

Welcome BG Task Force
Report and Recommendations
June 2018

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With City Council's passing of Resolution 3662 proclaiming Bowling Green (BG) as a welcoming and safe community for immigrants and people of diverse backgrounds, BG recognized the moral and economic importance of building a more welcoming community for all.

As many other cities in the state and country, BG and Wood County are experiencing a continuing decline in the working-age population *and* significant growth in people of diverse backgrounds, including immigrants.

At the same time, BG's manufacturing sector (the largest employer) is growing and yet currently has a serious workforce shortage. Bowling Green State University (the second largest employer) is focusing on how to attract and retain a diverse student body, including international students, another source of professionals and entrepreneurs for the city and wider area.

Cities large and small have begun to realize that welcoming people of diverse backgrounds, including immigrants, has allowed them to build healthy, vibrant 21st century communities.

In creating the "Welcome BG Task Force", linked to the Human Relations Commission, the City took a first big step towards understanding what a "Welcoming BG" would look like and the impact it could have in securing our own vitality. It became clear that Economic Opportunities was a key area of focus. What could be done to attract and retain a needed workforce? Thus, a number of recommendations in the report address this challenge.

Once newcomers choose to settle in BG, what barriers will need to be addressed to support them to Live and Thrive here? A number of recommendations look at expanding upon what is already in place in key sectors of the community and also identifying new initiatives to be more inclusive.

Lastly, our Task Force recognized that implementation will require intentionality and resources to make this a dynamic initiative that is sustainable for the future.

These recommendations provide momentum and support for taking the next steps to begin implementing key elements. As other cities have documented, the return on this investment has been high both economically and in building strong communities that are safe and inclusive for all.

We believe that with continued commitment and action, BG is well-positioned to experience the many benefits of being a truly welcoming city and to be a leader for other small communities desiring to do the same.

INTRODUCTION

On April 3, 2017, Bowling Green City Council unanimously passed Resolution 3662 proclaiming Bowling Green as a “welcoming and safe community for immigrants and condemning any discrimination, harassment or unjustified deportation of immigrant residents of Bowling Green.” Subsequently, the Human Relations Commission formed a Welcome BG Task Force, mandated by Mayor Richard Edwards to develop recommendations.

These targeted recommendations will:

- ❖ Promote BG as a community that is welcoming, safe, and inclusive to all residents, including immigrants
- ❖ Build on current initiatives and efforts, and identify new initiatives that will assist in further developing BG as a welcoming, safe, and inclusive community
- ❖ Help BG attract, support, and retain a diverse workforce to fill current unmet local labor shortages by identifying:
 - Where the available labor pools exist
 - What services are in place and what services will be needed to support people (language, housing, health, schools, etc.)

The work of the Task Force included:

- ❖ Researching and engaging in conversations with key people working in cities/municipalities that are using the Welcome City framework and recognizing the economic and social benefits. Our research focused on Dayton, Cleveland, Toledo/Lucas County, Columbus, Cincinnati, and Detroit.
- ❖ Gathering data and interviewing immigrants and organizations working with newcomers
- ❖ Identifying needs and issues and the many dimensions that comprise a truly welcoming community
- ❖ Organizing an educational presentation opened to the public with expert and Global Detroit Director Steve Tobocman
- ❖ Identifying current events and initiatives that could be built upon
- ❖ Identifying pools of labor in our region and barriers and solutions in increasing our current labor availability
- ❖ Holding a community conversation to hear from the community and incorporating public input into final report.

Welcoming diverse populations into our community is certainly a matter of human rights and a way of preserving our historic traditions as an immigrant country. However, these recommendations propose that acknowledging and celebrating the contributions of diverse populations, including immigrants, *is an imperative for continued community vitality.*

THE NEED FOR A WELCOME BG INITIATIVE

Resolution 3662, which proclaimed Bowling Green as a welcoming community, addresses this issue indicating that “WHEREAS, given current demographic trends, in order to secure the future vitality of the City and the County, it is imperative to develop ways to attract and retain a diverse population and consequently to leverage this diversity in the building of welcoming, safe, and inclusive communities for all”.

General Demographic Trends

- ❖ Census data, both for Bowling Green and Wood County, for years 2,000 and 2010, show that the influx of diverse populations helped offset population losses.
- ❖ In Bowling Green, the significant 53% increase of people of diverse races and ethnic backgrounds, was what helped the overall population to grow 1.25%. In Wood County it was the 45% growth of non-whites that drove the general population to increase 3.65%.
- ❖ Changes in the population by age between the last two Censuses show, both for the City and the County, an aging population. Youth and people of working age decreased in Wood County by 3.82% between the last two Censuses, while people 65 and older increased 15.41% . In Bowling Green the youth and people of working age increased 7.7% while the people 65 and older increased 18%.

(United States Census Bureau, data for years 2000 and 2010)

Labor Shortage

- ❖ Bowling Green and Wood County data shows severe labor shortages (On this Labor Day, it’s laborers that the region is lacking , September 5, 2016, BG Independent News). A similar reality can be seen all over Ohio.
[\(<http://www.toledoblade.com/business/2017/09/03/Shortage-of-qualified-workers-hampers-construction-industry.html>\)](http://www.toledoblade.com/business/2017/09/03/Shortage-of-qualified-workers-hampers-construction-industry.html)
- ❖ OhioMeansJobs.com states there are about 9,200 jobs available within a 20-mile radius of Bowling Green. These jobs range from engineers to general labor.

A Growing Manufacturing Sector

- ❖ There is an increase in manufacturing in BG-Wood County in the last 30 years. Per the Bowling Green Economic Development Director, 4,125 are now employed in manufacturing, surpassing BGSU (2,641) as the largest employer in the City. (Year 2018)
- ❖ Employers express difficulties filling general labor positions and skilled trades (welding, maintenance, electricians). Wood County has an unemployment rate of less than 4% which makes it hard to find good quality candidates. (Wood County Jobs and Family Services, Ohio Jobs)



As a result, the Task Force recommends a focus on two interconnected tracks: **1) Economic Opportunities** to address prevalent labor shortages and **2) Living and Thriving:** Enhancing BG as a welcoming, safe and inclusive community with initiatives needed to attract and retain a younger and diverse work force, including immigrants, by addressing the many dimensions that comprise a truly welcoming community. In addition, immediate recommendations are suggested to the Mayor's Office to ensure sustainability and visibility of the initiative.

RECOMMENDATIONS

SUSTAINABILITY

Suggested Lead: Mayor's Office

1. The Mayor appoints a Steering Committee to oversee the implementation of recommendations in these focus areas of greatest urgency:

- Economic Opportunity
- Living and Thriving: Enhancing our quality of life, social support services and community engagement

Consider representatives from a broad variety of impacted sectors of the community to involve both private and public stakeholders. Potential stakeholders could include:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">● BG Chamber of Commerce● BG Convention & Visitors Bureau● BG Economic Development● Private Sector Businesses● United Way● Human Relations Commission● La Conexion● BG City Council | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● City Administration● Law Enforcement● Local Faith Community● BG City Schools● BGSU Office of Diversity and Inclusion● Wood County Hospital● Wood County Health Dept.● Wood County Commissioners |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

2. Hire a part-time Welcome BG Consultant on a one year renewable contract to engage with and provide support to the Leads for each key priority project area in designing and confirming goals, communicating progress to key stakeholders and identifying grants that could fund the ongoing work, reporting to the Mayor or his designee.

3. **Expand this initiative to include Wood County by presenting and engaging the Wood County Commissioners** since the issues are common to a wider geographical area and would allow for shared resources.

4. **Brand BG as a Welcoming City to increase the Visibility and Community Awareness of the Welcome BG Initiative:**



Proposed Welcome BG Logo

- City authorizes the proposed Welcome BG Logo as official for the initiative
- Create an official Welcome BG Facebook page, linked to the City Website
- City and 4 Downtown Agencies (4 Corners) include Welcome BG as a major focus of the current BG Branding Campaign
- City approve a Welcome BG brochure and its public distribution
- City of Bowling Green become a member of “Welcoming America/Welcoming Economies” at \$200/year to access member benefits/resources etc.
- The Welcome BG initiative is currently a member of the Ohio Welcoming Opportunities Network (OWIN). This carries no additional cost. OWIN is a member of the Steering Committee of the new State of Ohio Office for Opportunities for New Americans.

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

1. Connect local employers with identified labor pools.

Suggested Lead: Bowling Green Economic Development Office

- International students
- Millennials
- Immigrants and Refugees

2. Engage resources to overcome current barriers to attracting and retaining a needed labor force.

Suggested Lead: Bowling Green Economic Development Office

- Identify critical job openings and skills needed
- Information sessions for the business community on hiring international students & refugees: process, laws, available support
- Identify local and regional contacts that connect employers and job applicants
- Advocate for meaningful immigration reform and the Dream Act to increase documented labor pool and immigrant access to jobs
- Access to work: Research what other Welcoming communities have done to facilitate access to work /documentation
- Identify and engage legal resources/ immigration attorneys who can assist employers as well as employees.

3. BG Economic Development engage with BGSU to attract/retain international students and millennials

Suggested Leads: BG Economic Development and BGSU Diversity and Inclusion

- Create workshops and online groups for international students to provide information on how to apply for jobs and how to market their skills.
- Informational sessions for employers on sponsoring international students
- Create internships to attract/retain BGSU graduates
 - A project to find out what types of jobs would attract/retain graduates

- Engage key departments connected to certain jobs
- Pilot projects: Start with one case to identify barriers
- Actively promote entrepreneurship to create jobs

4. Support immigrant business ownership/micro enterprises

Suggested Lead: BG Economic Development Office and Small Business Development Centers

- Training and assistance for diverse populations who want to start small businesses
- Establish a city program providing detailed explanation and steps of business system staffed by trained staff in the areas specifically impacting immigrant entrepreneurs.
- Resource center /targeted support for (a) knowledge-based services, (b) tailored counseling and assistance, (c) mentoring and networking, (d) facilitating access to credit
- Establish a program to help current and potential immigrant entrepreneurs establish and improve their credit
- Mainstream and targeted business support program
- Structural and broader policies that promote an environment that is conducive to entrepreneurship and innovation.

Potential Resource groups:

- US Together Toledo
- Wood County Economic Development Offices
- BGSU Office of International Students
- Welcome Toledo-Lucas County and Global Detroit (*Employer Engagement, Workforce Development, and the International Student Retention Projects*)
- Wood County Jobs and Family Services
- BGSU Technology School
- Regional Growth Partnership
- Jobs Ohio
- Local recruiting and staffing agencies
- Advocates for Basic Legal Equality (ABLE)
- BG Chamber of Commerce

LIVING AND THRIVING

All relevant sectors, such as government, law enforcement, business, schools, service agencies, and others, work together to create a welcoming community climate that supports long-term integration.

1. Develop a Welcome BG Ambassadors program to help newcomers settle and integrate.

Suggested Lead: Four Corners Agencies

- Promote the value of immigrants to our community as neighbors, friends, families, community leaders, and contributors to the economic, social, and political well-being of Bowling Green and Wood County
- Engage newcomers and the receiving community together and provide opportunities for one-on-one exchanges.
- Committee can be integrated with community volunteers and international students including speakers of different languages.
- A community potluck to welcome newcomers can be held once a year.

2. Increase access to quality and affordable housing through processes like the BG Improvement Plan and the Community Action Plan (CAP)

Suggested Lead: City Planning Department

- Address barriers related to lack of credit history for newcomers
 - Workshops on establishing and improving credit
- Increase access to affordable quality stable housing
- Prevent housing discrimination by offering information and workshops on buying, renting, and the Fair Housing Act
- Planning housing in relation to employment
- Ensure safety standards are maintained

3. Identify needs to support language access:

Suggested Lead: La Conexion, United Way, City of Bowling Green

- Identify and address needs for interpretation services.
 - Establish a City/county-wide interpreter service. Pooling agencies might reduce costs. BGPLD using Language Line.

- Promote and sustain ESL and citizenship classes already in place

4. Identify and address transportation barriers through processes like BG Improvement Plan and CAP.

Suggested Lead: City Administration Department

- Cheaper housing is available outside BG, but mobility is an issue
- Walkability
- Provide accessible transportation options

5. Promote Multicultural Events and Entertainment

Suggested Lead: BG Chamber, Convention and Visitor's Bureau and Downtown BG

- Increase access to international culture, films, festivals
- Access to international food stores
- Cultural and educational community events to increase tolerance and appreciation of multiculturalism and multilingualism
- Generate opportunities for immigrants to tell their stories, celebrate traditions, and enhance cultural understanding through existing events and local and regional collaborations

6. Address issues of systemic racism, stereotypes, harassment and bullying

Suggested Leads: NIOT partnering with BG City Schools

- Bring education of this type to children and youth -through both public and parochial schools
- Diversity training and education for local organizations and businesses -both to improve staff diversity and to welcome diverse people to their businesses

7. Identify needs and ways to access health care; dental services

Suggested Lead: Wood County Health Department Wellness Center

8. Increase trust-building efforts between the community and the police

Suggested Leads: Law Enforcement agencies (BG Police, BGSU Police, Wood County Sheriff)

- Focus on safety and crime prevention per the Community Policing Philosophy
- Increase community safety by making immigrants and diverse populations feel safe about reporting crimes or suspicious activities to law enforcement

- Expand community awareness of BGD accreditation standards against bias-based profiling
- Increase community awareness about the existence of the BGD interpretation services and the process to use it

9. Foster a welcoming environment in schools

Suggested Lead: BG Board of Education and Superintendent

- Include and integrate immigrant parents into their children education
- Infuse welcome message in schools' curriculum
- Foster the integration of English Language Learners and accelerate their English Language acquisition. Integrate school efforts with community ESL classes.

10. Advancing welcoming policies and practices for the benefit of the whole community

- Increase representation of diverse populations, including immigrants, on City Boards and Commissions
- Evaluate whether a Municipal ID would benefit residents, and if a Municipal ID is found to have a positive impact, implement an ID program that will have the most benefits while fully protecting ID holders' private information and safety

Potential Resource Groups:

- Local Faith Community
- La Conexion
- The United Way
- BGSU International Student Associations
- Local Landlords/Realtors
- Continuum of Care Coalition
- Community Action Plan Initiatives
- Wood County District Public Library
- Wood County Hospital
- Wood County Health Department
- Global Connections