, wholesale and retail trade and services. High technology also plays an important role in the economy, and the city has become a regional hub for industries reliant on technology. Almost 1,700 high-technology firms, most of them semi-conductor manufacturers, are located in the Portland metropolitan area and they account for 36 percent of factory jobs. The biggest local private employer is Intel, the maker of Pentium microprocessors.<sup>8</sup> A significant proportion of the workforce is employed in manufacturing industries (15.7 percent), but education, health and social service industries and professional, management and administrative industries employ 17.6 percent and 10.4 percent of workers, respectively. Examining the proportional distribution of workers across industries highlights one of the essential characteristics of Portland's economy – a polarization between employment in high-skilled and low-skilled industries. The labor force is also young and educated, with the city ranked fifth in the nation in terms of the in-migration of college educated single people between the ages of 25 and 39. The net migration of young, well-educated people to Portland is a good indicator

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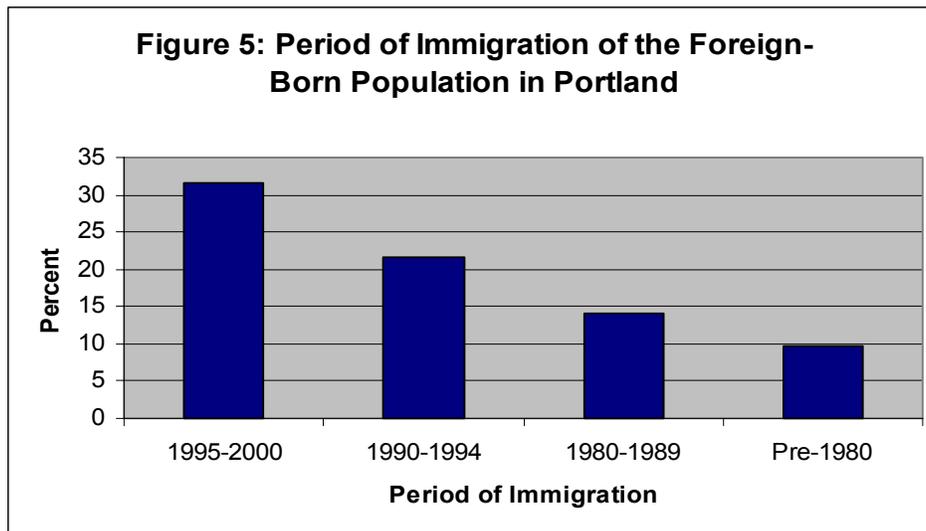
<sup>7</sup> The federal poverty level for a family of four in 2000 was \$17,050. Approximately 10 percent of the US-born population in Nashville lived in poverty.

<sup>8</sup> See *Portland Facts and Praises*: [http://www.pdc.us/bus\\_serv/praises/default.asp](http://www.pdc.us/bus_serv/praises/default.asp)

of perceived economic and employment opportunities, and encourages the future growth of industries in which education plays a key role.

The unemployment rate in Portland, however, is higher than in the other cities. In 2000, 4.0 percent of the labor force was unemployed, which was slightly lower than that for Oregon as a whole (4.9 percent). The most recent recession at the beginning of this decade hit Portland's high-technology industries particularly hard, and as a consequence the unemployment rate increased significantly. In 2002 the unemployment rate rose to 5.9 percent and increased even more dramatically in 2003 to 8.5 percent.<sup>9</sup>

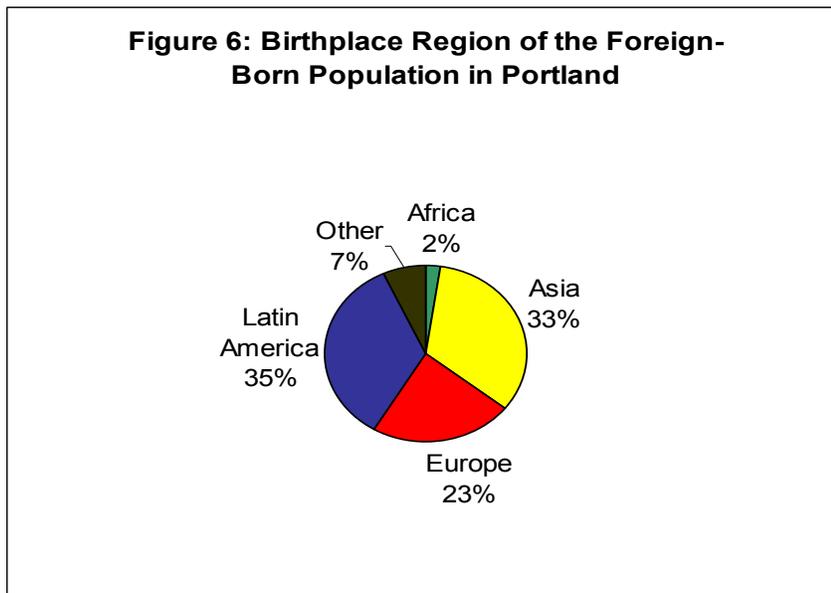
Immigrants responded to the strong economic conditions that existed in Portland during the 1990s by settling in growing numbers in the city. In 2000 the foreign born constituted 12 percent of the total population in the Portland metropolitan area. Nearly one-third of the foreign-born population arrived after 1995 and half (53.2 percent) arrived in the area after 1990 (Figure 5). Reflecting Portland's robust economy during the 1990s, the foreign-born population grew by 136 percent between 1990 and 2000, thereby placing Portland in the rank of cities in which the growth rate of the immigrant population was more than double that of the nation.



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<sup>9</sup> US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Local Area Unemployment Statistics*, [http://policyresearch.gc.ca/page.asp?pagenm=rp\\_sc\\_index](http://policyresearch.gc.ca/page.asp?pagenm=rp_sc_index)

As is the case in Nashville, Latin Americans make up the largest foreign-born group in metropolitan Portland (34.6 percent) and Mexicans make up 28.8 percent of the total foreign-born population (Figure 6). Unlike Nashville, Asians in Portland constitute almost the same share of the refugee/immigrant population as Latin Americans (33.5 percent) and the majority of Asians were born in Vietnam, China, Korea, India and the Philippines. European immigrants also constitute a sizable share of the population and, unlike in many cities, are fairly recent migrants. The Europeans mostly originate from Ukraine, the United Kingdom, Russia and Romania. African immigrants are small in number (approximately 2 percent of all refugees/immigrants) and most come from eastern Africa.



Source: US Census, Summary File 3, 2000.

In Portland, roughly equivalent proportions of youth who speak Spanish, an Indo-European or Asian/Pacific Islander language have limited English proficiency (41.2 percent, 41.7 percent and 38.3 percent, respectively). The large proportion of youth speaking an Indo-European language other than Spanish whose proficiency in English is limited reflects the relatively recent settlement of refugees from the former Soviet Union in Portland. Among adults who are limited English proficient, 59.4 percent speak Spanish, followed by 55.6 percent and 40.3 percent, respectively, of individuals speaking Asian and Pacific Island languages and other Indo-European languages.

As is the case in Nashville, the relative “newness” of the foreign-born population in Portland means that naturalization rates are below the national average (40 percent). Thirty-four percent of Portland’s refugees/immigrants are naturalized, and Asians make up the largest share of naturalized citizens (50 percent), followed by Africans (36 percent), Europeans (24 percent), and Latin Americans (16 percent).

The strong economy in the late 1990s is reflected in relatively low poverty rates for Portland at the beginning of this decade. In 2000, 9.5 percent of Portland’s population lived below the poverty line, compared to the national average of 12 percent. Even though the economy was strong and unemployment levels were low, the foreign-born were more than twice as likely to live in poverty than natives: 18.1 percent lived below the poverty level compared to 8.4 percent of natives. The length of time in the United States and human capital are key factors that influence the socio-economic status of refugees/immigrants, and individuals who have been in the country for at least five years and have made it through the citizenship test are much less likely to live in poverty. Almost three times more non-citizens (23.1 percent) live below the poverty level when compared to naturalized citizens (8.5 percent).

### Building Coalitions: Institutional Relationships and Local Context

Local conditions in each BNAC site, such as the size and diversity of the newcomer population, economic circumstances, or the type of involvement by the business community, in many ways helped shape the structure of each coalition. The coalitions created multi-issue integration agendas and had refugee and immigrant-serving organizations at their core, but each in turn developed its own structures and inter-institution relationships. This section will outline the basic structure of each coalition and identify the major institutions that became members and actively shaped integration plans and projects.

The BNAC Initiative from the outset intended for the local coalitions to have a diverse membership and the sites responded to this requirement. In general, the coalitions included:

- Refugee and immigrant groups (Mutual Assistance Associations)
- Community-based organizations involved in social services generally or immigrant assistance specifically
- State and local government departments and agencies
- Business associations
- Faith-based organizations
- Neighborhood organizations
- Social service providers
- School administrators
- Second language-training organizations

Each coalition had refugee and immigrant organizations as core members, but around this core constituency were different combinations of the organizations listed above. Many of these organizations had relatively little experience with newcomer communities, but realized that they needed to respond in meaningful ways to the social and cultural changes that were occurring within their cities. The following sections outline the basic objectives and structure of the BNAC coalition in each city.

#### **Lowell: The One Lowell Coalition**

Lowell stands out among the three BNAC sites as the city with a strong heritage of immigrant settlement and cultural diversity. Until the 1980s, however, Lowell did not have much modern experience with integrating large numbers of refugees and immigrants. The One Lowell Coalition was an attempt to rekindle the city's immigrant heritage and facilitate activities that make a difference in bringing newcomers into the social, political and economic life of the community. It was One Lowell's intent to focus on three main activities:

- *Civic responsibility and participation* – The One Lowell Coalition from the outset believed that it was important for refugees and immigrants to become active participants in direct forms of civic engagement, such as voting, as well as to engage other organizations, such as city commissions, non-profit management boards and school associations, on an ongoing basis.

- *Education and Literacy* – In recognition of the fact that socio-economic mobility and integration are tightly tied to language proficiency, the Coalition sought both to catalogue opportunities for language training and expand opportunities for adult and youth English-language education.
- *Economic Self-Sufficiency* – One Lowell identified low wages and poverty among many refugees and immigrants in Lowell as a serious problem, and proposed to research the barriers to the socio-economic advancement of refugees and immigrants. The Coalition also sought to identify actions needed to address inequality and to achieve greater economic self-sufficiency among newcomers. One Lowell recognized that some refugees and immigrants would need to improve their language, professional and/or vocational skills to escape poverty, but also emphasized that organizations and employers of the receiving society could make substantial efforts in recognizing the knowledge and skills that newcomers have when they arrive.

The One Lowell Coalition was headed by the Greater Lowell Community Foundation, in partnership with ten organizations from the refugee/immigrant and receiving communities. From the refugee/immigrant communities the founding organizations included: African Assistance Center, Cambodian American League, Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association, La Prensa Latina, Lao Family Mutual Association, Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers, and the International Institute of Lowell. A range of non-profit organizations from the receiving community also were involved, namely the Center for Work, Family and Community (a community-based program supported in part by the University of Massachusetts at Lowell), Community Teamwork, and the Eliot Presbyterian Church (one of the most influential multi-ethnic churches in the city). Notable in Lowell was the absence of direct participation in the Coalition by departments or agencies of the local or state governments, although the city government did lend its support to One Lowell's application for BNAC funding. Over time, One Lowell would develop relationships with some local government agencies, but the Coalition never lost its strong footing within the city's sizable non-profit community.

### **Nashville: The Nashville New American Coalition**

Nashville is distinguished by the rate at which the refugee/immigrant population grew during the 1990s, and to a significant degree the Coalition's planned activities focused on integrating a very large population of recently settled newcomers into the political, social and economic life of the city. The Nashville New American Coalition specifically identified the workplace as a key locale in which integration processes occur, and sought to enhance integration by concentrating on workforce/employment issues. It also focused on the involvement of the entire community in the integration process, not just refugees and immigrants, as well as the role of the private sector in fostering opportunities for newcomers and encouraging social cohesion. The Nashville New American Coalition intended to work on four interrelated issues:

- *Workforce and Business Development* – Job opportunities for newcomers, and especially social mobility, were significant concerns of the Nashville Coalition. The Coalition sought to go beyond just finding newcomers *a job* by encouraging employers to develop workplace English training programs and other skills-enhancement opportunities. It also fostered career advancement activities and training opportunities for service-oriented small businesses.
- *Citizenship and Civic Participation* – The Coalition recognized that a large part of the newcomer population in Nashville was ineligible for citizenship because many individuals had not been legal permanent residents for at least five years, but it did seek to encourage refugees/immigrants to train for citizenship. The Coalition also intended to encourage the active involvement of newcomers in institutions and organizations that had a direct impact on their lives or those of their children such as schools and non-profit organizations.

- *Leadership and Capacity Building* – In Nashville, refugee and immigrant organizations chose to develop their own communication and management capacities as a means to enhance their political and economic effectiveness in the city. Effective communication and organizational management are key skills for newcomers in an environment in which receiving society organizations already have substantial organizational depth and not very much knowledge of the particular social, economic and political challenges faced by refugees and immigrants.
- *Applied Research* – In a departure from the other two BNAC sites, the Nashville Coalition placed considerable emphasis on the need for research about the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of refugee/immigrant communities in Nashville, as well as their settlement experiences. In part this reflected a paucity of solid data about the newcomer communities given the recent arrival of many groups, and a perception that such information is key to achieving broad citywide participation in integration efforts.

The Nashville Chamber of Commerce, in partnership with 16 organizations representing refugee/immigrant and receiving community organizations, sponsored the Nashville New American Coalition. The founding partners from the refugee/immigrant community were Iraqi House, Kurdish Human Rights Watch, Somali Community Center, International Lao-American Organization, Encuentro Latino, Catholic Charities, and the League of United Latin American Citizens. From the receiving community, the founding organizations included the Metro Nashville Schools Adult ESL, Metro Social Services/Refugee Services, the Nashville Task Force on Refugees and Immigrants, Opry Mills, Tennessee Department of Human Resources/Refugee Programs, Tennessee State University, United Way of Metropolitan Nashville, and Woodbine Community Organization. From the outset there was strong local government participation from Metro Social Services, and the Tennessee Department of Human Resources was involved with the Coalition throughout the project, although in a less direct manner than Metro Social Services. Some of the founding organizations eventually withdrew from the Coalition for various reasons, but the Coalition attempted to maintain the breadth of representation that was evident from the beginning.

### ***Portland: Project Interwoven Tapestry***

Portland settled a significant number of Southeast Asian refugees during the 1980s, and one of the key objectives of Project Interwoven Tapestry was to capitalize on the settlement and integration experience that many organizations had developed with Asian refugees. With this kind of institutional capacity at hand, it was Interwoven Tapestry's intent to develop the kinds of relationships and networks that should be in place to encourage long-term integration that benefits newcomers and the receiving society alike. In order to initiate bridge building at a local scale between refugees/immigrants and the receiving society, Interwoven Tapestry endeavored to build upon an existing network of over 100 neighborhood associations that receive modest funding from the City of Portland/Multnomah County. The Coalition also wanted to utilize the accumulated experience of long-established refugee and immigrant organizations to assist two very new communities with relatively weak organizational structures – Slavic/Ukrainian people and Africans – to develop a capacity to participate effectively in Portland's political and social structures. Specifically, Interwoven Tapestry intended to work on four interrelated initiatives:

- *Indicators of integration* – An assessment of the status of political, social and economic integration among refugees/immigrants in Portland, and to identify areas of unmet needs.
- *Comprehensive Community Planning* – One of Portland's great assets is its network of neighborhood associations, which is coordinated by the Office of Neighborhood Involvement. Interwoven Tapestry sought to build on this network through a community planning exercise

that would identify the unmet needs of recent refugees and immigrants, most notably those of Slavic/Ukrainian people and Africans. The Coalition viewed the network of neighborhood associations as a tremendous asset in building relationships between newcomer communities and long-time Portland residents.

- *Leadership Development and Civic Participation* – Interwoven Tapestry saw leadership development as a key activity that would allow refugee and immigrant communities to participate in various aspects of civic life – from neighborhood associations to municipal boards and commissions. Developing skilled leaders who could articulate the particular circumstances of their communities to organizations that had little experience with refugees/immigrants was identified as an imperative for generating two-way integration.
- *Mentoring* – Mentorship was seen as a logical follow-up to the leadership training that newcomer communities would receive. In this case, new groups such as Africans and Slavic/Ukrainian peoples would receive support from long established Latino and Asian organizations that understand the challenges and opportunities of immigrant settlement in Portland. Additional mentoring would be provided by organizations more closely associated with the receiving community that had developed expertise in assisting refugees and immigrants.

Interwoven Tapestry was unique among the three sites in that it was led by a public-private partnership between the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO) and the Metropolitan Human Rights Center (MHRC) of the City of Portland and Multnomah County.<sup>10</sup> These two lead agencies were joined by several refugee/immigrant-affiliated organizations: African Refugee and Immigrant Network of Oregon (ARINO), Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO), Latino Network, Refugee/Immigrant Consortium of Oregon and Southwest Washington, and Russian Oregon Social Services. From the receiving community, the founding organizations were Central Northeast Neighbors, Northeast Coalition of Neighborhoods, Southeast Uplift Neighborhood Coalition, Office of Neighborhood Involvement, Oregon State Refugee Program, and Portland Public Schools/ESL-Bilingual Program. The two lead agencies were distinguished by deep experience in assisting refugee and immigrant settlement (IRCO) and a strong mandate to address racial and ethnic inequality issues (MHRC).

### Summary

This chapter has outlined the broad context in which the BNAC Initiative began its work in the three communities. Relatively new refugee and immigrant communities, considerable ethnic diversity, and fast growth in the numerical size of the foreign-born population during the 1990s distinguish each site. The integration trajectories of refugees and immigrants in the three cities differ in important ways due largely to the socio-economic and political history of each place and current economic circumstances. The BNAC Initiative's central objective was to foster the successful integration of refugees and immigrants at a community level, and the particular configuration of participating organizations in each site meant that considerable variation existed in approaches to this goal. In the following chapter, attention shifts to a more detailed examination of the integration objectives in each demonstration site, the ways coalitions were organized to achieve objectives, and the barriers and opportunities that influenced each Coalition's ability to move forward on components of their integration programs.

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<sup>10</sup> IRCO was the fiscal agent for Project Interwoven Tapestry and managed most of the Coalition's day-to-day operations and activities.

### **Chapter 3: Integration Objectives in the BNAC Demonstration Sites**

The broad objective of the BNAC Initiative is to encourage the successful integration of refugees and immigrants. As a consequence of local conditions and the objectives of participating organizations, each BNAC site developed unique approaches to integration and created distinctive projects designed to bring the refugee/immigrant and receiving communities into dialogue, build relationships, and begin the process of constructing cohesive cities.

This chapter outlines the integration objectives of each demonstration site by focusing on the *community action plans* that were developed in the first year of the Initiative. The plans had a number of objectives – some with a relatively short time span and others that were geared toward encouraging long-term systemic change – and attention here will primarily center on the more defined and contained objectives. Each site recognized from the outset that the BNAC Initiative was a limited three-year experimental project, and as a consequence this time span influenced the kinds of plans and activities that were developed.

Execution of the various components of the community action plans depended on the kinds of structures and relationships that developed within the coalitions to tap the diverse capacities and experiences of participating members. The BNAC Initiative encouraged the sites to build coalitions of organizations that could work together to achieve integration goals, and to develop capacity among refugees and immigrants MAAs. The challenges and accomplishments experienced by each demonstration site reflect both the kinds of projects that were undertaken and the ways in which each coalition organized itself and built relationships between organizations. Especially after the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington on September 11, 2001 and the resulting economic downturn in each city, the BNAC coalitions also faced the challenge of responding to significant changes in local conditions. In this sense, the BNAC Initiative tested the capacity of local organizations to respond quickly to dramatic changes in local circumstances.

#### Demonstration Sites' Community Action Plans

The action plans in each community were developed primarily by means of a survey of organizations, as well as focus groups with key informants from refugee/immigrant and receiving community organizations in each city. The information from these sources was also supplemented with census data (from the 1990 and 2000 censuses) and a limited amount of secondary research. The principal objective of this information-gathering exercise was to establish a baseline profile that could be used to identify the needs and capacity of the community generally and those of newcomers in particular, as well as activities in which a coalition of organizations could make real progress in fostering the integration of refugees and immigrants.

#### ***One Lowell Coalition Community Action Plan***

In the community action plan data collection and planning phases, the One Lowell Coalition identified a wide array of needs/barriers that organizations and individuals had indicated were integration challenges. In particular, English as a second language (ESL) training emerged as a top priority, followed by increasing knowledge and access to information about civics and government, increasing the number of newcomer voters, and improved access to jobs. Increasing the number of naturalized citizens and voters was a key goal, but based on the focus group results, turned out not to be as central as it had been in the Coalition's original proposal and work plan. Many focus group respondents emphasized that English-language abilities were firmly tied to other social, economic and political opportunities and, in the absence of adequate opportunities for learning English, integration could only be partial at best.

Other participants in the focus groups emphasized that access to jobs and training programs was a precondition to active civic involvement. The ranking of the community action plan goals was a reflection of what was said by immigrant and refugee residents of Lowell in the focus groups, rather than the specific interests of Coalition members.

A final goal that emerged through the community action plan development process was the plan itself and how to use it as part of the communication outreach strategy of One Lowell. This is tied to a central component of One Lowell's mission which was to enhance access to services and programs that already exist and to encourage existing organizations, some of which may have limited interaction with newcomer communities, to regard outreach to refugees and immigrants as integral to their activities and a necessary step toward building cohesive communities.

Through the community action plan development process, the members of One Lowell also clarified that the Coalition should support refugee/immigrant leaders to become more influential in Lowell, as well as to address specific issues such as access to ESL training and jobs. In order to achieve significant integration, the Coalition realized the importance of enabling refugee and immigrant leaders to become strong and articulate leaders in the eyes of their own communities and the larger Lowell population. As a consequence, One Lowell emphasized a two-pronged approach – working with the existing refugee/immigrant leaders and the foreign-born population at large to develop capacity and organizational skills, and also working directly on the needs of newcomer groups, such as improved access to ESL training opportunities.

In terms of increasing the capacity of the refugee/immigrant organizations and communities, five goals were identified by the Coalition:

- Increase the number of refugees/immigrants on boards of non-profit organizations, city commissions and boards, and local parent-teacher organizations;
- Enhance the capacity of refugees/immigrants to serve as spokespeople for their communities;
- Increase the effectiveness of refugee/immigrant leaders to motivate their communities to participate in the civic life of Lowell, including voting;
- Develop a strong and productive relationship between refugee/immigrant leaders and government officials; and
- Foster the participation of refugee/immigrant leaders in city government and politics.

In addition, the Coalition identified an additional six specific goals to enhance the integration of individual refugee/immigrant community members in Lowell:

- Increase English-language skills;
- Increase the knowledge about opportunities to participate in the civic life of the community and how governments and agencies function;
- Increase job access and opportunities for refugees/immigrants;
- Increase the number of naturalized citizens;
- Increase the number of voters from refugee/immigrant communities; and
- Promote the community action plan in Lowell.

An element that is not an explicit goal of One Lowell's community action plan is the education of the receiving community about the particular challenges faced by refugees/immigrants, and the cultural diversity that exists within the newcomer population. Instead, outreach to the larger community is discussed in relation to strategies to achieve particular goals. For example, with regard to ESL services, the community action plan emphasizes the importance of educating instructors that American customs/civics and practical job search skills should be part of a curriculum, in addition to lessons on English grammar and sentence construction.

### ***Nashville New American Coalition Community Action Plan***

At the heart of Nashville's community action plan was a commitment to the mutual integration of native- and foreign-born residents. As was the case in Lowell, the community action plan for Nashville emerged out of broad consultations with organizations and individual representatives from refugee/immigrant communities in the city. The plan also attempted to enhance the capacity of refugee/immigrant organizations and their leadership, and improve the lives of individual newcomers, especially by increasing employment opportunities and job quality. More specifically, the plan was divided into three broad components with a number of goals structuring each domain's activities and strategies.

The first component focused on enhancing the capacity of refugees and immigrants to be leaders within their own communities and in the larger Nashville community. To achieve this, the Coalition set the following goals:

- Increase the number of refugees/immigrant leaders on boards of community organizations;
- Enhance the ability of foreign-born leaders to serve as spokespersons for their organizations and communities; and
- Build relationships between foreign-born residents and leaders from government, philanthropic and business sectors.

From its inception, the Nashville Coalition had a strong commitment to enhancing workforce opportunities for newcomers, not only in terms of the number of jobs but also in terms of economic mobility. Its community action plan strongly reflects this objective. The second component of the plan emphasized workforce issues, and set the following goals:

- Engage local employers in developing economic integration opportunities and processes;
- Foster a local economic and business climate that is conducive to sustaining refugees and newcomers as part of an integrated workforce, such as by encouraging vocational ESL classes at worksites; and
- Assist the development of businesses within the refugee and immigrant communities in Nashville through training foreign-born entrepreneurs about the local business environment and opportunities.

The final component of the Nashville Coalition's community action plan focused on community participation and civic engagement. Given that so many newcomers to Nashville are very recent immigrants who have not yet reached the five years of residency required for citizenship, the Coalition encouraged refugees and immigrants to be involved with the community in ways that do not require citizenship. In this respect, three goals were established:

- Create venues and opportunities for refugees and immigrants to participate in community life, such as expanded access to local Cable Access Television and involvement in local faith-based organizations;

- Expand the leadership capacity of foreign-born organizations through activities such as leadership development; and
- Foster programs and processes that promote refugee and immigrant involvement in democratic processes, such as support for ESL classes that have a strong citizenship and civic involvement focus.

The broad intent of the Nashville New American Coalition was to encourage two-way integration between refugees/immigrants and the receiving community. To varying degrees, each of the goals in the community action plan moved towards achieving this kind of integration, and in the early stages the Coalition was committed to enlisting not only the participation of more MAAs, but also other mainstream communities, businesses and organizations.

### **Interwoven Tapestry Community Action Plan**

The Interwoven Tapestry Coalition took a slightly different approach than that of Lowell or Nashville in developing their community action plan. The Coalition focused primarily on just two newcomer communities – Africans and Slavic/Ukrainian peoples<sup>11</sup> – and the receiving community. The overall goal of the project was to train the receiving community to understand the particular circumstances and experiences of refugees and immigrants, and empower newcomer groups to become active participants in Portland’s varied civic activities and economic opportunities. Consultations with newcomer communities in the early phases of the BNAC Initiative established that both the African and Slavic/Ukrainian communities wished to establish their own community centers. A great deal of Interwoven Tapestry’s subsequent work plan both directly and indirectly reflected efforts to make community centers a physical reality by the end of the three year demonstration period. The community action plan was also strongly influenced by the expectation that established Asian and Latino refugee/immigrant organizations would play critical roles in mentoring the African and Slavic/Ukrainian communities to build their organizational capacity and funding base in order to make the goal of establishing community centers a reality.

Interwoven Tapestry’s community action plan was based on surveys, in-depth interviews, and focus groups with the African and Slavic/Ukrainian refugee communities, as well as with a number of more established refugee/immigrant groups and the established US-born population in the city. The action plan had four main components that guided the work of the Coalition, and within each component a number of goals were established.

The first component focused on *leadership development* within both the refugee/immigrant and receiving communities. Among refugees/immigrants the Coalition sought to build leadership skills to enable leaders to participate effectively in mainstream organizations such as Portland’s neighborhood coalitions, boards and commission. Among receiving community leaders, Interwoven Tapestry attempted to raise their level of understanding of newcomer issues and enhance the effectiveness of their outreach to refugees and immigrants.

The second component of the community action plan was centered on *civic engagement*. Among refugees and immigrants, civic engagement activities included liaison activities with local police forces, coverage of local news and politics in ethnic newspapers, and involvement in local and state political processes. The civic engagement work of the Coalition also deliberately reached out to the receiving

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<sup>11</sup> The label for this group is challenging. The majority of people in this group are refugees from Ukraine who belong to Pentecostal churches. Originally the group was labeled the “Russian-Speaking Community”, but many individuals rejected this designation because they identify as either Ukrainians or “Slavic people” who speak Russian (as well as other languages). Many did not see themselves as being ethnic Russians. They also wished to distinguish themselves from an older group of Russians who had migrated to Portland years earlier, some of whom are Jewish. The group eventually adopted “Slavic Coalition” as their label, although many people within this group emphasized their Ukrainian heritage and language identification.

community by working with the neighborhood associations to deliver civics classes, to encourage the involvement of newcomers in local community-building activities, and to build relationships with county government agencies.

*Workforce and workplace development* was the third major component of the Portland community action plan. For refugees and immigrants, the intent of this work was to encourage economic self-sufficiency by increasing opportunities for skills development and English-language training. The receiving community was strongly implicated in this component of the plan, with volunteers and organizations providing opportunities for workers to make effective contacts with local employers, teaching English and job-search skills, and making substantial efforts to establish recertification programs (including skills upgrading classes/workshops) accessible to newcomers.

The final component of Interwoven Tapestry's community plan was *institutional strengthening*. For African and Slavic/Ukrainian refugee communities, institutional strengthening meant the development of resources and infrastructure required to establish sustainable community centers where newcomers could receive a wide array of social and cultural services. The receiving community was more indirectly implicated in this component of the plan, its involvement in institutional strengthening being limited to participation on the boards of directors of newcomer organizations and involvement in public education activities or presentations with leaders from refugee/immigrant organizations.

Interwoven Tapestry's community action plan reflected a strong commitment to two-way integration, with each component of the plan deliberately identifying the ways in which the receiving community should be involved in the social, political and economic integration of refugees and immigrants. Key participants in the Portland Coalition recognized from the outset that the established network of neighborhood associations represented a potential base from which to build integration projects, and that the neighborhood associations could be key vehicles for including the receiving community in processes of refugee/immigrant inclusion.

Each demonstration site's community action plan had an ambitious set of goals and activities, and the key to achieving these objectives was the way in which the coalitions organized themselves. The next section will examine the demonstration sites' efforts to build structures to manage specific projects, as well as how they maintained an overall focus on encouraging integration.

### Organization of Coalitions

Coalitions supporting a multi-issue integration agenda require a diverse membership that goes beyond the "usual suspects" – small refugee and immigrant assistance organizations that often have disparate levels of institutional capacity, political influence and public visibility. The BNAC coalitions recognized the importance of including receiving-community organizations, and invited local government (state, county and city), business associations, faith-based organizations, neighborhood associations, community-based organizations and social service providers, as well as refugee- and immigrant-serving MAAs and newcomer resettlement agencies, to become members. A challenge that all of the coalitions faced, regardless of their organizational structure, was how to respond to membership changes as new groups sought inclusion and older ones dropped out.

**Lowell:** The One Lowell Coalition was initially organized into a management team made up of three refugee/immigrant organizations and three receiving community organizations, and this team was responsible for directing the work of the project director and project assistant. Although there were three refugee/immigrant organizations on the management team, only two members were themselves refugees or immigrants. The management team was responsible for making many of the day-to-day management decisions about One Lowell, while the entire Coalition established the community action

plan and assisted with its implementation. After the community action plan was developed, the Coalition also established a number of sub-committees to implement particular plan elements. Unfortunately, the sub-committee structure was difficult to sustain given the small size of the Coalition, competing demands on the time of members, and the withdrawal of some organizations as active participants. As a consequence, a great deal of the community action plan implementation work eventually was carried out by the project director and assistant with the help of some Coalition members and organizations that were not formal members of One Lowell. The project director used the Coalition members as resources for information about their own communities and Lowell in general, and the Coalition members at monthly meetings would review the work that was ongoing and offer suggestions.

The Coalition was very fortunate to have opted to hire a full-time project director and assistant, as these two people brought continuous effort to bear on One Lowell. Many of the member organizations did not have the ability to devote time to One Lowell on a daily basis, but the project director and assistant did make the Coalition a continuous rather than episodic presence in the social, economic and political life of the city. The one downside to this form of organization was that some Coalition members over time did not feel like they were actually involved in the implementation of the community action plan, even though the project director would use them as information resources and encourage individual coalition members to attend events and meetings. This separation between the member organizations of One Lowell and the project director and assistant became more noticeable and serious over time as the Coalition members, who had been actively involved in the development of the community action plan, attended meetings less regularly and perceived that they had lost control over the project. Many organizations associated with One Lowell came to feel that there was less sharing of authority and recognition between the project director and Coalition members, and this became a serious representation problem for the group. Some members of the management board also felt strongly that they were not just an advisory board, but had responsibility for staff oversight. The project director, on the other hand, felt that she needed to be free to act quickly in response to opportunities and challenges in order to maximize One Lowell's potential. One Lowell never really came to a sound resolution about the parameters of the relationship between the Coalition members and the project director and assistant – there was always an underlying tension about roles and in hindsight a clear specification of the relationship from the outset would have been desirable. Nevertheless, it is clear that the daily presence of the project director did have an enormous influence on the overall visibility of the project and the progress that was made through the components of the community action plan.

Implementation of the community action plan in Lowell was also hampered by tremendous changes in the ability of several organizations to play a meaningful role. By September 2002, four Coalition organizations – Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association, Lao Family Mutual, Cambodian American League of Lowell and La Prensa Latina – were experiencing significant financial and/or leadership problems that seriously affected their ability to participate in One Lowell. Given the small size of One Lowell, the difficulties experienced by these four organizations also influenced its ability to function as a cohesive coalition. Out of the four organizations, only the Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association and Cambodian American League of Lowell would regain sufficient financial strength and leadership capacity to participate in One Lowell, although their contribution was much more limited than originally expected. The Coalition also had not established a process for accepting new members, and this became an urgent issue as founding organizations faltered and the ability of One Lowell to function as a coalition became an issue. In the end, new organizations were accepted into the Coalition on an ad hoc basis and a formal process never became firmly established.

**Nashville:** The Nashville New American Coalition's charter "Principles of Association and Operation" was adopted in the spring of 2002. The Coalition was organized such that its membership

as a whole, led by the director, was the governing body. Day-to-day business was guided by a Steering Committee comprising Standing Committee chairs, lead delegates from member MAAs/ foreign-born communities, and project staff. The standing committees were: workforce and business development; capacity building and leadership development; research and training; and resources and outreach. Like One Lowell, the Nashville Coalition initially also retained a paid coalition coordinator to handle day-to-day work and guide the implementation of the community action plan. Unfortunately, the coordinator resigned from the Coalition in March 2002 after disputes with the director and key Coalition members, and the decision was made not to find a replacement immediately. The work of implementing the community action plan fell squarely on the shoulders of Coalition members and depended on the strong leadership of key members who had initiated the project.

The Nashville Coalition established clear membership goals. It was expected that half of the members would be from refugee and immigrant organizations, 20 percent would be from the government and non-profit sectors, 20 percent from the private, for-profit sector, and 10 percent from the education/technology sector. The Coalition also wished not only to maintain a substantial number of participating organizations but also to attract ones that had the capacity to make meaningful contributions to the project. As a consequence, the Coalition decided that organizational membership should increase by no more than 25 percent in a given quarter or 75 percent in a calendar year. Membership in the Coalition was also maintained by active participation, defined as representation at 75 percent of all monthly and standing committee meetings. By the end of the second year, membership in the Nashville Coalition stood at nineteen.

The size of the Coalition was a tremendous asset, especially during the first two years, as the number of participants enabled the creation of task forces to work on discrete components of the community action plan. Such a structure was not feasible in a small coalition like that in Lowell, where there were insufficient active members to create viable task forces, but it initially worked well in Nashville. Seventeen task forces were established; each had a chairperson who was responsible for reporting back to the Coalition at monthly meetings, and most had at least three members. The responsibilities of the task forces closely mirrored the components of the community action plan itself and included work on education recertification/credential recognition, capacity training, mentorship, information/outreach and economic development. This structure was a meaningful response to the large number of activities identified in the community action plan, and gave the individual members a sense of contributing to and shaping the work of the Nashville Coalition. The task force structure, however, did rely strongly on all member organizations being able and willing to participate in several meetings each month, as well as their ongoing participation in the long-term process of encouraging change. In many ways, the structure of the Nashville New American Coalition held tremendous promise in terms of how diverse organizations might collaborate to make progress on a range of integration issues.

The Nashville New American Coalition's organization and cohesion as a group suffered from a number of key resignations over the course of the project. In addition to the loss of the coordinator during the first year of operation, the Coalition also lost Renata Soto, a dynamic leader from the Latino community who worked for the United Way of Middle Tennessee. The departure of Ms. Soto was followed by that of Garrett Harper from the Nashville Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Harper was the principal architect of the organization's original proposal for funding, became its director after the Nashville Coalition won the grant competition, and had been instrumental in maintaining the involvement of the Chamber of Commerce as a key Coalition member. In response to the loss of these key individuals, the Nashville Coalition opted to replace the departed coordinator with Tahir Hussain, the director of the Nashville Kurdish Forum. Mr. Hussain in many respects was an ideal replacement as he is a refugee leader who possesses vision and management skills, but the coordinator position severely stretched the amount of time he could devote to several competing obligations. The facilitation and

much of the day-to-day management of the Nashville Coalition was eventually taken over by Dinah Gregory from Metro Social Services (Refugee Assistance Programs), who also came to manage Mr. Hussain's work as coordinator. Under this particular leadership configuration, the Nashville Coalition tended to focus on discrete tasks within the community action plan during the last year and a half of the project and lost a certain degree of energy for tackling larger community issues in relation to the overarching goal of promoting two-way integration. The unequal power of the coordinator and representatives from Metro Social Services also became more evident over time. As in Lowell, sharing of authority and recognition became problematic within the Nashville Coalition, and participation from the once large number of partners dwindled.

**Portland:** A third model of coalition organization was adopted by Portland's Interwoven Tapestry Coalition; in this case, refugee community development specialists carried out much of the day-to-day work associated with the community action plan. Interwoven Tapestry was led by the Asian Family Center (AFC), a division of the Immigrant and Refugee Center of Oregon (IRCO), and its main partner was the Metropolitan Human Rights Center, an office of the City of Portland. A seventeen-member Coalition Advisory Board that represented a wide range of organizations in Portland – from the Latino Network to the Oregon State Refugee Program and the Portland Public School ESL/Bilingual Education Department – guided the coalition. It is important to emphasize that the Advisory Board only had an advisory or guidance function and did not have binding authority. Members of the Advisory Board could only advise project staff on how the work of the Coalition should be undertaken. In terms of implementation, Project Interwoven Tapestry was managed by an eight-person team comprising the project director, project coordinator, three refugee community development specialists and three receiving community representatives. The project director, Lee Po Cha, was from AFC, and the three refugee community development specialists represented the African, Slavic/Ukrainian and Asian communities. These five people were also IRCO employees who worked part-time on the Interwoven Tapestry project. Unlike the project director in Lowell, who was charged with undertaking much of the daily work associated with the community action plan, the community development specialists worked almost exclusively with their particular refugee/immigrant communities on components of Portland's action plan. The three community organizations were the Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO), the African Refugee and Immigrant Network of Oregon (ARINO),<sup>12</sup> and loosely affiliated individuals with ties to the Russian-speaking and/or Slavic/Ukrainian populations who became known as the Slavic Coalition. The community development specialists did work together on some projects and activities, but the majority of their time was spent trying to organize and train their own communities. The project coordinator carried out the day-to-day management of the Coalition's activities.

In addition to being the fiscal agent, IRCO was the key organization in Project Interwoven Tapestry and influenced the plans and activities of the Coalition in a way that no organization in the other two coalitions was able to accomplish. Founded in 1976 by a group of refugees, IRCO has an annual budget in excess of \$5 million, and is the dominant refugee and immigrant assistance organization in the Portland area. The organization holds an exclusive contract with the State Refugee Office to provide newly arrived refugees with services. Specifically, IRCO provides job placement services, including English and job-skill training; youth, family and early childhood services designed to help families improve their quality of life; interpretation and translation services; and community building, economic development, health outreach and traditional arts services. Unlike refugee and immigrant organizations in the other two demonstration sites, IRCO is an extremely large and influential organization – it is the 20<sup>th</sup> largest non-profit organization in Oregon and the most comprehensive service provider for refugees and immigrants in the state.

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<sup>12</sup> The leadership of ARINO eventually became disenchanted with the organization's relationship with IRCO and became an independent organization without funding. Another African organization emerged within IRCO to take the place of ARINO and became known as the African Community Center of Oregon (ACCO).

In many ways, Interwoven Tapestry's governance structure was tightly associated with IRCO's own internal organization. The Asian, African and Slavic/Ukrainian organizations, which were the focus of attention in the community action plan and that participated in Interwoven Tapestry, in fact were not independent MAAs, but IRCO affiliates. Although these three organizations had their own set of leaders, the development specialists and some of the board members were IRCO employees, and ultimate responsibility for each organization's actions lay with IRCO. This is not necessarily a problem, as IRCO performs a valuable role as the incubator of fledgling refugee and immigrant organizations, and the intent is that they might one day become relatively autonomous organizations similar to the Asian Family Center. Unfortunately, it was never clear when an organization might become semi-autonomous or even independent from IRCO, or the process that would be used to achieve autonomy. The success of the Asian Family Center, and the long-term integration support it provides to Asian refugees and immigrants in Portland, strongly motivated the African and Slavic/Ukrainian communities to begin creating their own community centers within the framework of the BNAC Initiative.

Over time, however, the relationship with IRCO became an issue for some of the African participants in the project. In particular, key members of ARINO came to perceive the organization's relationship with IRCO as a paternalistic one, which in turn led to a major division within the African community and its leadership. The precise qualities of the relationship between ARINO and IRCO over time became less important than the way in which it was perceived, and this led to the withdrawal of ARINO from IRCO and Interwoven Tapestry. Eventually, ARINO was replaced by ACCO (African Community Center of Oregon) and the ACCO board acted in an advisory capacity to IRCO concerning the funding of initiatives for the African community. ACCO also led work with African refugees and immigrants in Interwoven Tapestry.

Interwoven Tapestry largely maintained the participants that it had recruited from the outset, although there was a decline in participation among some of the members over time. One of the fundamental problems in recruiting new participants was the structure and objectives of the Coalition itself. Interwoven Tapestry devoted its efforts with newcomer communities to enhancing the organizational capacity of the Asian, African and Slavic/Ukrainian groups. One consequence of this decision was a difficulty in recruiting new refugee and immigrant organizations, as they would not receive the same level of development training or financial support. At the same time, the member organizations of the Coalition Advisory Board contributed to Interwoven Tapestry in solely an advisory capacity, and they had only an indirect and non-binding influence on Coalition planning and decision making. It was challenging, therefore, to recruit new members to the Advisory Board from either the receiving or newcomer communities because the role of the board was limited. The strong focus on three refugee communities also meant that there was little opportunity for new groups to move into Interwoven Tapestry and receive significant assistance.

As this brief description of coalition structures indicates, the idea of building local coalitions encouraged considerable adaptation to local conditions and the capacity of participating organizations. This was a desirable outcome as it allowed the BNAC Initiative to observe three distinct approaches to coalition building and the development of integration plans, projects and activities. One of the challenges that each Coalition faced was the need to be *dynamic* and respond to changes in local conditions or public attitudes about immigration generally and the integration of newcomers in particular. Over the life of the BNAC Initiative, the demonstration sites were all faced with challenges that were not anticipated at the outset of the project.

### **Shifts in Goals and Priorities**

It is difficult to underestimate the degree to which the terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington on September 11, 2001 (9/11) fundamentally influenced the work of the BNAC

demonstration sites. In the aftermath of 9/11, all the demonstration sites responded to concerns about discrimination directed toward newcomers, especially refugees and immigrants from the Middle East and West Asia, and this more cautious and sometimes hostile socio-political environment came to influence the work of the demonstration sites throughout the life of the project.

Given the large size of the foreign-born population from the Middle East and West Asia in Nashville, the response of the Nashville New American Coalition to the more negative social climate after 9/11 is notable. The Coalition adopted a proactive role to prevent a discriminatory backlash against foreign-born Nashvillians by promoting tolerance toward people from the Middle East, as well as by fostering greater understanding of the teachings and tenets of Islam. In particular, the Coalition formed a *de facto* speakers bureau to address schools, faith-based organizations and community groups. The Nashville New American Coalition also partnered with the Nashville Task Force of Immigrants and Refugees<sup>13</sup> to examine ways to detect and report cases of discrimination, harassment and violence directed toward newcomers. Members of the Task Force and the Nashville New American Coalition worked to circulate information in a variety of languages provided by the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice and the American Civil Liberties Union.

The downturn in the American economy following 9/11 and the subsequent slide toward recession and higher rates of unemployment in large and small cities also had a fundamental impact on the activities of the BNAC demonstration sites. It must be remembered that the BNAC Initiative and the community action plans were conceived during one of the most sustained and aggressive expansions of the American economy. The opportunities for each site to work collaboratively with employers to improve the socio-economic circumstances and mobility of newcomers were strongly related to robust economic conditions and what seemed to be an insatiable demand for labor. However, the steady deterioration in employment rates, especially in Lowell and Portland, dramatically diminished the incentives that employers had to work with refugee and immigrant organizations to promote integration, especially employment opportunities and English-language and vocational training programs.

The post-9/11 economic downturn also coincided with a diminished capacity on the part of philanthropic organizations and local and state governments to fund non-profit organizations. Philanthropic organizations experienced a sharp decline in revenues in 2001/02, and many local foundations had weak ties to refugee and immigrant communities and limited appreciation of their integration challenges. As a consequence, both the coalitions and individual newcomer organizations confronted a highly competitive, and not particularly well-informed, philanthropic community when they turned to it for funding. The same was true of many state and local government agencies that might have been more willing to be involved in newcomer issues during the 1990s.

Many of the organizations that participated in the coalitions experienced declining resources and a loss of personnel, but the groups participating in One Lowell were particularly hard-hit and participation in this Coalition declined dramatically in the second year of the project. It is important to note that refugee and immigrant organizations were especially disadvantaged in this new funding climate, but many of the mainstream organizations were also affected by scarce financial and human resources. The BNAC demonstration sites were able to lend modest assistance to some refugee organizations, but the majority of coalition members did not receive financial compensation and instead were net contributors of time and personnel to the project. As a consequence, the capacity of the demonstration sites to execute all dimensions of their community action plans suffered because they could not count on the same level of organizational involvement and in-kind support that existed prior to 9/11 and the economic recession.

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<sup>13</sup> This is a large ad hoc group that focuses on systemic issues pertaining to refugee and immigrant settlement in Nashville. The group usually meets on a monthly basis and a key topic or set of topics is the focus of a presentation and subsequent discussion. The Task Force performs a strong information dissemination role in the community.

Concern about mounting hostility toward newcomers following 9/11, changes in the economic health of the BNAC sites, and diminished capacity on the part of some coalition organizations are three compelling examples from a myriad of small- and large-scale changes that occurred over the three-year life of the Initiative. The need and ability to respond to change, as well as the ways in which the three BNAC sites chose to organize, suggest some important lessons in building coalitions to undertake local integration work. The chapter concludes by discussing some of these lessons and their implications for cohesive coalitions and the timely development of integration initiatives.

### Coalition Building in New Immigration Communities – What Does It Take?

To be effective in encouraging two-way integration, it is essential that coalitions have sustainable management structures, maintain a diverse membership, and be flexible and adaptable. The Lowell, Nashville and Portland coalitions grappled with each of these dimensions of coalition building and development, and much was learned about the ways in which future coalitions might be formed and managed.

**Sustainable Management Structures:** As this chapter has indicated, the three demonstration sites experimented with the right management structures and questioned whether their manager should function as a leader or a facilitator, or if the management position should be a part-time or full-time one. A full-time, fully funded management structure appears to be crucial in order to support and advance the objectives and tasks of the community action plan. This is especially critical for circumstances in which participating organizations do not have sufficient resources to donate considerable time to advance the work of the coalition. Integration projects such as those that the coalitions wished to undertake are time consuming and long-term endeavors, and as such are demanding for participating individuals and organizations. One Lowell, for example, had a full-time project director and an assistant who were able to dedicate themselves to writing proposals, organizing meetings and running large projects. Even given diminished capacity on the part of many organizations to participate in One Lowell on a continuous basis, as well as conflict within the coalition, important parts of the community action plan were advanced over a two-year period.

The experiences of the BNAC demonstration sites with organizing and managing their coalitions demonstrate the need for future coalitions to take steps early in their development to define membership rules, missions and management roles. This might be achieved in at least two ways – through the use of a strategy guide for forming an integration coalition, or through trainings designed to help a group of representatives who wish to form a coalition identify a membership strategy, define objectives, and construct a viable management structure.

**Diverse Membership:** The demonstration site coalitions were unique in that they went beyond a predictable core of refugee and immigrant organizations to include neighborhood associations, chambers of commerce, local governments, and faith-based organizations, to name a few. The experience has demonstrated that diverse membership can leverage resources and that the coalitions need to be open to enhancing their diversity. The BNAC coalitions were approached by other refugee, immigrant and receiving community groups that wanted to become coalition members, and this created challenges regarding the ways in which new members might be included in projects. Coalition structures initially did not always allow for new membership on an “open enrollment” basis, although eventually Nashville and Lowell did develop mechanisms for including new members.

**Flexibility:** Integration implicates a wide array of activities and areas of intervention. Coalition members, therefore, had to be prepared to work in a dynamic context in which their missions might shift periodically in response to context changes. BNAC coalition members were acutely aware of changing national and community priorities, especially in the wake of 9/11, and spent substantial time

revisiting and redefining their core mission and activities. In particular, the coalitions on a number of occasions had to consider whether they played the role of visionaries or task-oriented entities, or both. Over time it became very evident that each coalition needed to recognize that flexibility was integral to their identity and this had to be built into their mission and planning process.

### Summary

The BNAC Initiative allowed key refugee, immigrant and receiving community organizations in Lowell, Nashville and Portland to develop action plans and coalition structures in response to the very real challenges that their communities faced in encouraging the social, economic and political integration of foreign-born and long-established residents. In this respect, the BNAC Initiative was an experiment with far-reaching implications for understanding how local communities define two-way integration and structure existing resources to respond to the challenge. The community action plans and organizational structures of each coalition were tightly linked and there was a strong degree of synergy between them.

Attention here has centered on the activities and projects that the coalitions intended to undertake and the organizational structures that were put in place to accomplish these goals. The next chapter moves on to consider what was actually accomplished and the lessons that can be drawn from efforts to move from the stage of developing an action plan to executing its goals and objectives in the on-the-ground context of each demonstration site.

## **Chapter 4: Pursuing Two-Way Integration in New Immigrant Communities – Coalition Activities and Outcomes**

The kind of two-way integration process that is at the heart of the BNAC Initiative requires long-term engagement and sustained effort. It is not something that can be accomplished quickly, primarily because true integration depends on institutions and organizations putting in place the conditions and opportunities that allow newcomers to achieve economic independence and strong civic participation. It also frequently demands re-examining long-established rules, norms and laws that may inadvertently put some groups at a disadvantage and influence the quality of interactions between refugees/immigrants and the receiving community. Systemic changes such as these rely on effective communication and knowledge exchange between newcomer and receiving organizations, and the process of fostering these relationships is a long one.

The three BNAC demonstration sites have worked in a sustained manner to take their community action plans from conceptualization to on-the-ground activities in a relatively short three-year period. While all of the BNAC communities are a long way from achieving the kind of two-way integration that motivated the Initiative, the progress that has been achieved is notable. All of the coalitions have made enormous strides in establishing a base of ideas and knowledge, relationships, and activities upon which future integration projects could build. It is impossible to describe all of the projects and actions that the sites have undertaken, so instead attention here will be given to significant examples from each site that highlight components of an integration agenda that have been implemented since November 2001. The chapter will conclude by reflecting on some of the lessons learned from establishing projects to encourage two-way integration in these three communities.

### From Community Action Plan to Projects: Examples from the Demonstration Sites

The descriptions of the three demonstration sites, the composition of the coalitions, and their community action plans highlight the diversity that exists under the BNAC umbrella. The differences between the sites are real and significant, but most refugee, immigrant and receiving community leaders, activists, and decision makers were united around four key issues: English-language training, employment/skills upgrading and credential recognition, youth development and education, and civic engagement.

- **English Training:** Many people emphasized the need for better access to English-language training, as well as for a strong awareness that functional basic English is insufficient to qualify for a good job in an economy that more often than not rewards knowledge over physical labor. For many newcomers both the opportunities to improve English skills and the quality of existing programs are problematic.
- **Employment/Vocational Skills:** Refugees and immigrants are also acutely aware that their socio-economic progress is strongly aligned with opportunities to upgrade their vocational skills and/or attain recognition of education and skills acquired in their country of origin. Many struggled to understand the procedures for attaining recognition of education acquired outside of the United States. Moreover, some newcomers encountered difficulties finding reliable information about education and employment training opportunities in their new cities.
- **Youth Development:** Youth development implicates the quality and content of education received in the school system, as well as the kinds of services – recreational and educational – that are available to youth within the community at large. Many refugees and immigrants, for instance, lament that after-school tutoring for subjects (other than English) in the mother tongue

of newcomer youth are not generally available. As a consequence, many believe that young people's overall scholastic performance is weak because of a limited comprehension of abstract ideas that are explained only in English.

- **Civic Engagement:** Integral to each of these issues is the need for refugees and immigrants to deepen their involvement with the civic life of the communities in which they live. Stronger involvement of refugee/immigrant parents with the school system contributes to solving youth scholastic performance problems, and building ties between policy makers and newcomers begins the process of rectifying persistent workplace challenges such as credential recognition. All coalitions expressed a desire to increase voter turnout from newcomer communities, but their civic engagement agendas included activities that did not require citizenship for participation.

These are complex issues and problems, but they are remarkably well suited to a coalition structure because solutions rely on the resources, knowledge and communication skills of a broad spectrum of organizations and leaders. Both directly and indirectly, the BNAC coalitions have been addressing these very real problems that impinge on the short- and long-term success and integration of refugees/immigrants and their children. Finding solutions to these issues is intricately tied to the long-term success of each community. Employment mobility, vocational skills training, English-language literacy, well-rounded youth, and opportunities to participate in civic life are integral to the civic and economic health of all groups and cities.

What follows are some key examples of innovative integration activities from each BNAC site. Some of the activities, such as leadership development, were absolutely critical steps that enabled refugees and immigrants to articulate their experiences and capacities for solution building. Other actions built on the capacities and knowledge extant in refugee and immigrant organizations, as well as in those of the receiving community, and were used to address directly issues such as youth development and employment opportunities.

### **Promising Practices: One Lowell**

*Leadership Development:* Lowell's community action plan had a significant leadership component, and goals included enhancing the capacity of refugees/immigrants to serve as spokespersons for their communities, fostering the development of productive relationships between refugees/immigrants and government officials, and increasing the number of refugees/immigrants on boards of directors. The leadership focus group met initially in October 2001 and this group of approximately 12 organizations brought together an especially dynamic combination of young leaders. The leadership training series, designed with these leaders in mind, began in the spring of 2002. The first trainings focused on public speaking and community organization, and subsequent sessions covered fundraising, financial management for non-profit organizations, and media strategies for grassroots organizing. As a direct result of these trainings and their own personal growth, the group has now evolved into the Refugee/Immigrant Coalition of Lowell. Founding members at the initial convening meeting of this new leadership coalition in June 2003 represented a cross section of the major newcomer groups in Lowell (African, Cambodian, Lao and Latino).

One tangible outcome of this training was intended to be the placement of refugee/immigrant community leaders onto the boards of mainstream organizations. The One Lowell project staff worked diligently on this issue, meeting with people from various sectors of Lowell society (city government departments, schools, economic development agencies, and non-profits) to discuss the importance of integrating newcomers in the governance structures of organizations. Overall, people were receptive, but barriers proved to be significant. One Lowell responded in a number of ways, including continuous

dialogue with organizations and the development of a brochure about the importance of cultural competency for boards and commissions in a diverse city.

*English-Language Training Opportunities and Confronting Barriers:* Enhancing opportunities for English-language training was a key element in Lowell's community action plan, and the Coalition sought to raise awareness of existing learning opportunities and to challenge barriers that some refugees and immigrants perceive in taking advantage of language classes that already exist. One Lowell completed a survey of the language classes in the Lowell area and then convened two English Language Provider Forums at which information was exchanged about the kinds of classes that are available, their timing, duration and content, and problems that providers have encountered with other organizations and students. Based on the survey and forums, One Lowell developed an informational brochure about English-language training options. This tremendous resource compiles a very fragmented field of information about language classes, availability and costs, and the brochure is available in Khmer, Portuguese, Spanish, and English.

One of the barriers that many refugees and immigrants cited regarding access to English classes was the schedule of the public transportation system. For many people, evening bus service was not available from their neighborhoods and, due to hours of employment, they were unable to go to classes during the day when there was bus service. Partially in response to this problem, One Lowell worked with the Lowell Regional Transit Authority on systemic barriers faced by newcomers in using public transportation. As a step toward solving this problem, One Lowell successfully convinced the Transit Authority to conduct a user survey in Lowell's main minority languages. Funding difficulties meant that public transportation services have not significantly improved since One Lowell started to work with the Transit Authority, but the relationship that developed is a very good example of how the Coalition started to build a relationship with an organization beyond the "usual suspects" involved in refugee and immigrant integration issues.

Building on its success in developing a comprehensive information source on English-language training opportunities, One Lowell, in collaboration with the Community Health Network Association's Cultural Competency Committee, also produced a video on the ways in which refugees and immigrants can access Lowell's health care system. Translated into French, Khmer, Portuguese, Spanish and Swahili, the video is available in clinics, health care facilities, and hospitals. One Lowell also worked with the Community Health Network Association to create a traveling speakers bureau to present information about barriers faced by refugee/immigrant communities as they access the health care system.

*Civic Engagement:* One Lowell undertook a number of projects in the area of civic engagement, but two especially merit discussion: a school – parent liaison outreach program and a voter education initiative. The Lowell school system has a high dropout rate among immigrant youth and the US-born children of newcomers, and this is a tremendous concern to parents and the education system. The dropout rate amongst Asian and Latino youth in 2002 was 12.4 percent and 21.4 percent, respectively, and these levels rank among the highest in the nation. The school – parent liaison project was an attempt to encourage the involvement of refugee and immigrant parents in an institution that has an influential effect on the long-term integration and social mobility of their children, and to begin to address the chronic problems of under-performance, delinquency and dropping out. The overall goal of the project was to increase the access of newcomer parents to teachers and administrators by mitigating some of the linguistic and cultural barriers that these parents face. The project included home visits to parents by linguistically competent personnel from refugee and immigrant organizations. The outreach workers discussed with parents the importance of involvement in their children's education, explained the way in which the Lowell school system functions, and outlined opportunities for parental involvement. The project received strong support from the superintendent of the Lowell Public Schools, and it fit directly into school system efforts to understand systemic barriers that parents and children encounter.

In the second year of the BNAC Initiative, One Lowell launched the “Campaign for Voter Vitality” in an effort to encourage various forms of civic engagement in local, state and national politics. Co-sponsored with the Non-Profit Alliance of Greater Lowell, the campaign focused on voter education and non-partisan voter registration. Thirty refugee and immigrant youth and service providers participated in a special “get out the vote” training offered by the Merrimack Valley Project and several One Lowell member organizations undertook voter registration campaigns. In September 2002, One Lowell also participated with the Non-Profit Alliance in a Voter Vitality Luncheon that attracted approximately 60 non-profit organization directors and staff, as well as the mayor of Lowell. As part of the Campaign for Voter Vitality, a multicultural rally entitled “Make Your Fate – Participate” was also held in October 2002 at City Hall. The purpose of the rally was to foster voter education/registration. The simultaneously translated event featured refugees and immigrants as speakers, as well as the mayor and other city officials. The Campaign for Voter Vitality had good participation from One Lowell member organizations and attracted attention from newcomer and long-established Lowell residents.

Based on the success of the Campaign for Voter Vitality in 2002, it was repeated in 2003 to coincide with local elections. Activities in the second year included voter registration, as well as the recruitment of bilingual poll workers and poll “helpers”. Poll helpers were staff and coalition members from One Lowell and many Non-Profit Alliance members who spent two-hour shifts at the polls to help out in situations where a bilingual poll worker was not present. One Lowell also developed a “Why Should I Vote?” brochure and a “Voter’s Guide” with candidate responses to specific questions. These two publications were translated into Khmer, Portuguese and Spanish, and were made available at Voter Information Sites that were coordinated by One Lowell.

### ***Promising Practices: Nashville***

*Leadership Development Through Board Bank Training:* To promote capacity building within newcomer communities, the Nashville New American Coalition organized a series of trainings designed to prepare refugees and immigrants to serve on non-profit and/or government governing bodies (e.g., boards and commissions). Debra Grimes from Management Solutions Group led the trainings, and brought to the table her experience as a board member for several non-profit organizations and also as a board president. The trainings focused on empowering the foreign-born participants to allow them to participate actively in community service. The trainings also encouraged participants to play an active role in ensuring that government agencies and non-profit organizations serve newcomer communities in culturally- and linguistically-appropriate ways.

Individuals were nominated for the trainings by service providers and ethnic organizations, as well as through self-nomination. The response was enthusiastic and participants from Kurdistan, Iraq, Iran, Rwanda, Burundi, Nigeria, Bosnia, Sudan, Congo and Uganda filled the sessions. Several participants with prior experience as board members felt that in the past, because of a lack of knowledge of governing processes, they had not been able to contribute fully to the organizations they represented. In the first training session, a panel of “seasoned” board members discussed general board responsibilities, meeting formats, rules, etiquette, and the skills and attributes required by boards. In the second session, the Sri Lankan owner of a bakery shared her experiences of being a new American on a board and the opportunities and pitfalls of being a “cultural representative” in a mainstream organization. Participants also discussed understanding one’s own approach and the perspectives of others, as well as managing expectations by being clear about what an individual contributes in knowledge, capabilities and activities. The final session went beyond the basic concept of board membership, to focus on how to read financial statements, fiduciary responsibility, and the tasks associated with board leadership. All of the training sessions had full attendance and the Nashville New

American Coalition committed to searching out board/commission service opportunities for newcomers.

*Workforce Needs and Employers:* Workforce development and outreach to employers was a major component of the Nashville Coalition's community action plan, and the Coalition did launch a number of important projects in this regard. Two are particularly noteworthy: the work of a taskforce on issues related to credential recognition, and an outreach effort to employers about the particular social and cultural practices of refugee and immigrant employees that could influence the workplace.

Many foreign-born professionals and trades people seek to establish their credentials in the United States, but do not have access to their original documents that are required by American certification and licensing agencies. In other cases, state boards and agencies require bilingual transcripts and syllabi in order to complete certification processes, but many foreign institutions do not have the capacity to provide such documents. In addition, some professional associations and licensing boards in the United States require that individuals take an exam in order to practice their profession or trade, even if they can clearly demonstrate prior certification in another country. This tangled web of regulations and requirements encouraged the Nashville Coalition's taskforce on recertification to create guidelines for refugees and immigrants who wish to have their training and experience recognized in Tennessee. This is a complex issue about which many newcomers seek clear and practical information. It is also one that is ideally suited to the talents and knowledge available within a coalition that has a heterogeneous membership.

Xiu Cravens of the Nashville Career Advancement Center led the recertification taskforce's work, with assistance from Dinah Gregory of Metro Social Services. The taskforce made some headway in cataloguing the challenges and barriers faced by individuals who attempt to have their credentials recognized in some professions, such as architecture and engineering, and accumulated a great deal of information about differences in regulations between states and different professional organizations. In the process of searching for information regarding a small number of professions, the taskforce also found that the governor's administration and members of the Tennessee legislature had limited appreciation of the challenges faced by newcomers seeking to have their training recognized or to pass licensing exams. The taskforce made substantial strides in documenting the procedure that engineers must complete in order to achieve certification, but a host of other occupations and trades still require attention.

The work undertaken on the credential recognition issue highlights the strength of a coalition, as well as the fact that some integration questions are extremely complex and require significant amounts of time and effort in order to achieve progress. The diverse membership of the taskforce, as well as of the Coalition overall, were tremendous assets in clarifying the problems encountered by newcomers in attaining recognition of education acquired outside of the United States. The number of professions and trades that require a "road map" for individuals seeking recognition and licensing is large, and a taskforce of volunteer organizations, even with tremendous good will, faces an enormous challenge to sort through the complicated regulations that govern each profession and trade. The Coalition's work on recertification gradually drew to a close mainly due to the complex and time-consuming nature of the effort. Its initial efforts stand, however, as a strong example of the ways in which a well-funded and devoted organization could make a tremendous difference to newcomers by sorting through the regulatory maze. Such a group could also play an invaluable role in educating members of the business, non-profit, and regulatory communities about the benefits of streamlined credential recognition procedures for American society in that it would enable refugees and immigrants to utilize the training they attained abroad.

Another major initiative that the Nashville Coalition undertook around workforce development was outreach to potential and actual employers of refugees and immigrants. Many Nashville employers

(especially small- and medium-sized companies) have little experience working with the foreign-born population. The relatively recent arrival of so many newcomers in the city means that many employers lack knowledge about visa status and required documentation for employment, ways to communicate effectively with employees who have limited English proficiency, and procedures to make appropriate religious accommodations. The Coalition first developed a brochure entitled “How Employers Can Expand and Diversify Their Workforce”, which has been distributed throughout the community since the second year of the BNAC Initiative. The brochure emphasizes the contributions that refugees/immigrants make to the labor force, provides information about visa status documentation, and highlights the cultural diversity that already exists among Nashville’s workers. This brochure has been followed by a more detailed publication called the “Guidebook for Employers of International Workers”. The Guidebook discusses in considerable depth the employment documentation requirements, the contributions of refugees/immigrants to the workforce, communication suggestions, and cultural issues. For example, the Guidebook contains a sample Islamic prayer schedule, a description of employment visa sponsorship, and a discussion of the documentation requirements for U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services’ Form I-9 (Employment Eligibility Verification).<sup>14</sup> The Guidebook was launched in electronic form late in 2003 and should prove to be a major reference work for human resource professionals, entrepreneurs and employers.

*Enhancing Appreciation of Cultural Diversity:* The BNAC Initiative made progress on a number of different fronts over a three-year period, including outreach to the receiving community about the rich cultural traditions within refugee and immigrant groups. One of the most successful efforts in this regard was an International Art Exhibition at the Centennial Art Center. The exhibition featured artistic creations by newcomers who have made a home in Nashville, and the Coalition anticipated that the opportunity for Nashvillians to see the art and meet the artists would encourage them to become more familiar with the contributions that newcomers make to the community.

A May 2003 exhibition displayed the work of 40 artists from countries including Iraq (Arabic and Kurdish), Sudan, China, Mexico, Somalia, Bosnia, Egypt, Afghanistan, Haiti and Yemen. A section of the exhibition included works by foreign-born youth. The art was in a number of different media, including painting, needlework and metalwork, and some of the pieces took inspiration from the experience of coming to the United States and building a life in a new community. Although many artists were known for their artistic abilities in their native country, for several this was their first opportunity to display their work in the United States. As an unexpected positive benefit, the artists had an opportunity to network with individuals in the established mainstream art community.

### ***Promising Practices: Portland***

*Civic Engagement and Multnomah County’s School-Aged Policy Framework:* In the third year of Project Interwoven Tapestry’s mandate, a unique opportunity arose for the Coalition, and especially its African, Slavic/Ukrainian and Asian membership, to participate in a process intended to enhance the services that Multnomah County provides to youth. The Multnomah County School-Aged Policy Framework (SAPF) was developed out of a consultation process that included 21 workgroup meetings held during March 2003 in which an average of 106 stakeholders attended weekly meetings. Project Interwoven Tapestry’s African, Slavic/Ukrainian and Asian groups actively participated in this process. In the early stages of the consultations, the African and Slavic/Ukrainian groups formed an alliance with a Coalition of Communities of Color, which included African American, Native American, Latino and Asian and Pacific Islander groups. This alliance became known as the “Network of Culturally Specific

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<sup>14</sup> All U.S. employers are responsible for completion and retention of Form I-9 for each individual they hire. This includes citizens and non-citizens. On the form, the employer must verify the employment eligibility and identity documents presented by the employee and record the document information on the Form I-9.

Coalitions” and it attempted to articulate the experiences and needs of minority youth in Portland. The Network members met regularly with the director of the Office of School and Community Partnerships and his staff to get clarification on the process, and wrote a formal position paper that was presented to Multnomah County.

The SAPF recommended that the county make service delivery more efficient and effective, enhance delivery of services to culturally specific populations, and ensure equity on a countywide basis. The Network of Culturally Specific Coalitions successfully advocated for \$3.4 million in funding for culturally specific services for school-aged youth and their families, and this was a significant increase over the \$1.5 million previously allocated for these purposes. The county, although unable to increase funds for youth development given fiscal constraints, did reorganize funding priorities to respond to the needs of newcomer communities. The network now faces the challenge of negotiating how these funds will be allocated among the communities.

The organizational and leadership development training that the African, Slavic/Ukrainian and Asian communities received from Project Interwoven Tapestry, as well as the skills of the community development specialists, were instrumental in enabling these relatively new and small communities to participate effectively in the consultation process. The groups also received informal mentoring from the Asian and Pacific Islander and Latino organizations that participate in Interwoven Tapestry, especially in terms of organizational politics and negotiation for resources. The African and Slavic/Ukrainian Coalitions were so sophisticated in their SAPF work that Multnomah County has asked them to endorse agencies that apply to serve their respective communities and to create lists of needed youth services.

In the last year of the Initiative, the Slavic/Ukrainian community also began to build a relationship with Multnomah County’s Department of Mental Health. The process was similar to that which developed between the county and newcomer organizations during the SAPF consultations, although in this case it did not involve a broad array of different newcomer groups. Based on a set of meetings with key Slavic/Ukrainian representatives who participate in Interwoven Tapestry, the Mental Health Department created three new positions in the spring of 2003 to work with this community. One of the positions was that of a community liaison specialist – a resource that the Slavic/Ukrainian community was especially enthusiastic to receive.

*Two-Way Integration at the Neighborhood Level:* One of Portland’s assets that Interwoven Tapestry wanted to capitalize on from the outset was the city’s network of neighborhood associations. To a considerable degree this was accomplished through a number of small grants allocated at a neighborhood level. The grant process also had the added benefit that newcomer and receiving communities were encouraged to work together around a concrete project. In fact, grant requirements included a 50/50 partnership between a refugee/newcomer group and a receiving community group, with a neighborhood association acting as the fiscal sponsor. The request for proposals explicitly required that the projects increase civic participation and community engagement between newcomer and receiving society groups.

Two grant cycles were organized, one in 2002 and another in 2003. In the first competition six groups were awarded up to \$2,000. Due to the success of these projects, the funding envelope was expanded in 2003 because the City of Portland decided to match Interwoven Tapestry funds, and 12 projects received awards.

Two projects serve to highlight the kinds of two-way integration that this very modest funding sparked at a local scale. In a combined project between the St. Johns and Cathedral Park Neighborhood Associations, Hmong, Latino and Euro-American neighborhood association leaders participated in planning efforts related to local business district and transportation plans. The project funded outreach workers who utilized door-to-door, phone calls, and neighbor-to-neighbor outreach to educate Hmong and Latino residents about the importance of getting involved with city planning initiatives in

neighborhoods that have an increasing number of ethnic minority businesses. Interested individuals participated in several focus groups and leadership trainings related to planning, economic development and the ways to advocate for ethnic community needs.

The second project example involved collaboration between the Russian Music and Education Foundation and Montavilla Neighborhood Association, and attempted to use music as the vehicle to bring people from different cultures together. A classical Russian music concert presented by children trained at the Foundation School attracted over 100 people. The program also included a presentation about Portland's neighborhood association system and ways to become involved, and as a result several new refugees did ask to be put on the Montavilla Association's mailing list. Although it was hoped that there would be strong attendance from the receiving community, only a handful of long-established residents came out and many of those who did expressed discomfort with being in an environment in which English was not being spoken. The event highlighted the difficulty in achieving involvement from long-established residents, as well as a lack of appreciation on the part of many residents that newcomers constantly find themselves in situations in which theirs is not the language being spoken.

*Putting Leadership Training to Use – Communicating with Policy Makers:* Considerable effort over the life of Project Interwoven Tapestry was given to developing the leadership and organizational skills of refugee and immigrant leaders. A two-day "capstone" event in this process was a training on ways to communicate with policy makers, followed by a set of meetings in Salem with state-level policy makers, organized by the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL). On the first day of the training, approximately 40 immigrant and refugee leaders met with Project Interwoven Tapestry staff and four representatives of the national BNAC partners to explore the most effective ways that coalitions can engage with policy makers. The meeting began with leaders from the African, Slavic/Ukrainian and Asian/Pacific Islander communities discussing their recent work with Multnomah County School-Aged Policy Framework. Max Niedzwiecki from the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center then led a discussion on ethical points about advocacy, lobbying, and ways to approach politicians for leaders of non-profit organizations. Ann Morse from NCSL then compared and contrasted the ways in which Oregon's legislature functions relative to others across the country. The presentations were followed by a lunch meeting with Representative Steve March, in whose district live many of the attendees. The afternoon was devoted to a session on communication strategies led by Handel Milo from the National Immigration Forum. Milo's workshop reviewed practices for effective strategic communication about immigration and newcomer settlement/integration issues, as well as practical advice about how immigrant groups might best express themselves to politicians and undertake message preparation for discussions with politicians or the media.

Two days later, approximately 35 refugee/immigrant leaders traveled to Salem for meetings with state lawmakers that had been arranged by NCSL. The leaders put into practice the lessons learned in the session two days earlier in an effort to engage lawmakers about the experiences of refugees and immigrants in Portland. In addition to watching the House of Representatives vote on a series of bills, the participants broke into small groups for meetings with individual representatives and senators. In these meetings, the refugee and immigrant leaders had good success in communicating many of their issues and experiences, and several of the lawmakers, some of whom had little experience with their newcomer constituents, showed a strong interest in pursuing future meetings and becoming more involved in refugee/immigrant issues. The two-day training introduced key refugee/immigrant leaders to an important facet of political integration in the United States, and started a dialogue with lawmakers about the ways in which they could become actively involved with newcomer constituents. It was exactly the kind of two-way integration exchange that inspired the creation of the BNAC Initiative. Many of the refugee/immigrant leaders felt much more confident in their ability to communicate with policy makers who could influence many dimensions of economic, political and social integration in Oregon. They also indicated that they felt much less hesitant to pursue further meetings with

lawmakers about issues over which the state holds legislative responsibility, such as credential recognition.

### Summary

The three BNAC demonstration sites all undertook a number of different projects to encourage two-way integration between refugees/immigrants and receiving communities in their respective cities. The consultations that each coalition undertook with members of the refugee, immigrant and receiving communities significantly influenced the projects that were developed, and many reflected a strong preoccupation with English-language training opportunities, employment, skills training, credential recognition, and youth development. These are all multi-faceted issues and as such are ideally suited to coalitions made up of diverse member organizations possessing different skills, leadership styles and networks of contacts. Some of the projects directly sought to bring about changes that would influence long-term opportunities for adults and children. Other initiatives focused on building leadership and organizational capacity within institutions so that refugee/immigrant leaders could develop much greater effectiveness in communicating the contributions and needs of their group to organizations and individuals that do not necessarily directly serve newcomers.

The coalitions faced significant challenges in pursuing projects, not the least of which was simply explaining the objectives of the BNAC Initiative to constituencies that more usually think in terms of services than long-term initiatives that encourage institutional change. It takes time to build coalitions, and in each demonstration site groups directly confronted the problem of building reliable working relationships between organizations in a relatively short time period. For all of the coalitions there was a strong imperative to demonstrate progress by mounting integration projects and activities, and as a consequence insufficient time was given to building working relationships of trust and mutual support between member organizations and project staff. Many organizations were learning “on the fly” what participation in a coalition actually entailed, and sometimes this led to a breakdown in communication within the coalition, as well as between coalition staff and members, about roles and responsibilities. Of course, this is a normal situation in a new and diverse organization, but it is not one that is conducive to producing quick positive results. Given the relatively limited time span of the BNAC Initiative, the projects that individual sites undertook represent important, but only preliminary, steps toward the implementation of a comprehensive two-way integration program.

Each coalition also saw some founding organizations leave, especially in the second year of the Initiative, and only Nashville developed a formal procedure for extending membership to new groups. The process of bringing new member organizations up to the capacity level of original members was largely an ad hoc one, and this further exacerbated the problem of unequal participation and engagement within the coalitions. Maintaining the internal cohesion in each coalition was a persistent problem, and this in turn affected the number of integration projects that could be launched and the ability of the groups to make significant progress on any one initiative.

The coalitions also faced a funding limitation. The BNAC Initiative had a three-year funding envelope and this did limit the scope of the projects that could be undertaken. Activities were also restricted by the amount of the funding available for each site to undertake projects. Most of the demonstration sites devoted a significant part of their budgets to staff salaries, meaning that the work of many coalition partners, especially those that were not refugee organizations, was uncompensated. Under the terms of the ORR grant, only refugee organizations could receive direct funding, and this also created a sense of inequity within some coalitions between refugees and immigrants. This tended not to be a problem when tasks for coalition members were limited in terms of time and effort, but participation in projects did tend to wane when a considerable amount of sustained involvement was required. Most organizations had little excess staff time and/or material and financial resources to share

with a coalition. The projects that the demonstration sites did undertake are a testament to the continuous engagement and leveraging abilities of staff, as well as to the willingness of coalition partners to devote people and in-kind resources. At the same time, the coalitions' work illustrates the limits of volunteerism among organizations that have limited budgets, especially in an overall context of relatively tight funding opportunities. Issues such as recredentialing/work skills upgrading or newcomer youth development are difficult, complex and time consuming, and cannot be adequately addressed in a short time period or with only modest funding and the efforts of volunteers.

The work of the BNAC demonstration sites point to ways in which progress can be made at a local level on some concrete dimensions of social and economic integration, as well as in building relationships between organizations for which the well-being of newcomers should be a strong concern. The projects launched by each site's coalition must be interpreted as modest beginning efforts in a long-run process that, if realized, would lead to greater overall community cohesion.

## Chapter 5: Summary and Recommendations

It has long been recognized that cities, especially large cities, are places where cultural diversity flourishes and identities constantly evolve. New York, Los Angeles, Miami and Chicago – places that receive migrants from all over the world – exemplify the cultural, social and religious diversity and continuous melding of identities that are fundamental attributes of places that will thrive in an era of global interdependence. Since the early 1990s, a number of smaller American cities have also become much more ethnically diverse as foreign-born individuals have been attracted to them by opportunities for a better life for themselves and their children. It is this trend toward greater geographic dispersion among newcomers, and the challenges that these “non-traditional” destination cities face in constructing an inclusive, cohesive and prosperous community out of social and cultural diversity, that motivated the BNAC Initiative.

The ways in which immigrants and their children build lives in a new society demands conceiving of integration as something more than a process predicated upon unidirectional assimilation orchestrated by the receiving society. Integration is a continuous two-way *interaction*. Dealing directly with the complexities inherent in this interaction has significant implications for the ways that newcomers will contribute to the communities in which they settle, the manner in which groups will live together, the quality of public debate about migration, and especially the public policy goal of good governance for the benefit of long-time residents and newcomers alike. The BNAC Initiative recognized from the outset the complexity that lies behind the concept of integration. The work with the coalitions in the demonstration sites, however, reinforced just how demanding the on-the-ground conditions are for creating social integration, especially in cities in which refugees and immigrants are largely new additions to existing social and economic processes.

Social inclusion in urban places doesn’t just happen. In the last two decades, cities around the world have witnessed movements to democratize local government and increase community and social group involvement in local affairs. *Governance*, as distinct from *government*, has become an influential concept in structuring interactions between local government and civil society groups and organizations. In the BNAC Initiative, Portland stands out as having implemented aspects of a local governance model. The Metropolitan Human Rights Center and Office of Neighborhood Involvement, as well as Multnomah County’s Office of School and Community Partnerships, deliberately solicited the involvement of several refugee and immigrant communities in a number of different initiatives. Although only a starting point, the kinds of institutional relationships and coalitions that were created in Portland, both in and outside of the Interwoven Tapestry framework, suggest that inequities can be addressed when state agencies build public policy and deliver programs in collaboration with civil society organizations.

The BNAC Initiative clearly demonstrates that an *integration* policy for the United States that fosters meaningful interactions, social mobility and inclusion cannot adopt a “one size fits all” approach. Local economic, social and political conditions will influence the overall context in which newcomers build a new life, as well as the capacity of groups and organizations to play a meaningful role in assisting with settlement. In every city with a sizable newcomer community, there is a need to strike a different balance of participation and responsibility among federal, state and local governments, community-based social welfare agencies, refugee and immigrant assistance associations, and advocacy organizations. Integration is also a multi-phased process, and as such demands the sustained involvement of many kinds of organizations. Engaging the resources of several levels of government, their agencies and civil society partners is an intensive way to build social policy. However, by reflecting (and respecting) most conscientiously local conditions and needs, such a process holds the promise of utilizing opportunities and knowledge, as well as of confronting systemic barriers that influence integration outcomes among newcomers in the places where they live.

The BNAC Initiative suggests several lessons for building an immigrant integration policy that is respectful of differences. It is clear that many key services need to be available to newcomers in order for them to become quickly established in the United States and able to provide for themselves and their families:

- English-language training for adults and children;
- Credential recognition and assistance with meeting professional and trade licensing requirements;
- Strong vocational/professional skills development and upgrading courses;
- Higher education opportunities;
- Youth-training and development services;
- Civic-participation training and opportunities for involvement in the wider community;
- Health care; and
- Adequate and affordable housing.

By using such services, newcomers learn about key institutions and organizations of their new society and begin the process of integration almost unconsciously. As the BNAC Initiative emphasized, integration involves more than just learning English or upgrading education qualifications; it requires innovative solutions to systemic barriers that limit the social inclusion of newcomers. The BNAC Initiative implicitly tested the merit of diverse coalitions as ways to foster integration, with mixed results. Coalitions are far from the only model. Yet, an active and diverse coalition membership with ties to a number of different segments of society holds considerable promise for achieving integration.

Based on the BNAC experience, several recommendations emerge about building coalitions and their operation:

- **Leadership:** Key to a successful coalition and its long-term sustainability is strong and intelligent leadership. The coalitions all experienced leadership challenges of one kind or another, but a strong and charismatic leader with a good understanding of the objectives and structures of coalition member organizations proved to be instrumental in moving work plans forward. Intensive efforts were devoted to developing leadership and organizational capacity within refugee and immigrant MAAs, and several prospective strong leaders did emerge through these efforts. In all three sites, however, more time was required for the newcomer individuals to establish their positions within the coalitions and demonstrate their ability to motivate a diverse membership to follow their leadership.
- **Broad Versus Specific Coalitions:** It was the intention of the BNAC Initiative to build coalitions that were broad in organizational membership and could tackle a range of integration issues. In fact, the National Partners allowed the coalitions to design action plans that reflected a broad range of problems and opportunities identified by community participants. This is not the only way to organize a coalition. Given limited resources and time, building coalitions around one or two issues, such as credential recognition or youth development, might have yielded stronger results. Focused projects may also face fewer challenges in terms of staff turnover and governance issues. In the BNAC framework, the local coalitions spent a great deal of time identifying the components of a work plan and creating a workable management structure. A predetermined set of issues around which groups coalesce could shorten the initial phases of coalition development.

- **Funding challenges:** It is crucial to recognize that the BNAC communities, especially Nashville and Portland, are in the beginning phases of a demographic transformation and that a small amount of funding could not bring about dramatic changes that substantially improve the integration experiences of most newcomers. At best, the BNAC Initiative identified problems that impede integration and suggested possible mechanisms for addressing them. Systemic change demands significant and sustained funding over an extended time period. As One Lowell strongly demonstrated, a sharp reduction in state and philanthropic funding to refugee, immigrant and receiving community non-profit organizations can severely influence such organizations' ability to participate in a coalition.
- **False Distinctions:** Funding for the BNAC Initiative was limited to refugee-serving organizations. As a consequence, it was not possible to allocate resources to immigrant and receiving community organizations that participated in the coalitions. Especially in an overall tight funding context, this stipulation created tensions, and was not conducive to generating cooperation. Integration is a challenge that *all* newcomers face, and funding should be provided in such a way that all service providers can respond to this reality.

Distinguishing refugees from other newcomer groups also contributed to intra-coalition frustrations with a situation they interpreted as a false division between newcomer groups. The trauma of displacement that many resettled refugees experienced, and which sets them apart as a group with special needs, is undeniable and should not be minimized. At the same time, within an individual newcomer group, some members may be refugees while others are not, and having different access to services and assistance can create intra-group tensions that adversely influence the integration prospects of the entire group. All newcomers face many of the same challenges, such as learning English and credential recognition, and developing programs that only address the needs and experiences of one segment of the population can detract from broad-based cohesion. For example, the exclusion of undocumented immigrants from the coalitions, even when in Nashville and Portland the status of the undocumented was an intensely debated public issue, serves to emphasize ways in which exclusion can occur in a project that is fundamentally about inclusion. The rights and obligations of undocumented immigrants are contested across the United States, but their presence and the needs of their families realistically cannot be set apart from an effort to achieve cohesive communities.

- **Coalition Building:** For coalitions to be successful and sustainable, they must be able to engage different kinds of organizations. In the case of the three BNAC demonstration sites, the coalitions came together primarily in response to a funding opportunity. As a consequence, each coalition spent a great deal of time trying to identify objectives and develop working relationships.
- **Horizontal Relationships:** In making a determination about the ability of a coalition to commit to an integration agenda and mount projects, it is critical to develop tools to catalogue and assess whether sufficient horizontal relationships and cooperative practices exist between member organizations. The quality of pre-existing relationships is key to the ability of a coalition to develop an agenda and implement it with the sustained and willing effort of coalition members.
- **Management:** Leadership is critical for building effective coalitions, but it bears repeating that the day-to-day work of such a group requires sound management and the talents of full-time, fully funded staff that is able to work closely with coalition members. Staff members are critical to successful project management and execution, proposal writing, fund raising and information exchange. It is important, however, that their responsibilities not eclipse or substitute for the meaningful participation of coalition members. To function as effective coalitions, authority, recognition and responsibility must be shared among staff and members.

These observations and recommendations relate primarily to the organization and management of coalitions. It is equally important not to lose sight of the overall community context in which a coalition must function. Community organizing and coalition building are not new processes. In each of the communities, considerable expertise existed before the BNAC coalitions formed that could have been utilized more intensively. Specifically, the coalitions in Nashville and Portland made relatively little effort to draw on the expertise of organizations and individuals within the U.S.-born African-American community. This occurred even though this community is large and has deep experience with many issues, such as employment training, the quality of schools, health, policing and housing, which were preoccupations of coalition members. In the final year of the Initiative, Interwoven Tapestry did begin to develop a relationship with some African-American organizations and this was a welcome development. In Nashville, some refugee representatives did encourage the Coalition to seek the involvement of African-American organizations, but this effort was strongly opposed by some representatives who felt that the interests of newcomers and African Americans were entirely different. The exclusion of some receiving community and newcomer groups from the coalitions because they were perceived to be difficult to deal with, or tangential to the objective of newcomer integration, illustrates the challenge of creating inclusion even among groups that are predisposed to support the idea. For coalitions to be truly vectors of integration, they must:

- Be open to all cultural, racial, ethnic and religious groups in a city, even if this creates conflict at the outset and makes the road to coalition cohesion more difficult, and
- Recognize that the work of the coalition should be situated within a broad context of community development that, in many cities, has been going on for decades.

Policy makers at the local and state levels are also a tremendous resource for a coalition attempting to mount an integration program. By virtue of their office and responsibilities as community leaders, state and local policy makers try to promote civic education and participation. Moreover, elected representatives have issue expertise and legislative responsibilities in areas that directly affect refugees and immigrants, whether education, transportation, workforce development or law enforcement. Before the coalitions were formed, policy makers reported few contacts with the refugee and immigrant communities, particularly beyond the leaders of the communities. This lack of contact made it difficult for them to ascertain day-to-day concerns or develop a rapport. Refugees and immigrants also had minimal contact with policy makers. The reasons range from fear of government and an unwillingness to make requests of the country that had welcomed them, to significant time constraints, and confusion about the roles and responsibilities of each level of government. All of these factors seem to have coalesced to make contact rare, although toward the end of the Initiative's life such interactions multiplied.

One of the major lessons to be drawn from the BNAC Initiative is that progress on integration issues depends on developing a relationship between newcomers and policy makers, and that these interactions take time, energy and continuous communication to build. To develop relationships with policy makers, coalitions should:

- Invite policy makers to community events to meet with local constituents.
- Institute regular, clear and brief statements of coalition progress and activities.
- Visit lawmakers in partnership with other groups – several groups stating needs together is important when making the case for changes in legislation or regulation.
- Identify and publicize examples of coalition members' economic and social contributions.

- Develop brochures on local government leadership (who they are, what they do, and how refugees and immigrants can voice concerns to them).
- Set priorities for legislative attention (know what the community needs and be willing to craft solutions).
- Develop ways to support internships at city, county and state levels for refugee/immigrant communities so young leaders can learn how political and policy processes function.

### Reflections on the BNAC Initiative and Policy Directions

The BNAC Initiative was conceived as an experiment in developing governance relationships that could inform the development of refugee and immigrant integration policies. In this regard, general lessons can be drawn from the Initiative, as well as ideas from which a national immigrant integration policy could be developed.

#### ***National Partnerships***

The Initiative yielded a tremendous amount of information about successful, and not so successful, coalition building practices among culturally diverse organizations that are unequal in terms of their development, capacity and power. Many of these lessons have been outlined above. The Initiative also demonstrated that national organizations can play a significant role in fostering newcomer integration. The strong relationship that developed between the national training/technical assistance and research teams was critical to the Initiative's success in that considerable information and knowledge was exchanged. This meant that research could inform the hands-on development work, such as newcomer group profiles and coalition building strategies, that the technical assistance team pursued. Likewise, reports from the technical assistance team based on their intense involvement with the coalitions and their management informed the kind of research questions that were pursued by The Urban Institute and the Migration Policy Institute.

The collective expertise of the national partners, accumulated through their involvement with newcomer integration issues over many years, was an indispensable asset to the local coalitions. Likewise, the national partners were able to demonstrate that refugees and immigrants have important human capital resources to share with their adopted communities. While too often the human capital of newcomers is buried by language difficulties and different communication styles, their skills and knowledge are important assets in community social and economic development strategies.

#### ***Developing an Immigrant Integration Policy***

To a considerable degree, integration depends on individual human capital, kin and friendship networks, and family resources. But it also relies on a society's willingness to devote human and financial resources to the task of removing barriers that hamper social and economic inclusion. The size and growth rate of the foreign born in many cities, coupled with economic and workforce changes that have placed a premium on language and vocational skills among all workers, challenge the United States to develop a comprehensive program of newcomer integration. Moreover, the importance of newcomers to the social and economic health of many communities means that their full and active inclusion cannot be left to chance.

At the present time, however, integration is fostered largely through the initiative of individual refugees and immigrants, as well as the work of some non-profit organizations that derive funding from several different, if too often precarious, sources. The BNAC coalitions showed strong commitment to

the principle of newcomer integration, but the ability of refugees and immigrants to participate in processes intended to encourage change was limited by significant time and financial constraints.

The federal government is the one institution that has sufficient financial and organizational resources to promote immigrant integration in the many communities across the United States that are experiencing demographic and social transformation. The BNAC Initiative demonstrates, however, that this is not a responsibility that the federal government should shoulder alone. The real strength of the BNAC coalitions was the public – private partnerships that were created to address real integration problems and barriers.

Any federal government venture to develop an integration policy must thus be built with great tolerance for different degrees and kinds of interaction with the many types of places where immigrants settle – from long-established and diversified gateways to small one-industry cities and towns. In each type of place, a different balance of participation and responsibility needs must be struck between federal, state and local governments, as well as with numerous kinds of civil society organizations. The BNAC Initiative demonstrates that it is possible to create structures that facilitate these kinds of relationships, and that diverse coalitions can construct meaningful projects that address specific integration barriers.

The experience and lessons learned from the BNAC Initiative suggest several key factors must be in place in order to build a successful national immigrant integration policy that is in step with local conditions.

- Flexibility in delivery, management and goals.
- Equitable public – private partnerships.
- Meaningful roles and training opportunities for refugee and immigrant organizations.
- Participation from the many and diverse newcomer and receiving-community groups that populate a city. At the core of integration is social inclusion, and cohesive societies cannot be built if some groups a priori are not part of the effort.
- States should play a major role in coordinating policy and working directly with communities. In this regard, creating a new position of a state coordinator for newcomer integration, modeled after the strong leadership and coalition-building activities of some current state refugee coordinators, would allow states and communities to liaise with the federal government. Such a position would require adequate resources to encourage integration programs that address the short- and long-term needs of individuals and communities, as well as inter-agency cooperation at the federal level to facilitate and support effective partnerships with the states and local communities.
- Mechanisms need to be in place to determine the quality of existing horizontal relationships between organizations and institutions in particular communities. Coalitions may not always be the correct vehicle for fostering integration. Likewise, not all communities may have sufficient organizational capacity, strong and cooperative relationships between different kinds of organizations, or sufficient appreciation of the intricacies of integration to mount successful projects. In such circumstances, devoting financial and human resources to integration is not productive when other issues must first be addressed.
- Policy makers from all levels of government need to be engaged in newcomer integration, as it is an issue that will influence the short- and long-term economic, demographic and social health of American communities.

Migration, global interdependence and a knowledge-based economy are challenging local and national governments around the world to respond in meaningful ways to challenges faced by newcomers and their children, as well as obstacles confronted by local communities that struggle with the implications of cultural, religious and linguistic diversity. In this dynamic context, governments and civil society are only in the early stages of developing expertise about how to achieve meaningful social, economic and cultural integration. The United States has been a world leader in creating an open society that is rich in opportunities for refugees and immigrants. The country has also benefited enormously from the contributions of newcomers for centuries. The BNAC Initiative builds on this heritage, but it also represents a new response to the economic and social realities that structure integration and social mobility among newcomers and long-established residents alike in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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## **Appendix I: Partner Organizations in Coalition Sites**

### **Lowell**

African Assistance Center  
Cambodian American League  
Cambodian Mutual Assistance Center  
CAMOLA (Cameroonians of Lowell Association)  
Community Teamwork Inc.  
Eliot Church  
Greater Lowell Community Foundation  
International Institute of Lowell  
Lao Family Mutual Association  
Latin American Health Institute  
Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers  
UMASS-Lowell's Center for Work, Family and Community

### **Nashville**

Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce (Greater Nashville Regional Community Foundation)  
Catholic Charities  
Fasha (Central African Leadership Organization)  
International Lao-American Organization  
Iraqi House  
Metro Health Department  
Metro Schools/Adult Refugee English Language Training  
Metro Social Services/Refugee Services Office  
Nashville Area Hispanic Chamber of Commerce  
Nashville Career Advancement Center  
Nashville Egyptian Community  
Nashville Kurdish Forum  
Somali Community Center  
Sudanese Humanitarian Organization  
TennCare Consumer Advocacy Program  
Tennessee Dept. of Human Resources/Refugee Programs  
Tennessee State University/Project Diane  
World Relief  
Woodbine Community Organization

### **Portland**

IRCO (Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization)  
Metropolitan Human Rights Center of the City of Portland and Multnomah County  
African Refugee and Immigrant Network of Oregon (ARINO)  
Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO)  
Central Northeast Neighbors  
Latino Network

Northeast Coalition of Neighborhoods  
Office of Neighborhood Involvement  
Oregon State Refugee Program  
Portland Public Schools/ESL-Bilingual Program  
Refugee/Immigrant Consortium of Oregon and Southwest Washington  
Russian Oregon Social Services  
Southeast Uplift Neighborhood Coalition