

IMMIGRANT & REFUGEE

**REGIONAL STRATEGY
& VISION**



INTRODUCTION

Interested and committed groups and individuals with professional experience from around the Richmond Region gathered in 2023 to understand the barriers and assets of the system of support for immigrants and refugees in the region. Individuals with lived experience as immigrants and refugees also gathered to provide their own experiences and insights about the level of support across the region. This regional plan emerged from these conversations.

Plan context: Common barriers for marginalized communities are magnified for Immigrants and Refugees and further magnified for individuals lacking documentation and those without a designated refugee services funding stream. Political changes and the overall attitude and impression towards Immigrants and Refugees also impacted support delivery. The consensus is that our regional system has both capacity and a lack of capacity at the same time. Participants stress that the availability of services does not equal the quality of services or that services are delivered with cultural competency.

The local insights back up the Needs Assessment “Barriers to Integration of Virginia’s Immigrants.[1]” This report lifted up 11 common barriers, all of which were reported within the Richmond region.

1. Lack of a centralized source of information on statewide resources and services available to immigrants in Virginia
2. Language barriers to accessing services and education
3. Barriers to learning the English language
4. Challenges finding employment to match education and skills because of difficulties in transferring credentials earned in the home countries into the American labor market
5. Becoming trapped in (often difficult and sometimes exploitative) jobs
6. Immigration status and scarcity of affordable legal assistance
7. Barriers to accessing healthcare
8. Transportation
9. Access to affordable housing
10. Cultural barriers
11. Exploitation by unscrupulous employers and immigration attorneys (or those posing as immigration attorneys).

The subsequent recommendations included in the report provide a roadmap for the region.

[1] https://www.dss.virginia.gov/files/division/cvs/ona/immigrant_services/2022-vcu_ona-study/ONA-Barriers_to_Integration_final_report_Sept_2022.pdf

PROCESS

The Spark Mill worked through a three-phase process to complete this plan.

In the first phase, The Spark Mill gathered information through one-on-one interviews with key partners, leading to a regional convening of service providers and a person-centered workgroup.

KEY ORGANIZATIONS



REGIONAL CONVENING OF SERVICE PROVIDERS



PERSON-CENTERED WORK GROUPS TO VALIDATE



Next, the team worked through feedback to create and validate key goals. Lastly, key organizations wrote the plan and sought feedback before finalizing this regional plan for the community.



VISION

**The Richmond
Region fully
embraces,
harnesses, and
supports
Immigrant and
Refugee
newcomers to
our region.**





FOCUS AREAS

ACCESS TO SERVICES

**CONNECTING PROVIDERS, SUPPORTERS, AND
ENTHUSIASTIC VOLUNTEERS**

EDUCATION FOR ALL

SUSTAINABILITY & ADVOCACY

STRATEGY



Focus Area: Access to Services

1. Develop a centralized hub of available resources to streamline access for newcomers
2. Create a regional database of services accessible by providers and newcomers
3. Explore a means to provide newcomer navigation services and referrals (i.e. regional welcome center)

Focus Area: Connecting Providers, Supporters, and Enthusiastic Volunteers

1. Convene regional support providers for regular connection, education, and support
2. Identify and extend existing opportunities for collaboration for service providers across the spectrum
3. Provide support for Ethnic Community Based Organizations (ECBO)

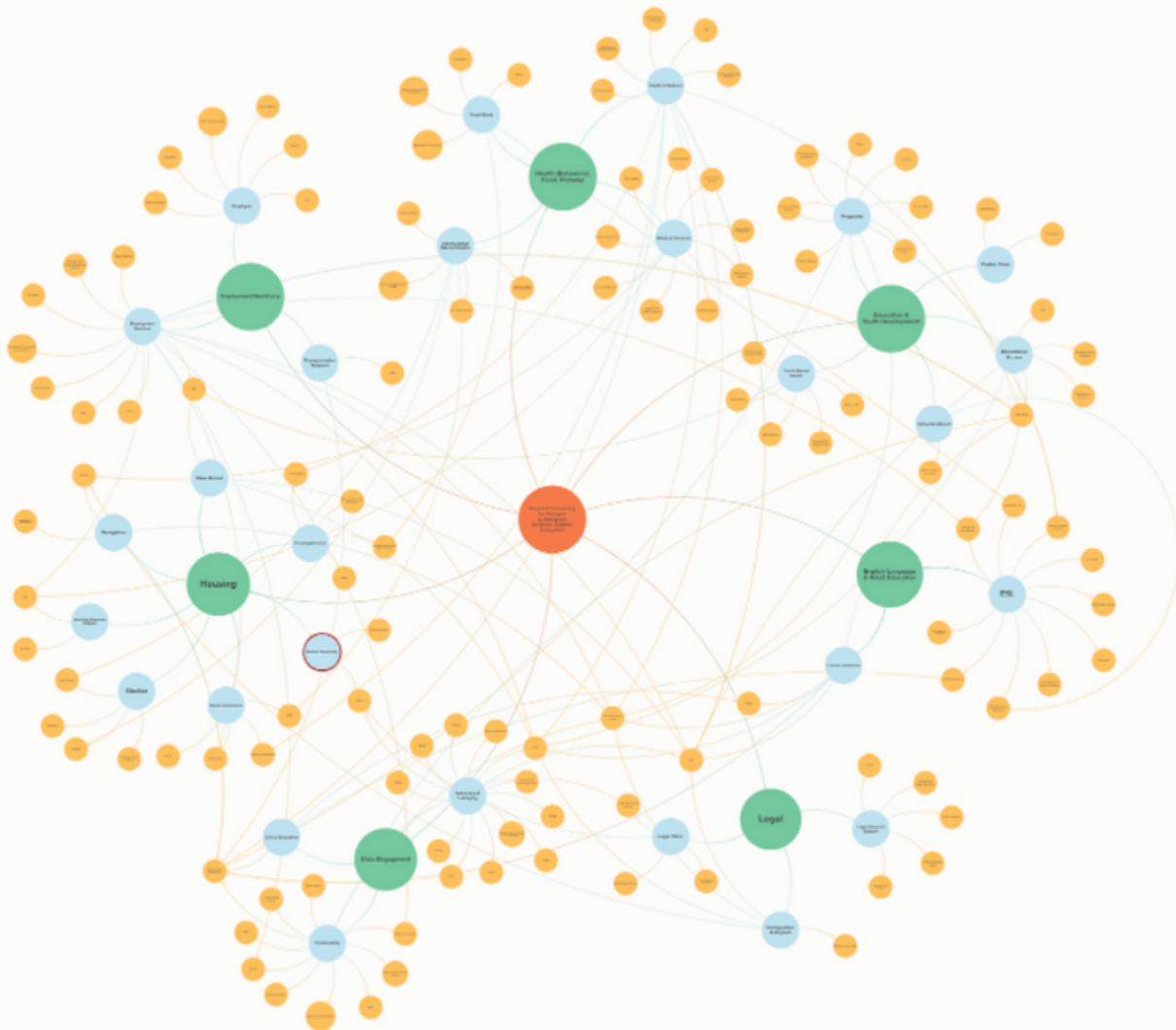
Focus Area: Education for All

1. Increase educational opportunities for workforce development for newcomers
2. Expand access to culturally competent and quality English language classes
3. Partner with youth-focused organizations and systems to strengthen support for newcomer minors
4. Create "Welcome to Virginia" orientation videos to improve cultural capital knowledge for newcomers

Focus Area: Sustainability and Advocacy

1. Increase unrestricted funding for service providers and support organizations
2. Develop a regional advocacy platform to improve services for Immigrants and Refugees at the state level
3. Break down misperceptions of Immigrants and Refugees through coordinated storytelling

SYSTEM MAP OF RESOURCES



This system map of resources was generated through community feedback. Kumu is a powerful visualization mapping tool for mapping systems and better understanding relationships. Through this system map, we are able to visualize service providers and resources throughout the region. Each category is shown with a connection to a service and the organization that provides it. This can be used service providers to identify where there are areas of support to connect those who need them. This should be viewed as a work in progress.

Visit the link to the Richmond Region **System Map**

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN



The Models & Approaches

- Larger City/Region
- Local Geographic Centric
- Population/Culture Centric (Afghan, Nigerian, etc.)
- Specific Focus Centric (Reading, Employment, etc.)
- State Coordinated
- National Organizations/Programs

Locations Included

- St. Louis, MO
- Northern MN
- Utica, NY
- Indianapolis, IN
- Yonkers, NY
- Erie, PA
- Colorado
- East Bay, CA
- Richmond, VA
- Charlottesville, VA
- Harrisonburg, VA
- New York, NY
- Washington, DC
- Boston, MA

Key Findings

The majority of funding comes from government grants followed by foundation grants. For a few organizations program revenue is a primary source of funding – particularly those that offer and charge for translation and legal services.

Many of the regional and larger city organizations are providing comprehensive services tailored to the populations and needs most prevalent in their area.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Founded in 2009, The Spark Mill is headquartered in Richmond, Virginia and works with nonprofits, corporations, government agencies, and coalitions in strategic planning and change management. This varies from 18-month projects to one day team retreats and from community engagement to brand strategy – all centered on making change possible. We also believe that all organizations regardless of size can have high functioning and high return teams and visionary goals. We pride ourselves on recommending cost effective and practical solutions with tangible action steps that can be implemented. Our sweet spot is the space where strategy, creativity, and action meet.

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