



**WELCOMING
ROANOKE**

Plan

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Background:



As the City of Roanoke developed its comprehensive plan, City Plan 2040, citizens were asked what they wanted the City to look like in the next 20 years. When community members were asked what was most valuable for the future of Roanoke, inclusion and diversity were top results. A diverse and inclusive city is one that celebrates all people and values differences.

Through a rigorous application process, the City of Roanoke was awarded the Gateways for Growth grant. The grant provided the City with technical assistance and data to help create a multi-sector immigrant integration plan. The Gateways for Growth program is a collaborative effort between New American Economy (NAE) and Welcoming America. Welcoming America is a non-profit organization that aims to support and provide guidance to communities across the nation to become more inclusive for all residents including immigrants. NAE is a bipartisan research organization that makes the economic case for immigration reform. The data provided helps local, state, and federal governmental organizations create policies to grow the economy for all Americans.



With support from the Gateways for Growth team, the City was able to create the Welcoming Roanoke Plan. The plan aims to develop a city where all residents feel included and have access to all available resources and opportunities for success. Creating a city that is inclusive of the immigrant population benefits our economy and allows us to harness and appreciate the diversity within our community. The Welcoming Roanoke Plan outlines policies to achieve diversity and inclusion and, alongside the Comprehensive Plan, will allow for a better community for all residents.

New Americans in VA:

Throughout the past thirty years, the immigrant population has grown rapidly in Virginia. In 1990, roughly 5% of the population was foreign born and that percentage more than doubled by 2010 to roughly 11%. During the 1990's, Virginia's growth rate was lagging behind the national average but now is growing at a rate twice as high as the national average.

A frequent question is how new Americans, or immigrants, contribute to our economy. Not everyone understands the economic importance of immigrants for our nation, state, and even local communities. However, by looking at data obtained from New American Economy, it becomes clear how vital immigrant populations are for our country. From tax contributions to support of small and large businesses, foreign-born residents offer many economic benefits in their communities.

When looking at tax contributions, immigrants in Virginia paid \$9.4 billion in federal, state, and local taxes with additional contributions of \$991.3 million to Medicare and \$3.7 billion to Social Security. In 2014, the immigrant population in Virginia earned \$36.5 billion, with \$27.1 billion to use for spending after taxes.

The foreign-born population was 36.7% more likely to work than native-born Virginians. This can be attributed the immigrant population largely being working age where Virginians have a larger percentage of citizens that are retired or too young to work. Additionally, the immigrant population has a larger range of educational attainment. While almost 80% of native-born Americans hold Bachelor degrees, immigrants balance between educational levels allowing for a larger range of job types. Even refugees, who receive initial assistance upon arriving in the United States, experience strong and long-term upward economic trajectories. While refugees here five years or less have a median household income of roughly \$22,000, that figure more than triples within the next 20 years. By their twenty-fifth year in the country, refugee households earn \$67,000 on average per year.

Immigrants also add value to our economy by starting businesses that provide employment for native-born residents. They are also twice as likely to start a business than native-born residents. Immigrant residents make up 20.2% of all entrepreneurs and generate \$1.8 billion in business income. Additionally, in 2019 52.17% of Virginia's Fortune 500 companies had at least one founder that was an immigrant or child of immigrant parents. This is larger than the national share as 44.6% of Fortune 500 companies in America was a foreign-born resident or had immigrant parents. In fiscal year 2018, the 223 New American companies on the 2019 Fortune 500 list brought in \$6.1 trillion in revenue.

New Americans in Roanoke:

In the report by the NAE, the economic benefit of the foreign born population was outlined and the importance of their presence in the community was highlighted. It is often questioned just how vital immigrants are to our economy and are often even blamed for economic turmoil. However, in 2017, immigrants in the Roanoke area positively impacted the economy by preserving jobs in the region as well as making significant tax contributions at both the federal and local levels.

As of 2017, there were 11,842 immigrants living in Roanoke and this population has been continuously growing. Between 2012 and 2017, immigrants accounted for 35.3% of the region's population growth. Although foreign born individuals account for just 5.5% of the total population, immigrants represent 6.8% of the working age population, 6.6% of the employed labor force, and 11.4% of STEM workers in the region. While just 5.5% of the total population, immigrants exceeded their share in general services, construction, hospitality, manufacturing, healthcare, and professional services. Additionally, immigrants helped to both create and preserve 545 local manufacturing jobs that would have either disappeared or moved to another location by 2017. When unemployment is low, new workers are needed to fill the need in expanding businesses. If those needs are not met, companies will move to a new location with more workers. This means that although immigrants do not necessarily represent a huge part of the total population, their presence in the workforce is significant and is essential to the well-being of the local economy.

Because of their representation in the workforce, another positive impact that immigrants have on the local community is their contribution in taxes. In 2017, immigrants contributed over \$75 million in taxes, and of that, \$23.1 million went to the state and local government. The immigrant population also contributed over \$39 million to federal social programs such as Social Security and Medicare. Outside of the taxes that foreign born individuals pay, they also have spending power. In Virginia's 9th Congressional District alone, immigrants contributed over \$380 million in spending power in 2017. This means that not only are immigrants contributing money to taxes, but they also have a substantial amount of money to spend and put back into the economy. As the immigrant population continues to grow and more of the local economy depends on them, the City of Roanoke recognizes the need to better serve this population and provide all residents with equal opportunity for success and quality of life.

Let's Make Roanoke a Welcoming Community

The themes presented in this plan reflect the six themes in the City's comprehensive plan, City Plan 2040.

- Interwoven Equity
- Healthy Community
- Resilient Economy
- Harmony with Nature
- Livable Built Environment
- Responsible Regionalism

While this plan is valuable as a single document, its principles can be found interwoven in the Comprehensive Plan in many ways.

We aim to make the City's services, programs, and policies more welcoming. We also aim to make the City as a whole, through every sector, more welcoming for all new residents.



Planning Process:

As with any Comprehensive Plan, it is important to engage citizens and community members. By using best practices and engaging the community, city staff ensured adequate authentic participation in each step of the planning process. Engaging the service providers and the immigrant population in particular is vital for the success of the plan.

However, Roanoke recognizes that the immigrant population is one that can be difficult to reach, especially when using common methods for engagement. There are many barriers to engaging immigrant populations like language and accessibility. Immigrant populations also tend to lack trust in government. The City of Roanoke should not only recognize these barriers but also find ways to build trust and break down those barriers.

Planning Steps:

Survey: Created and distributed surveys to immigrant population. The survey was available online and was distributed by local partners that were involved in the planning process.

Working group: A working group was created to analyze data received from New American Economy and the survey. Our working group was created from the Roanoke Refugee Dialogue Committee that consisted of various service providers, educators, and local government workers.

Review: The working group reviewed priorities and policies with action items for each theme.

Draft Plan: A draft plan was created and community meetings were held in order to receive feedback. It is important to note that our last community meeting was held virtually due to COVID-19 public gathering restrictions.

Feedback: Priorities and policies with action items were revised to include feedback from community meetings.

NAE Report



I AM A WELCOMER

أهلاً وسهلاً بكم في روتونوك
به روتونوك خوش آمدید

Bienvenido a Roanoke
रोनोकमा स्वागत छ

#WELCOMINGROANOKE
ROANOKEVA.GOV/WELCOMING



New Americans in Roanoke

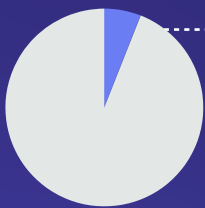
The Demographic and Economic Contributions of Immigrants in the Region¹



State & Local

Population Growth

Immigrants made up



5.5%
of the total population in the Roanoke region in 2017.

35.2%

of total population growth in the region was attributable to immigrants.

Between 2012 and 2017, the immigrant population in the region increased by:

8.6%,
from 10,906 to **11,842**.

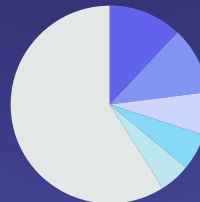
The overall population grew by:

1.2%,
from 214,553 to **217,212**.

11,842

immigrants lived in the region in 2017. Their top five countries of origin were:

1. Mexico **11.6%**
2. Honduras **10.7%**
3. Haiti **6.5%**
4. India **6.2%**
5. Philippines **5.3%**



Spending Power & Tax Contributions

Given their income, immigrants contributed significantly to state and local taxes, including property, sales, and excise taxes levied by state and local governments.

Amount earned by immigrant households in 2017:

\$303.9M

\$52.0M
went to federal taxes.²

FEDERAL

\$23.1M

went to state and local taxes.³

STATE AND LOCAL

Leaving them with **\$228.7M** in spending power.

Spending Power & Tax Contributions (Continued)

Immigrants in the region also supported federal social programs. In 2017, they contributed **\$31.0M** to Social Security and **\$8.3M** to Medicare.

23.6%

of immigrants in the region received Medicare or Medicaid, compared with

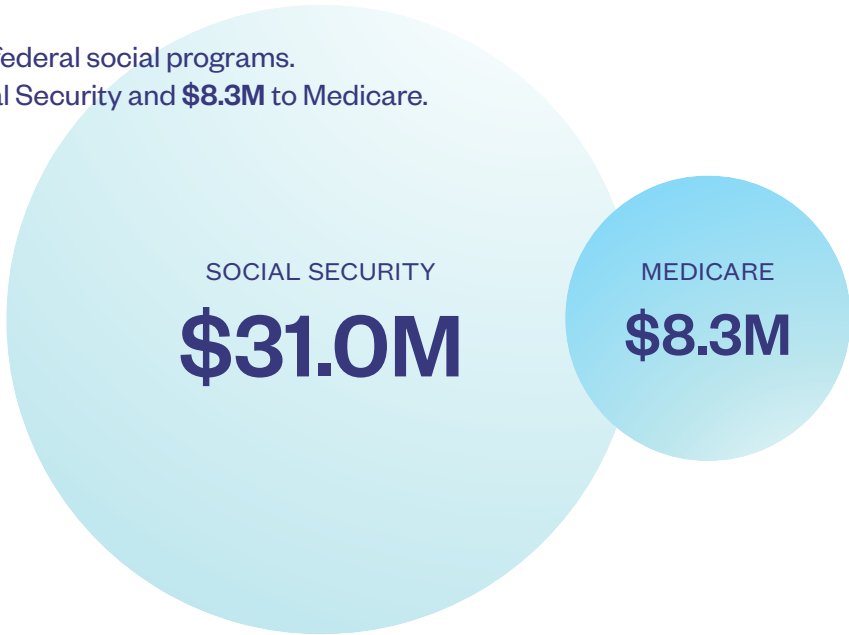
35.0%

of U.S.-born residents in 2017.

IMMIGRANTS



U.S.-BORN



55.6%

of immigrants had private healthcare coverage, while

23.9%

had public healthcare coverage in 2017.

PRIVATE



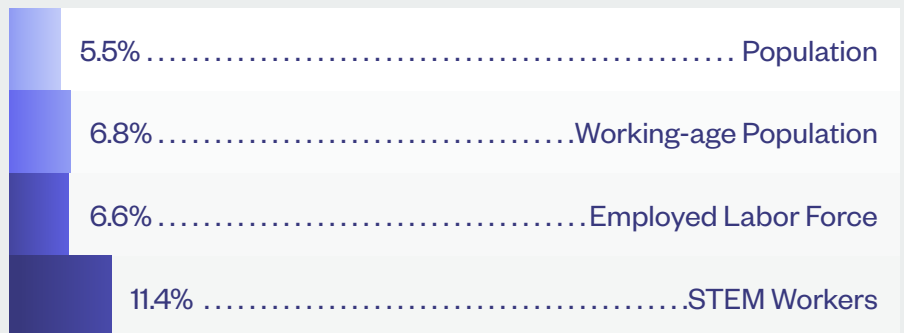
PUBLIC



Workforce

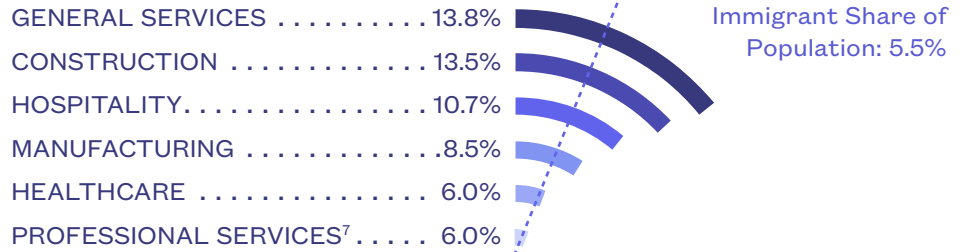
Although the foreign-born made up **5.5%** of the region's overall population, they represented **6.8%** of its working-age⁴ population, **6.6%** of its employed labor force, and **11.4%** of its STEM⁵ workers in 2017.

Immigrant shares of the...

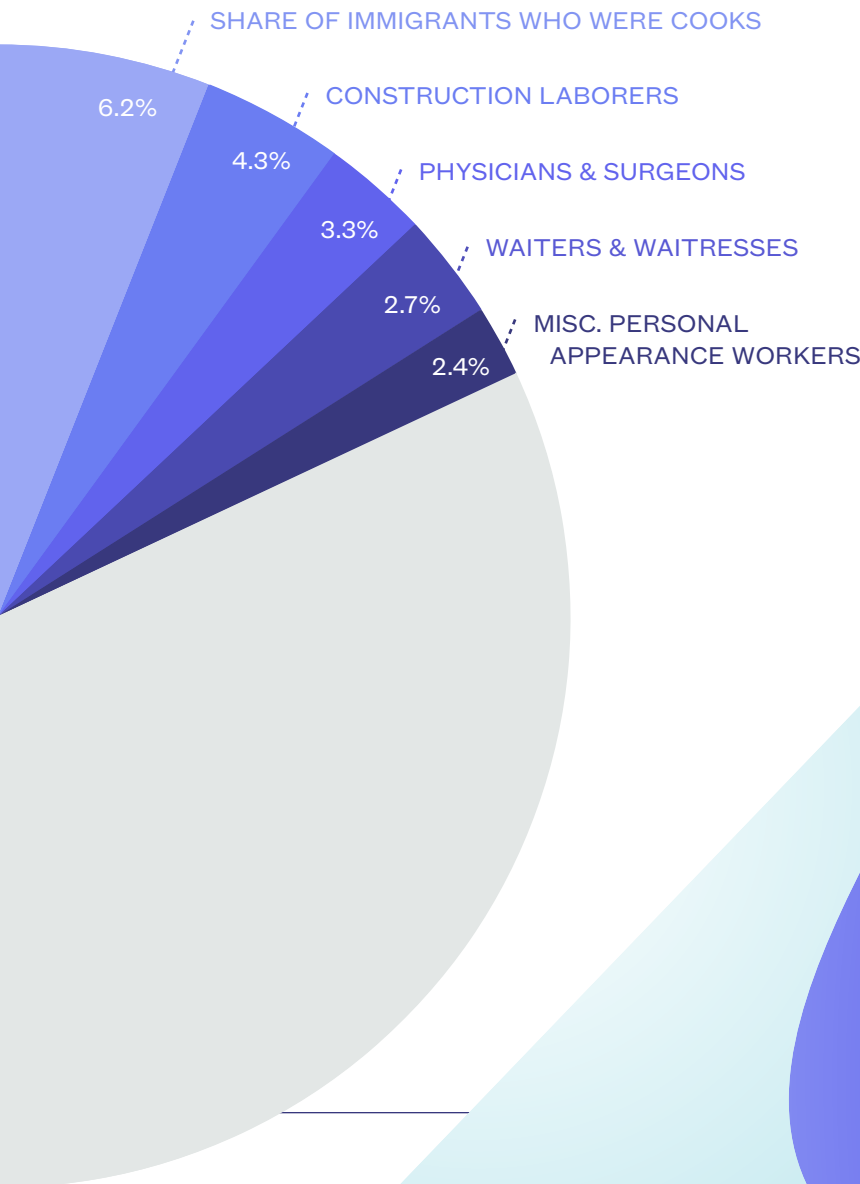


Workforce (Continued)

Immigrants played a critical role in several **key industries** in the region. This included:



Immigrants tended to work in these **occupations** in the region in 2017:

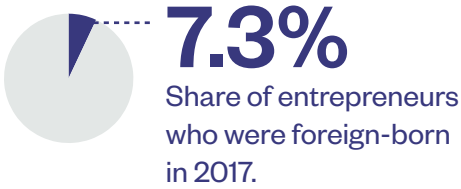


Because of the role immigrants play in the workforce helping companies keep jobs on U.S. soil, we estimate that:

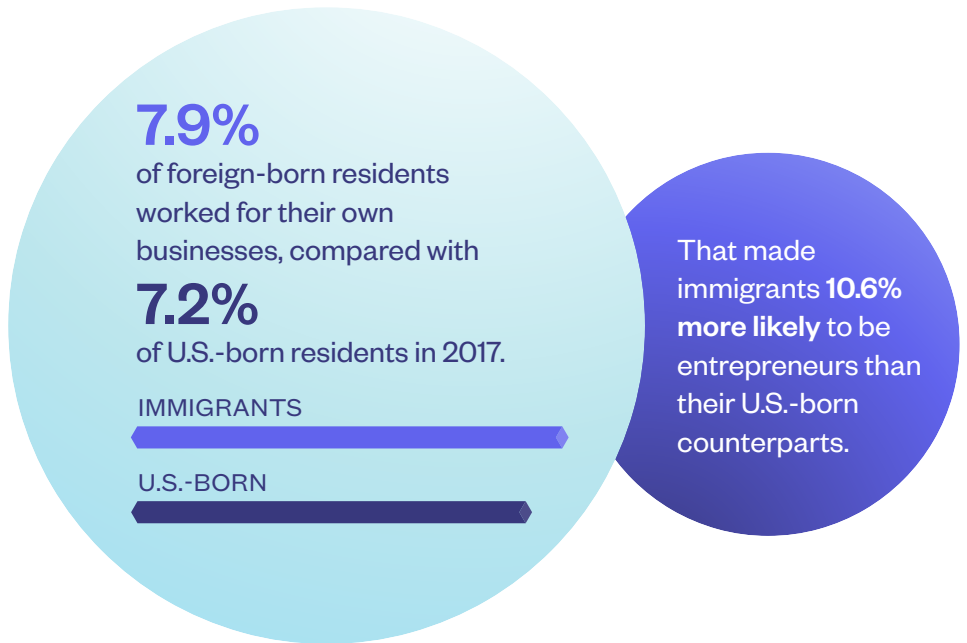
*Immigrants living in the region helped create or preserve **545 local manufacturing jobs** that would have otherwise vanished or moved elsewhere by 2017.⁸*

Entrepreneurship

Despite making up **5.5%** of the population, immigrants made up **7.3%** of the business owners in the region in 2017.

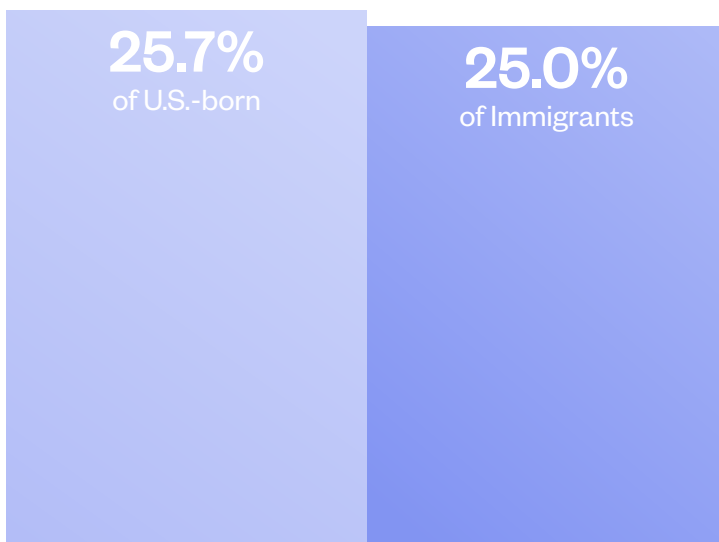


Businesses in the Region, 2012	Sales Revenue	Number of Paid Employees
AFRICAN AMERICAN-OWNED	\$54.2M	557
ASIAN-OWNED	\$181.5M	1,745
HISPANIC-OWNED ⁹	\$42.0M	58

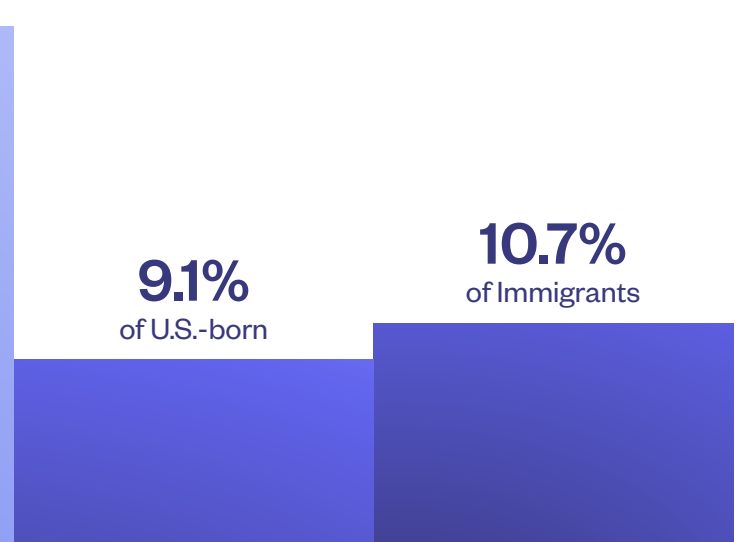


Education

Share of the region's population aged 25 or older that held a **bachelor's degree or higher** in 2017:



Share of the region's population aged 25 or older that held an **advanced degree** in 2017:



SPOTLIGHT ON

Rebecca Chang

PROFESSOR, ROANOKE COLLEGE

Rebecca Chang moved to Roanoke to be with her husband, whom she met while on a work assignment in the United States. This was in 1990, when few from mainland China called Virginia home. Her husband had to briefly travel a few months after she arrived, leaving her alone with her young daughter. Christmas was approaching, and the pair would walk to the grocery store.

One day they saw a wreath with white flowers on a front door. Chang cautiously explained to her four-year-old that someone had died, which is what this would mean at home, in China. A few days later, she saw another wreath and, soon, more. "I thought, What kind of a block is this? Everybody had somebody die," she says. "At the time I didn't have much language, and I was missing home. So I really felt alone."

It wasn't too long before a nice neighbor brought Chang an early Christmas gift—a wreath with white flowers. "My mind just raced," she says. "From there I realized there were so many things I didn't know."

Chang tells this story to illustrate the immense volume of detail a new immigrant must absorb when moving to a new place. Those details can quickly overwhelm someone from another culture.

"In my early years here I felt I was struggling to survive. I didn't know if I would survive," she says. "There was no organization to receive me, and not many people from mainland China."

Chang, an electrical engineer in China, hardly lacked for effort. In Roanoke, she took dozens of community college classes in a wide range of subjects, earned a bachelor's degree in business management and a master's degree in education, and plans to defend her PhD this year. At the same time, she and her husband went into business together and raised two children—one is a high school teacher, one a medical resident—and she also volunteered. She now teaches at Roanoke College.

"When you become an immigrant it's like you're a tree being pulled up by all your roots," she says. "You have to reroot yourself, and that's a very complex process."

SPOTLIGHT ON

Elvir Berbic

STUDENT AFFAIRS MANAGER, VIRGINIA TECH

Elvir Berbic's family fled Bosnia when war broke out in 1992. "One day I went to school, and out of four grades—so about 80 students—10 showed up to class," Berbic says. "They told us, 'School is over. We don't know when it's going to be open. Go home. Be safe.'"

But to stay in Derventa, their hometown, was also to risk the family's life.

"We were playing one time, and a MiG [military plane] just flew over us and knocked us all on the ground because it was so low," he says. "There was a lot of talk about whose house is targeted, whose house is safe, whose house has a basement to hide in. My dad would guard our apartment with an AK-47 and a pistol, which is nothing when people are about to roll in with tanks."

Adding to the threat, the Berbics were Muslim, the subject of an ethnic cleansing campaign by the Serbian majority. Before this time, Berbic, 11, didn't even know they were Muslim.

The family drove to Croatia in a refrigeration truck, doling out soda to bribe checkpoint guards. When 13 relatives took refuge in their Croatian aunt's one-bedroom apartment, his family moved into a nearby refugee camp, where their stay, and the war, dragged on for three years. His parents thought they would be home in a few months. Instead, they accepted refugee status and relocation to the United States.

Berbic, by then 14, and his brother had learned English in the camp. Youth, too, helped them integrate. His parents, however, had a tougher time, and have since returned home.

"It was depressing for them: no language skills; doing a job they were never trained to do; starting life all over," he says.

Berbic earned a master's degree and now helps other newcomers acclimate to life in Roanoke, serving as student affairs manager at the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine and as a volunteer for local support organizations. His brother is a doctor in New Jersey.

"If you want to invest in anything, it's people," Berbic says. "It has to be in people. If we are investing, they will invest."

Education (Continued)

264

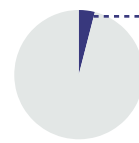
students who were enrolled in colleges and universities in the region during the fall of 2015 were temporary residents.¹⁰

60

local jobs were supported by international students.

\$9.9M

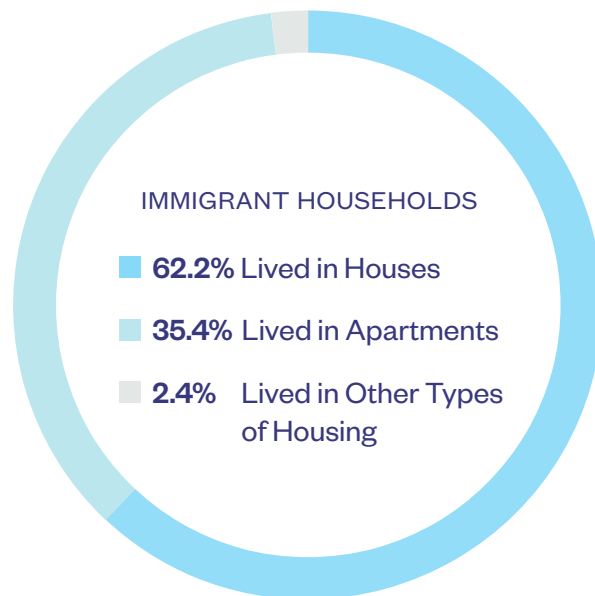
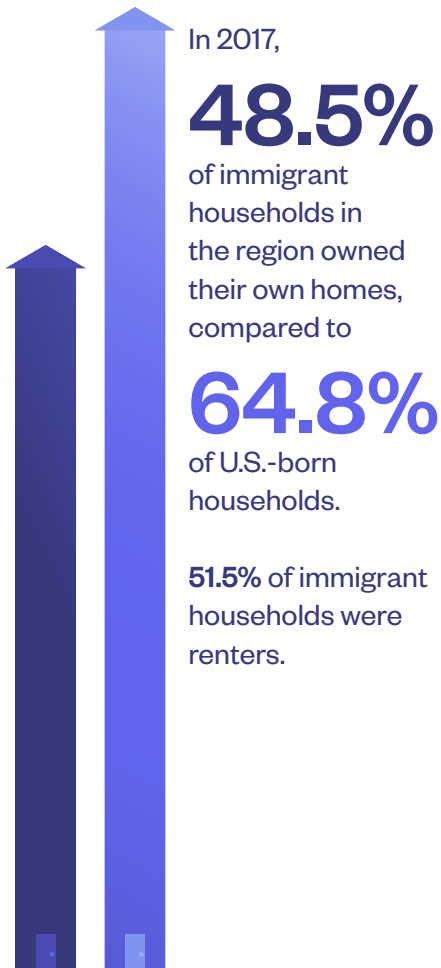
were spent by international students in the 2017-18 academic year.¹¹



4.0%

of public school students under 18 were born abroad.

Housing Wealth



The total property value of immigrant households:

\$506.0M

Their total annual rent paid:

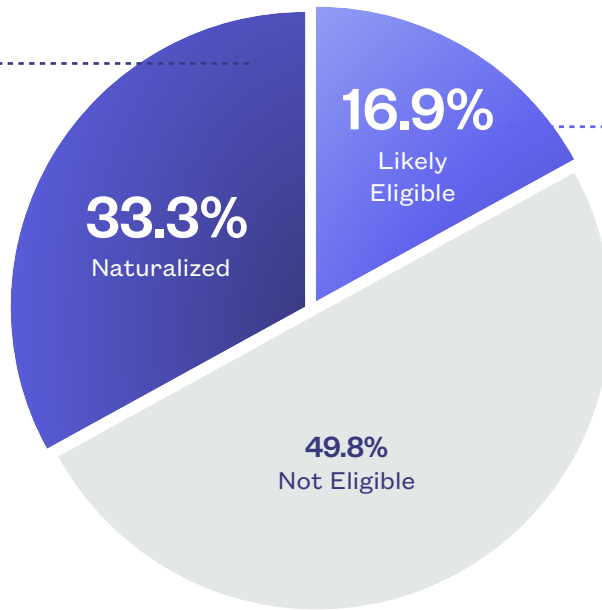
\$22.0M

Naturalization

Share of immigrants in the region who were naturalized U.S. citizens. This represents a total of

3,941
immigrants.

Nationally, **49.4%** of all immigrants are naturalized.



Share of immigrants who were likely eligible for naturalization. This represents a total of

2,006
immigrants.

Refugees

1,963

immigrants were likely refugees in 2017.¹²

16.6%

of the foreign-born population were likely refugees.

Undocumented Immigrants

Amount earned by undocumented immigrant households in 2017:

\$63.6M

After taxes, this leaves them with **\$57.3M** in spending power.

\$3.7M

went to federal taxes.

FEDERAL

\$2.6M

went to state and local taxes.

STATE AND LOCAL

- 1 Unless otherwise specified, data comes from 5-year samples of the American Community Survey from 2012 and 2017 and figures refer to the Roanoke region in Virginia, including Roanoke County, the City of Roanoke, and the City of Salem.
- 2 U.S. Congressional Budget Office. 2018. "The Distribution of Household Income, 2015."
- 3 Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. 2015. "Who Pays? A Distributional Analysis of the Tax Systems in All Fifty States."
- 4 We define working age as 16-64 years of age.
- 5 Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math
- 6 General services include personal services (e.g. laundry services, barber shops, and repair and maintenance), religious organizations, social services, and labor unions.
- 7 Professional services: Most of these industries include professions that require a degree or a license, such as legal services, accounting, scientific research, consulting services, etc.
- 8 Vigdor, Jacob. 2013. "Immigration and the Revival of American Cities: From Preserving Manufacturing Jobs to Strengthening the Housing Market." *New American Economy*.
- 9 2012 Survey of Business Owners, U.S. Census Bureau.
- 10 Data on total student enrollment in the region is derived from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System maintained by the National Center for Education Statistics. Temporary residents refer to people who are not U.S. citizens or permanent residents.
- 11 Economic data is derived from the International Student Economic Value Tool maintained by NAFSA, the association of international educators.
- 12 *New American Economy*. 2017. "From Struggle to Resilience: The Economic Impact of Refugees in America."

WELCOMING ROANOKE

Survey Results



Highlights from the survey:

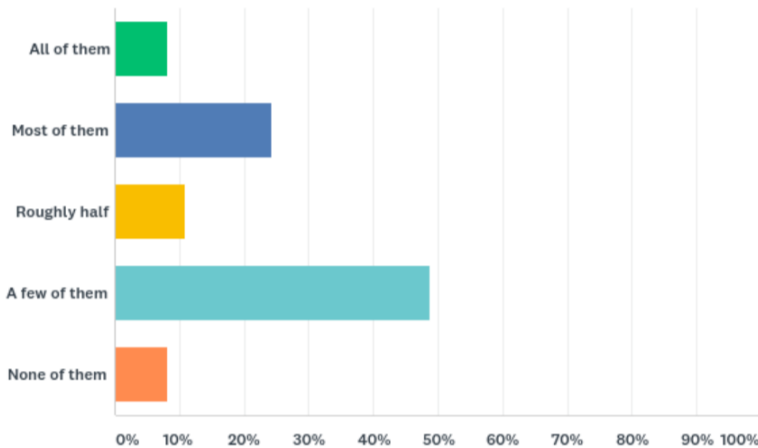
The survey was available online and distributed by our partners that work directly with the immigrant population. The survey consisted of 20 questions and was available in both English and Spanish. The following are highlights taken from the survey results.

When asked how accepted a person feels on a scale of one to five with five being most accepted, our community gave Roanoke an average rating of 4.0.

4.0 
average rating



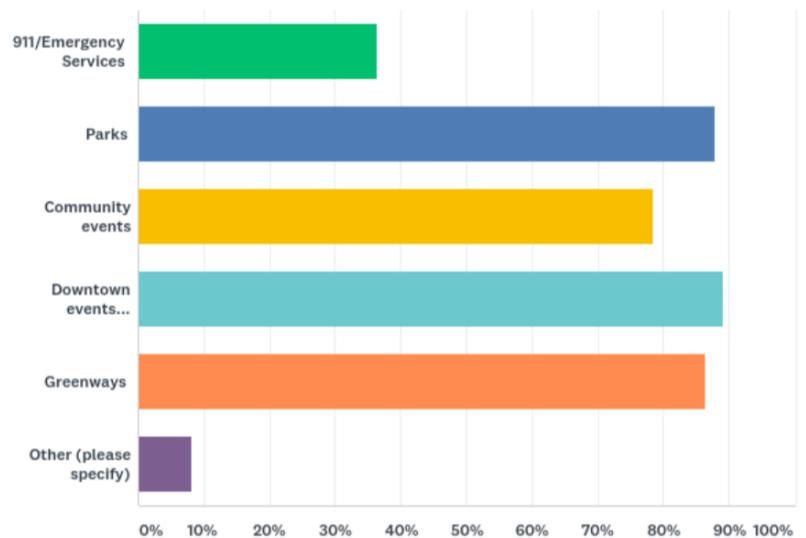
How many of your neighbors do you know?



Almost 50% of respondents stated that they knew a few of their neighbors.

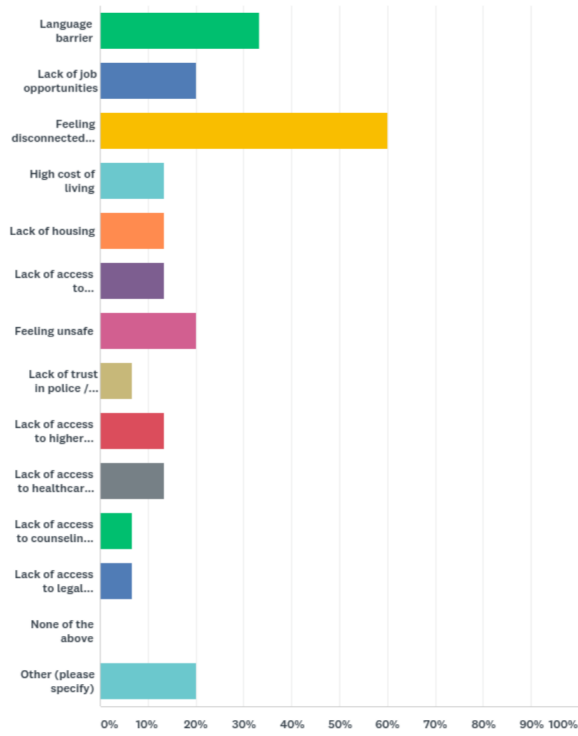
Parks, downtown events, and greenways were city services that had the highest percentage of usage among respondents. Other amenities such as city libraries and the Roanoke River were also specified.

What city services do you use?



Highlights from the survey:

What are the biggest challenges you faced when moving to Roanoke?



When asked to identify the three biggest challenges when moving to Roanoke, 60% responded with feeling disconnected from the community. Language barrier was also identified as a challenge many faced when moving to Roanoke.



Interwoven Equity

Interwoven Equity is the idea that decision making and policy making are based on principles of equity and are examined for bias and potential unintended consequences for any specific group of people.

Short-term goals:

- Expand multi-lingual options for government resources and services
- Educate other organizations on the importance of immigrant inclusion efforts and provide resources on how their organizations can implement practices that remove barriers for New Americans

Long-term goals:

- Consider a dedicated person on the equity board or commission proposed in City Plan 2040 that focuses on the needs of immigrants
- Include more New Americans on city boards and commissions
- Continue efforts dedicated to attaining more equitable educational outcomes for school systems

Healthy Community

A healthy community engages a holistic and equitable approach to building and ensuring the physical and mental health of our community by empowering citizens with the knowledge and resources to achieve healthy living and striving for accountability as individual members of a connected society.

Short-term goals:

- Adopt a charter that declares Roanoke a [Compassionate City](#)
- Ensure emergency information is provided in multiple languages
- Monitor and track crimes against immigrant populations

Long-term goals:

- Strengthen the relationship between public safety staff and New Americans to increase usage of emergency services when needed
- Expand and adapt trauma informed training for public safety staff and health care providers on working with diverse populations

Resilient Economy

A resilient economy is one that is built on a strong collaboration between private businesses, non-profits, local government, and our educational partners to promote workforce development across all ages, skill levels, and backgrounds.

Short-term goals:

- Work with partner agencies to provide hazard and recovery information in multiple languages
- Create a multi-lingual guide to opening a business
- Consider specialized help for immigrants and refugees with starting, building, and growing their business

Long-term goals:

- Consider a partnership between local businesses and students for mentorship opportunities
- Identify and remove barriers to New Americans transferring existing and earning new technical degrees, certifications, professional licensing, etc.

Harmony with Nature

The City of Roanoke will boast a clean and resilient environment in which everyone will live and prosper in harmony with nature through innovative, sustainable and resilient practices.

Short-term goals:

- Greenspace, such as parks and greenways, should be welcoming for all people
- Provide inclusive recreational programs and events
- Signs and educational materials in parks should be in multiple languages

Long-term goals:

- Use outdoor activities such as community gardening, as a source of healing from trauma
- Increase greenspace near predominately immigrant neighborhoods

Livable Built Environment

Roanoke is a growing, historic cultural hub with vibrant neighborhoods for all; varied housing that is safe, accessible, and affordable; and a connected multi-modal, user-friendly transportation system.

Short-term goals:

- Recognize and support cultural centers, which are organizations or buildings that support art and culture, in every neighborhood
- Review public space policies to ensure a welcoming city for all

Long-term goals:

- Increase affordable housing stock
- Improve public transit clarity by providing providing information in multiple languages
- Increase public transit access and to community resources like health care services

Responsible Regionalism

Each community lends its unique assets and resources to developing the region's economy and quality of life. The region will work together to provide exceptional educational opportunities and public services at the regional level.

Short-term goals:

- Create partnerships throughout the Roanoke Valley to engage in immigrant inclusion work and address the changing needs of immigrants

Long-term goals:

- Increase regional transportation options
- Market our successful diversity and inclusion efforts to attract new businesses and residents

Implementation

Immigrant inclusion must be included in work across multiple sectors. Implementation of this plan will rely heavily on the help of our partners including:

- Blue Ridge Literacy
- Commonwealth Catholic Charities
- Local Colors
- Points of Diversity
- Refugee Dialogue Committee
- Roanoke Refugee Partnership
- Roanoke City Public Schools

As we move forward to become a more welcoming city for all, we aim to have roles clearly identified, continue engagement of immigrant communities, and analyze metrics that allow for us to report our improvement.

Continuing Engagement:

- The City's Community Engagement Office will continue planning and coordination of Welcoming Week and similar events
- The Equity and Empowerment Advisory Board will engage in immigrant inclusion work
- The Refugee Dialogue Committee, which includes at least one City staff person, will continue to meet on a monthly or bimonthly basis
- Create website for continual tracking of metrics and measures