NEW AMERICAN CITIES

BUILDING PATHWAYS TO REFUGEE ECONOMIC SECURITY AND HOPE

By Jessica Santos, PhD; Ariela Braverman Bronstein, MD, PhD, MPH; Danielle Chun, MPP; and Rolande Ayinkamiye, MA

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Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) is the largest faith-based nonprofit dedicated to serving vulnerable immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees in the United States. For more than 80 years, LIRS has been a champion for migrants and refugees from around the globe. Our legacy of compassionate service has made a difference in the lives of more than 750,000 people who have sought safety and hope in America's communities. Our history reflects our own deep immigrant roots and passionate commitment to welcoming newcomers, especially those who are most in need.

The **Leah Zallman Center for Immigrant Health Research (LZC)** is a research center at the Institute for Community Health. We are a team of interdisciplinary social science researchers with expertise at the intersection of immigrant, economic, and health justice. We partner with immigrant communities, advocates, policymakers, and social and health systems on actionable research to improve immigrant health and well-being. We are proud to build on ICH's decades-long history of using participatory methods to ensure that community voices in research are amplified to the state and national level as part of evidence-based policymaking.

New American Cities Site Partners

Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains (LFSRM) is an affiliate of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service. Since 1975, LFSRM has worked with LIRS, churches, organizations, community groups, businesses, and individuals to support refugees in becoming self-sufficient and integrating into their new communities. LFSRM is the New American Cities affiliate partner in **Albuquerque, NM**, and **Denver, CO**.

Canopy Northwest Arkansas (Canopy NWA) is an affiliate of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service. Canopy was designated a refugee resettlement site in 2016. Canopy's mission and vision are to provide a robust network of support for refugees resettling in Northwest Arkansas and equip them with the tools to thrive as active members of the NWA community. Canopy NWA is the New American Cities affiliate partner in **Fayetteville, AR**.

Lutheran Social Services of Northeast Florida (LSS) is an affiliate of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service. Since 1980, LSS has resettled hundreds of refugees each year. Besides its Refugee Services program, LSS operates four other community outreach programs to support people in crisis and help them move toward stability. LSS is the New American Cities affiliate partner in **Jacksonville, FL**.

The Center is an affiliate of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service. Since 1981, The Center has resettled refugees in the Mohawk Valley region, assisting them throughout the integration process and helping them to achieve independence. The Center is the New American Cities affiliate partner in **Utica, NY**.

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Introduction

New American Cities Fills an Employment Services Gap

Each year, tens of thousands of people migrate to the United States in search of a chance to work and live in safety. Many are forcibly displaced due to war or persecution and resettled through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), U.S. government agencies, and a network of national and local non-profit resettlement agencies.

The Immigration and Nationality Act defines economic self-sufficiency as "earning a total family income at a level that enables a family unit to support itself without receipt of a cash assistance grant" (CFR 45 400.2).[i]

Refugee-serving employment programs fill a critical role in communities by welcoming new Americans with a wide range of backgrounds, skills, and languages and connecting them to employment. On any given day, these programs may place a newly arrived Congolese man in a factory job, assist an Afghan medical researcher in translating their academic credentials, discuss the shifting household duties within a Bhutanese family as the mother starts her first ever job outside the home, and negotiate with a commercial driver's license training program to offer group classes to Burmese men with an interpreter. They work closely with refugee leaders and community-based organizations as a conduit and connector to complicated work support systems. Employment counselors may also field calls from local employers and workforce development partners who seek assistance as they learn how to welcome their new employees and clients.

Given this extensive scope, refugee employment programs have not historically been resourced or structured to provide career advancement supports to people after they have settled into their first jobs in the United States. Refugees are required to take the first job they are offered. However, refugees tend to be precariously employed. They experienced higher unemployment rates during the COVID-19 pandemic and recent data suggest that their employment declines the longer they live in the United States.[ii] The policy priority of rapid employment and a lack of integration between resettlement services and mainstream workforce development services leave many refugees isolated from employment resources and supports after their first job.

Refugee employment programs have not historically been resourced or structured to provide career advancement supports to people after they have settled into their first jobs in the United States.

In 2021, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) launched an innovative pilot program called New

American Cities (NAC) to fill this gap. NAC is focused on moving refugee and immigrant workers into family-sustaining jobs so that they can achieve economic self-sufficiency. Many years in the making, NAC launched at the height of the Afghan and Ukrainian crises and just as refugee resettlement started to rebuild local programming after the Trump administration's attempts to shut down the program. Nevertheless, LIRS and its affiliates maintained a commitment to providing newcomers with core employment services and simultaneously launched a successful model for longer-term career pathway programs.

In 2021, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) launched an innovative pilot program called New American Cities (NAC).

The United States has resettled an average of 73,300 people annually since the program was established by the Refugee Act of 1980.[iii] Resettlement is a global humanitarian program, but in recent years, it has become unnecessarily political. As **Figure 1** shows, the Trump administration slashed the annual admissions ceiling, setting the cap at historic lows from 2018-2021. This caused non-profit agencies to reduce services and lay off staff or shut their doors.

In many cities, resettlement agencies form the backbone for a much larger network of services for immigrant communities and mixed status families. So, just as the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and with additional challenges brought on by the Afghan and Ukrainian crises, a network of service providers that was stretched

Figure 1. U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program Rebuilds after Trump [iv]

Adapted from Migration Policy Institute (N.D.) https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/us-refugee-resettlement

thin received an influx of new Americans. Resettlement leaders recounted working 80 hours per week, 7 days a week with barebones teams to secure housing for fleeing Afghans, Ukrainians, Congolese, and many others. Some ended up temporarily in shelters, military bases, and/or hotels, while agencies did their best to increase staffing and get emergency funding out the door. Immigrant communities suffered disproportionately from the pandemic, seeing greater job losses,[v] higher rates of food insecurity, and higher COVID-19 infection and mortality rates.

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Today, the annual refugee ceiling is back to pre-Trump and pre-pandemic levels, but admissions lag. Welcome centers and resettlement programs are still working to rebuild and establish sustainable infrastructures to support newcomers as they seek safety, build new lives, and contribute to the economic prosperity and well-being of our shared communities. By implementing NAC during this chaotic period and despite major contextual challenges, LIRS demonstrated a clear commitment to the long-term self-sufficiency of refugee and immigrant families. It is crucial that funders, policymakers, and program managers continue to build pathways for refugee economic security and hope, even as we respond to changes in global migration patterns and political priorities.

LIRS is the nation's largest faith-based non-profit refugee resettlement organization. LIRS works through a network of local affiliates to welcome newcomers and move them into safety and stability. The New American Cities program ran for two full years in five mid-sized cities: Baltimore, MD; Denver, CO; Fayetteville, AR; Jacksonville, FL; and Utica, NY, and continues today.

The NAC model, like many workforce development programs, pairs new Americans with career navigators. Many of the staff are refugees themselves and/or are trained in how to coach participants on career development in culturally and linguistically effective ways. NAC also innovatively includes a pathway builder role at each site. The pathway builder's job is to structure opportunities for career pathways and build coalitions of local

New American Cities
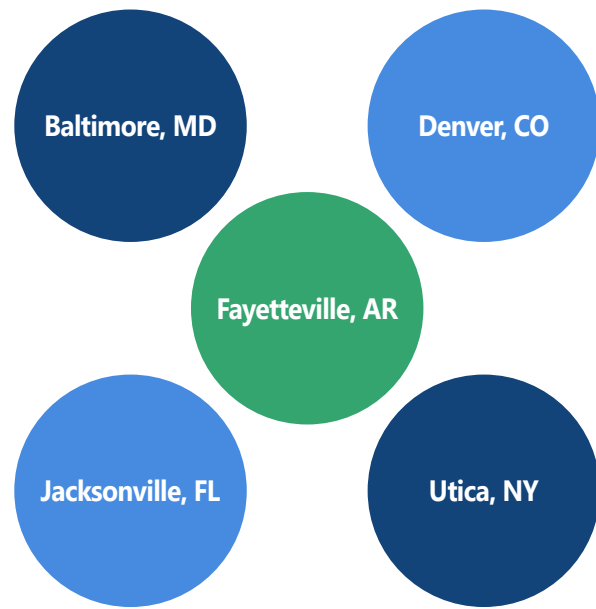
champions committed to refugee and immigrant integration. To our knowledge, NAC is the first in the nation to intentionally focus on refugee employment *and* advancement through upskilling, and to incorporate a coalition-building component at the local level to strengthen career pathways *and* community commitments to immigrant economic prosperity.

Figure 2. The New American Cities Model

1. Albuquerque, NM, was one of the original six sites when the NAC pilot began. However, due to several community factors, LFSRM Albuquerque withdrew from the program in July 2022. All cross-site findings in this report include one year of data from Albuquerque.

Figure 3. Regions of Origin of U.S. Refugee Arrivals, FY 2000-23 [vi]

Adapted from Migration Policy Institute (N.D.) https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/refugees-and-asylees-united-states
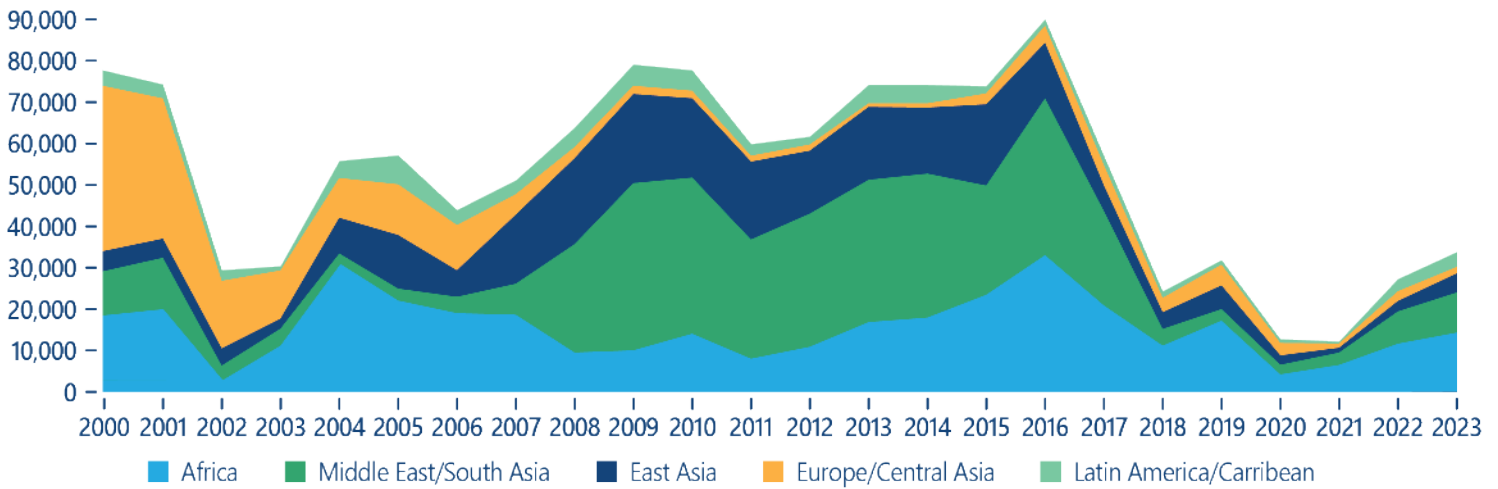
As **Figure 3** shows, NAC operated in a time where newcomers were arriving from all over the globe. NAC enrolled a total of 580 refugees and immigrants from June 2021 through July 2023.[2] NAC participants also came from all over, with the largest populations arriving from Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Burma, and Thailand (see **Figure 4** below).

Figure 4. NAC Participants' Countries of Origin

Legend: < 10 | 10–20 | 20–30 | 30–40 | ≥ 40
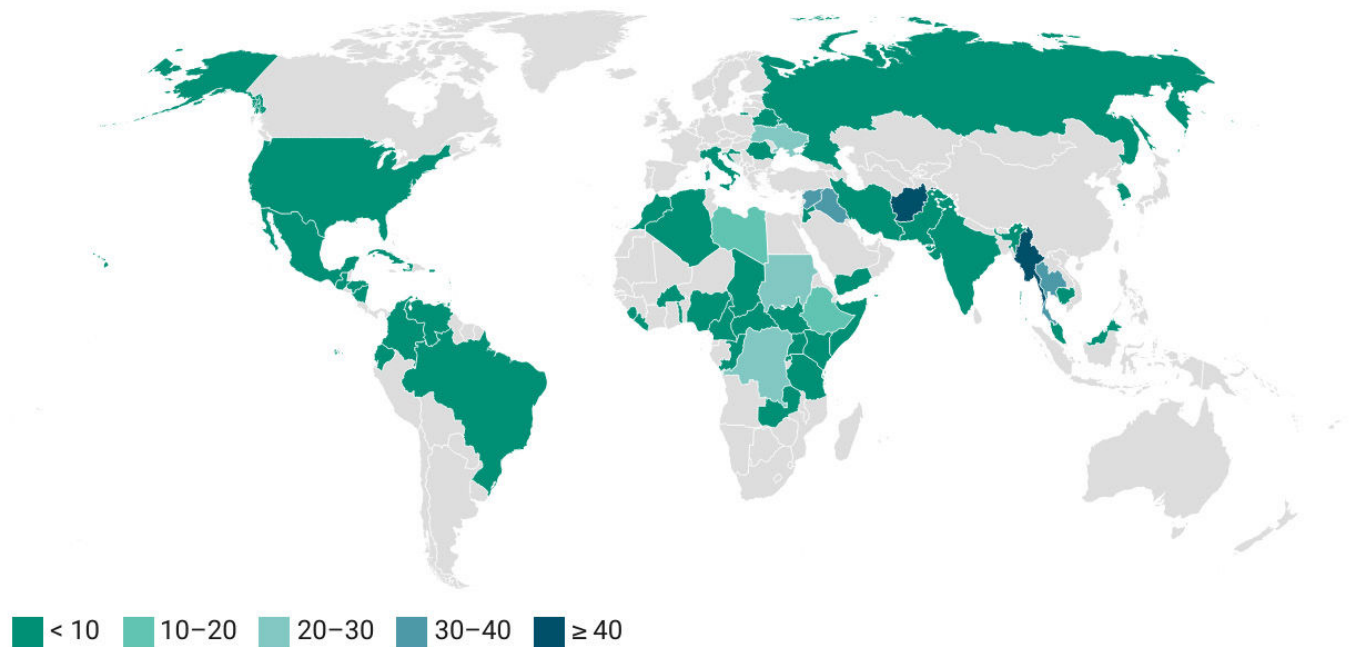
Created with Datawrapper

2. From January to July 2022, LFSRM Albuquerque enrolled 22 participants in NAC and secured new job placements for 12 participants. Four others completed a career development activity and two reported improvements in job quality.

Participant demographics like previous work experience, English language proficiency, and family dynamics affect participants' outcomes. The average age of NAC participants was 35 years, about 50% were female, 38% reported being married, and the average family size was four. Almost 60% had some college education and only 17% had less than high school education. At the time of enrollment, more than 57% had a household income between $10,000 - $49,000, yet 53% were unemployed and more than 40% of those employed had a salary below the 100% federal poverty level (FPL) for a family of four.

Nearly

60%

of participants had some college education.

LIRS laid the groundwork for a comprehensive refugee career pathway database with the data collected through the NAC program. With additional time and program and evaluation resources, this dataset would provide enough statistical power to estimate the extent to which demographic, institutional, and structural factors impact refugee career outcomes, making an important contribution to the field.

Overall, pilot findings show significant promise. Five hundred and eighty refugees and immigrants entered the program with differing expectations, with some hoping to find their first job in the United States (or ever), others excited about the trainings that NAC offered, some interested in a promotion in their existing field, and others looking at making a career change.

Only

17%

had less than a high school education.

Thirty-eight percent are still actively engaged in the program. Across the board, NAC provided participants with resources and assistance in getting closer to the goals they developed when they were displaced from their lives. At the community level, NAC built on or established networks of employers,

Overall, pilot findings show significant promise.

training providers, workforce development agencies, and others to move refugee employment out of a programmatic silo. Staff created connections and trained mainstream organizations on the unique employment needs and goals of refugees and explored sector-based on-ramps for workers looking to align their career with their prior experience and skills.

Two years is not enough to advance careers and move families to economic security, but NAC has shown that with very small, targeted investments, it is possible to make a difference in the lives of families and create a long-term return for communities. More time and additional resources are needed to demonstrate just how impactful this program can be over a 5- or 10-year period.

In this report, we demonstrate how LIRS assisted new Americans in getting closer to some of their employment goals by describing participant pathways to

38%

of participants are still actively engaged in the program.

increased wages, increased stability, and hope (see **Participant Findings**). We provide a community-level portrait of each of the five NAC sites, illustrating key contextual factors that shaped how NAC operated in each of the cities.[3] We outline components of the NAC model that add value to workforce programs and cities, and calculate NAC's return on investment to participants and communities. We end by encouraging LIRS, funders, workforce development and refugee resettlement leaders, and researchers to continue this line of action and learning to create welcoming and prosperous communities.

Methods

LIRS partnered with the Leah Zallman Center for Immigrant Health Research (LZC) to learn from NAC in real time and upon the conclusion of its first two-year pilot phase. Together, LIRS and LZC designed a multi-level research and evaluation plan to assess participant and community level outcomes, learn how the New American Cities program is structuring opportunities for refugee and immigrant career advancement, and calculate the benefit of this program to families and cities.

LZC conducted background research on each of the six sites in Year 1, producing labor market analyses and community portraits for each site that were vetted by LIRS and site staff. LZC also designed a sampling grid with input from LIRS and conducted key informant interviews with community stakeholders in each site through referrals from NAC staff. In total, we interviewed 33 key informants representing workforce development, government, affiliate partners, and community organizations.

In Year 2, LZC held six virtual focus groups with 15 NAC participants in the five remaining sites. In May 2023, the research team visited Baltimore to conduct in-person fieldwork, holding nine interviews each with participants and community stakeholders and facilitating two focus groups with 16 LIRS staff. We coded interview and focus group transcripts in Dedoose, a qualitative analysis software, based on a codebook that we developed with deductive and inductive themes. LZC held several "meaning-making" sessions with our team as part of our thematic analysis process. We also met regularly with LIRS and the network of NAC partners to hear about the ongoing implementation of the program and gather input on the design, implementation, and framing of this study.

LZC received data from the LIRS team on baseline sociodemographic characteristics

"All my friends when they came, they still didn't do anything. This program changed their lives because before they didn't have plans to go to study."

"I hope I get a job with my certification and once I'm in the job, I could bring in more people who are certified in this field. Maybe I'm not the one who hires them, but I can be the one who says, "Hey, you should come apply at my place," or I can introduce them."

- Jacksonville participants

and outcome tracking for the 580 participants enrolled from June 2021 to July 2023 in all six sites. Site staff collected and entered administrative data into LIRS' extendedReach data platform. LZC managed, cleaned, and analyzed the administrative data in Stata 18, selecting one entry per participant to estimate the number of participants who reported at least one new career advancement, career development activity, or job quality improvement in any of the tracked areas. We then conducted the following analyses:

Baseline characteristics and outcomes: We used frequencies and percentages for discrete variables and mean and standard deviation for continuous variables.

Construction of pathway categories: We constructed pathways using entry employment and wage data. We categorized participants into unemployed, below, or above the 100% federal poverty level (FPL) at baseline using hourly wage at baseline. Built-in assumptions for estimating salaries above or below the 100% Federal Poverty Level were that participants who had an hourly wage of 0 were unemployed, and full-time wages represented the total annual income for a family of four.

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3. Due to Albuquerque exiting the NAC program after the first year and the site's sample size, we did not conduct an in-depth standalone analysis of Albuquerque, instead weaving data from Albuquerque throughout the report.

Pathway analysis by participant and group outcomes: We used job placement or job promotion hourly wage (the most recent one) with the same assumptions as for baseline. Participants who had no recorded information on job placement or wages were considered unknown. We then estimated the appropriate counts for each pathway to develop the Sankey diagram (see **Figure 6**) using R version 4.3.1 and the ggplot and ggalluvial packages.

Wage gains by pathway: We estimated the average difference of hourly wages for participants in each category at baseline compared to the average hourly wage at job placement overall for the five sites that had data for more than one year.

Return on investment at participant level: For each pathway group, we used the average job placement income to estimate the total salary (benefit) of participants at year 1 and after 10 years (cumulative sum of yearly wages plus a 3% COLA adjustment every year) and divided that by the NAC investment in each participant ($5,438.56, sum provided by LIRS). This provided an estimated return on investment to program participants, excluding any external factors.

Return on investment at community level: To estimate the tax benefit to the community, we estimated average tax contributions based on tax brackets for the year 2022-2023 after 1 year and 10 years based on average job placement salaries in each pathway. Participants who did not have data for a job placement hourly wage were excluded from the analysis. However, they were accounted for in the estimation of NAC's investment per participant.

Participant Findings: Pathways to Economic Security and Hope

Overall, New American Cities (NAC) outcomes show significant promise. Since 38% of participants are still enrolled and 23% either dropped out or are unaccounted for in the data, we analyzed employment and family outcomes for the remaining sample of 193 participants who experienced real benefits to participation and exited the program (see **Table 1** below).

Here, we highlight outcomes related to job placement, advancement, and job quality as well as hope, power, and belonging. We also note challenges faced by participants as they seek to establish economic stability and family well-being through work.

Table 1. Difference Between Hourly Wage at Time of Enrollment in the NAC Program and Highest Paid Career Advancement [a]

Population Type at Enrollment [b]	N	Enrollment Wage (T1) Mean (SD)	Job Placement Wage (T2) Mean (SD)	Difference (T2-T1)	Percent Change (T2-T1)/T1 * 100	p-value
Unemployed	114	0 (0)	19.63 (8.08)	19.63	N/A	<0.001
Below 100% FPL	38	13.56 (1.28)	19.08 (7.21)	5.52	41%	<0.001
Above 100% FPL	41	19.84 (5.17)	23.53 (8.66)	3.69	19%	0.021
Overall	193	6.88 (8.87)	20.35 (8.18)	13.47	196%	<0.001

a. Career advancement corresponds to job placement or promotion, the highest salary for each person was selected for this analysis.
b. Categorization made for wage at entry assuming a full time job and a family of 4.

Employment, Advancement, and Job Quality Outcomes

Since enrolling in the NAC program, 80% of the 580 participants have enrolled in at least one certification, job readiness, or upskilling training and 69% have completed at least one training, with the most common being job readiness. 19% were paired with a career advising mentor, 30% were placed in a new job, and 31% reported improvements in at least one area of job quality, the most common being changes in wage followed by hours/schedule, and occupational title. As shown in **Table 1**, 193 participants completed and exited the program with higher wages because of a new job or career promotion during this time. 223 people remained in the program as of July 2023, and 133 participants dropped out or are unaccounted for in administrative data.[4]

In most workforce development programs, career advancement is measured by an

4. Findings in this section draw from administrative data collected by NAC sites on all participants (n=580) and participants who have recorded entry wages and job placement or job promotion wages (n=193). Quantitative findings are strengthened by data collected through key informant interviews, focus groups, and a site visit. Qualitative findings suggest additional positive outcomes that are unaccounted for in the administrative dataset, which means that all outcomes reported here are conservative estimates.

Participant-Level Research Questions

To what extent do refugees and their families benefit from **career advancement and asset building supports** provided by NAC?

To what extent does the New American Cities model foster:

- **Household economic stability and well-being**
- **Household economic mobility** through career advancement
- **Enhanced job quality** for refugee workers

To what extent does participation in New American Cities increase **hope and aspirations** for refugees?

increase in wages or education level, new credentials or job title. These changes are vital for the economic security and well-being of refugee and immigrant families. NAC's outcomes in this area are very promising. We present these findings by describing five different participant paths represented in the NAC employment and wage data: 1) becoming employed (represented by the first row in **Table 1** (n=114)); 2) advancing out of poverty (second row (n=38)); 3) advancing to

stability and mobility (third row (n=41)); 4) upskilling and navigating U.S. culture (n=223, or those who remain in the program); and 5) dropping out (n=133, or those who are unaccounted for). These different pathways are also represented in **Figure 6**, which shows employment and income status (below or above 100% FPL) for all participants from entry to exit or the last data point collected (July 2023).

Five Participant Pathways Through NAC

Becoming Employed

Advancing Out of Poverty

Advancing to Stability & Mobility

Upskilling & Navigating U.S. Culture

Dropping Out
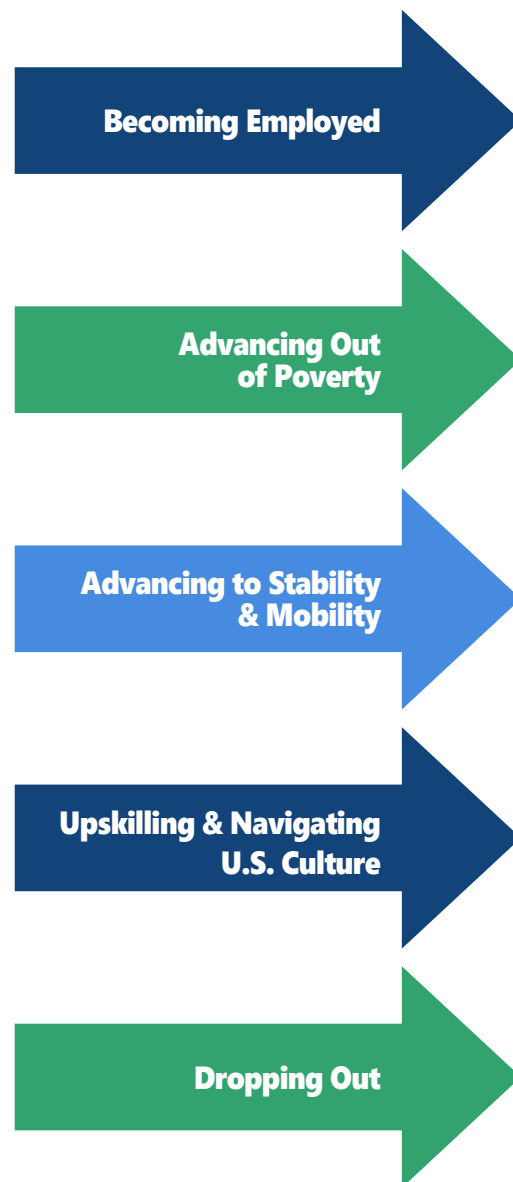
Figure 5. The New American Cities program enrolled 580 participants in two years.
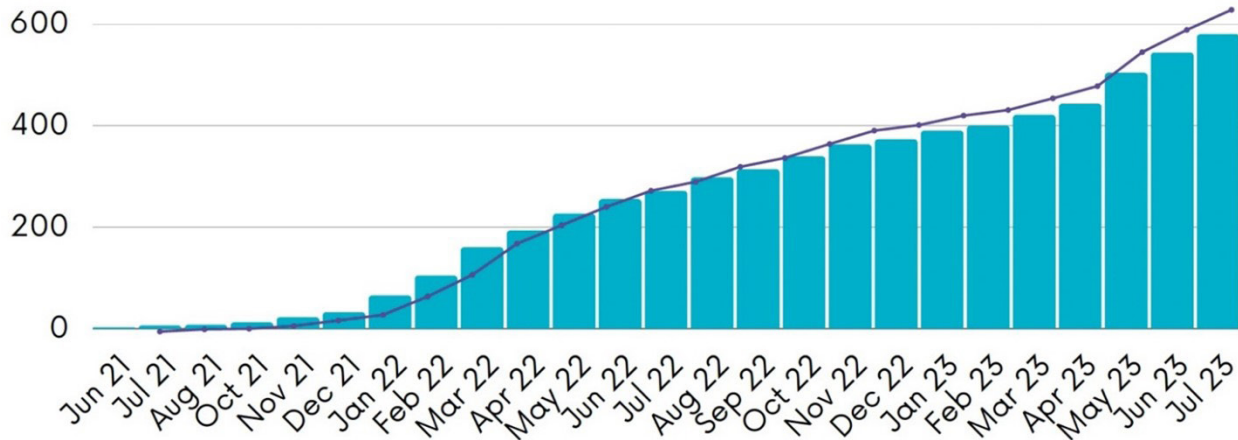
Our data suggest that focusing only on employment, wages, and upskilling fails to fully capture the lived experience of refugee workers and their families as they navigate new communities and labor markets. NAC participants discussed other benefits and "micro-advancements"[vi] within labor markets that improved their overall quality of life and, in many cases, helped them to feel more integrated in their communities.

These include better work environments and schedules, benefits or increased benefits, increased job security, greater flexibility, ability to navigate resources in the community, and hope. For immigrants and refugees, getting academic and professional credentials from their home country assessed and recognized by U.S. educational institutions and professional associations is a critical micro-advancement.

Figure 6. NAC Participant Pathways

Path 1: Becoming Employed

20% of all participants / 60% of those with exit data

After experiencing forced displacement and often-traumatic migration journeys, refugees are required to accept the first job offered to them and begin working as soon as possible after arrival. Resettlement agencies—guided by strict policy incentives—design their workforce training services to prioritize workforce entry within 90-180 days. For some refugees who arrive with limited English proficiency and minimal education or job experience, their first entry-level job (e.g., in laundry facilities, food production warehouses, and/or cleaning companies) may represent success. In the case of NAC, 60% of those with positive outcomes (20% of all participants) started the NAC program unemployed and became employed.

Table 2. NAC Job Placements by Industry

	Total n=196
Construction	9 (4.6%)
Education	12 (6.1%)
Food Service	16 (8.2%)
Healthcare	19 (9.7%)
Hospitality	9 (4.6%)
Human Resources	2 (1.0%)
Information Technology	11 (5.6%)
Interpretation	4 (2.0%)
Manufacturing	25 (12.8%)
Office Administration	10 (5.1%)
Retail	31 (15.8%)
Social Services	18 (9.2%)
Transportation	30 (15.3%)

Table 2 shows that retail, transportation, and manufacturing were the most common industries for NAC job placements (see **Community Findings** for site-specific details). Although these first jobs may not be ideal in terms of job quality or pay, some NAC participants see them as a stepping-stone with intangible benefits for their long-term stability beyond the paycheck.[vii]

"[The NAC staff] got me a job in less than three months . . . I think the fact that I am there is quite positive. As they explained to me, I may not be earning as much as I would like to earn, but I am learning English, which is an important step to find another kind of job, which is the ultimate goal . . . And well, that will be financial well-being for my family. And it also implies financial well-being for the community because then I will be able to contribute more to the community in every sense, both financially and maybe morally or socially."

- Fayetteville participant

The average wage for participants who went from unemployed to employed was $19.63, which would place a family of four just above the federal poverty line. This is higher than job placement wages for people who leave the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, though still within the range that qualifies a family for public benefits such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Many refugees and immigrants rely on personal networks to find and secure a job,

Participants who entered NAC unemployed exited with an average wage of $19.63/hr.

as do all job seekers. NAC staff such as the career navigator and the pathway builder provide new Americans with connections to resources and are often committed to leveraging their own networks to assist NAC

clients in their job search. NAC provides participants with a minimum of two new contacts: a career navigator and a pathway builder. NAC frequently also connects participants with community stakeholders who are associated with the program and are committed to leveraging their own networks to support participants on their career journeys. This can be enough of an assist to make the difference.

Path 2: Advancing Out of Poverty

7% of all participants / 20% of those with exit data

Thirty-eight people were already working when they entered NAC, but they were making extremely low wages ($13.56 per hour, on average) that placed them below the poverty line. When exiting NAC, this group had advanced into higher paying jobs with wages averaging $19.08 per hour, bumping them just above the poverty line.[5]

Some people advanced within their company, and others moved into new

positions with the assistance of NAC career navigators. As one Fayetteville participant noted, "I started working for $15 an hour. Now . . . they pay me $20 an hour." We categorize this group as advancing out of "poverty" with the important caveat that the federal poverty line is commonly understood to represent an extreme level of material hardship. Nevertheless, this group's wages increased by 41% due to participating in NAC.

For some refugees who accepted the first job they were offered and stayed in it for years, getting a better job was a distant or overwhelming thought. Others did not understand how to find opportunities and resources available to them in their city. Some had specific underutilized skills but did not know where to start to find the right job match. For example, one man had worked for years as a cook, but never had stable benefits for his family. NAC staff encouraged him to prioritize larger companies that offer full benefits during his job search, and he successfully secured a full-time position with benefits to support his family.

"On an individual level, the job placements that we have gotten, you know, [the participants] are so excited. Like in this one instance, [a participant] had been applying for months on her own with no response. But then, when she got into the program, with all the work we did, she received the job"

-NAC staff

5. Estimates are based on a full-time job and a family of four.

I started talking with him—'Do you know if you take a good sort of opportunity for work and a good company, they can give you health insurance? They can provide you all kinds of benefits, with pensions and that kind of thing.' You know, it was an eye-opener for this guy. He didn't realize that this is what can happen . . . He said, "What do you think I should be doing?' I said, 'Well, what do you think you can do?' We talked about his skills . . . An opportunity came with one of the major companies . . . and I advised him to go to that and he was accepted.

Path 3: Advancing to Stability or Mobility

7% of all participants / 21% of those with exit data

Another group of 41 people entered NAC employed, with slightly higher wages upon entry ($19.84 per hour). They also advanced, raising their average collective wage to $23.53, a 19% change. A small handful of high earners with advanced degrees secured excellent positions in their chosen field. A NAC staff member shared the story of one such participant, saying, "Through our connection and help, we found him a very high-paying job for a new arrival person. After six months, to have a salary of more than $85,000, it was really something very big and special for him."

A Baltimore participant with an advanced degree similarly described how the New American Cities program was instrumental in helping him secure a job that was closer to the career that he had had before he was forced to leave his home country. Although he had hoped to find a job on his own, he only succeeded after coaching from NAC on interviewing and navigating available opportunities. He said,

When I arrived to the U.S., I was trying to find a job suiting my background and education . . . I was not waiting for a caseworker or for the agency to find me job, so I started

applying to different positions and different organizations. And I had many interview experiences . . . You know, the main problem when I was attending interviews, it was lack of U.S.-based experience. I was attending interview . . . and my background was matching with the job requirements, and everything was going well, but when it comes to the U.S.-based experience, I was facing most of problem. And finally [the NAC team] were here and they helped me a lot.

Most people in this group secured smaller raises or promotions, providing their family with slightly more income to meet expenses or save for future assets. We know that wealth mobility in the United States is "sticky," that people with the most wealth and the least wealth are unlikely to move out of the respective wealth quintile they were born into.[ix] For immigrants and refugees coming into the United States—often with minimal financial assets due to being forcibly displaced—achieving financial stability is an important first step for their families' well-being. Participants shared dreams of upward mobility for themselves and their children but were also pragmatic about

Participants who entered NAC employed but still living in poverty increased their wages by 41%.

the immediate issues they faced and the high cost of living in the United States. Paying bills, securing childcare, and getting a license and securing transportation—all while adjusting to a new culture—can take years. But, families often do not have the luxury of years, so they achieve stability little by little, one raise or job transfer at a time, balancing a wide range of needs and patching together resources.

For example, childcare and transportation remain two of the most common structural barriers to employment and advancement for low-resource families. Participants recounted how NAC staff would pick them up and bring them to job fairs as they could not drive or did not have a vehicle. One partner shared,

> I think access to transportation [is a resource that the community needs]. And when they say, 'Well, we give bus vouchers,' that doesn't work. I don't know if it's fear if they don't know the language, to get lost . . . I guess if you think about somebody coming from a place where they always walked everywhere, it's very intimidating to get into a public bus. So, even if you give free vouchers, I don't think that's the solution.

Staff described referring participants to other departments in their agencies or partner organizations to get wraparound services or just more support. Other staff shared how they try to connect participants with childcare. A partner shared, "Any time we have any classes, they are always with the kids . . . It's a big challenge for them. They can't work because they have kids." member.

A staff member shared,

> I think one of the biggest barriers for newly arrived families is childcare. I think that whole childcare system is so hard if you don't have a friend or family to help you watch your children. Childcare vouchers, daycare, like the whole system is so, so hard.

FEDERAL HILL
HISTORIC COMMUNITY OF SOUTH BALTIMORE

We know that wealth mobility in the United States is "sticky," that people with the most wealth and the least wealth are unlikely to move out of the respective wealth quintile they were born into.[ix]

Path 4: Upskilling and Navigating U.S. Culture

38% of all participants

By far the largest pathway through NAC was ongoing engagement and training. This makes sense because enrollments varied by site and month, so many NAC participants who joined in the last six months would not have had time to receive services or go through training to secure employment or advance. The majority of these participants are actively receiving job training, going through educational programs, securing credentials, or otherwise working towards their goals. Some are working to resolve the immediate issues facing their family mentioned above so that they can work. More time is needed to adequately support these participants and track their progress in upskilling and cultural navigation. One Baltimore participant explained,

> I've started my life here with numerous challenges, and then a lot of cultural shocks, and a lot of ambiguities . . . but now I'm glad with the situation is somehow being adjusted, and I'm trying to adopt the lifestyle here in the U.S. . . . Now starting everything all over from zero, and a new life, a new face, a new culture, is somehow challenging, but it is what it is, and I am doing the best I possibly can to get acquainted to it and to adjust my life into the new system here in the U.S.

Educational opportunities provide upskilling as well as a forum for immigrants and refugees to learn about U.S. systems. Participants spoke about

One popular course across NAC sites was IT and data analytics.

training they received through NAC. While looking for jobs, some built skills through the free courses they accessed through NAC's partnership with Coursera and other mainstream workforce development programs such as WIOA. One popular course across NAC sites was IT and data analytics. This training could place refugees in position to enter a growth sector with remote work opportunities and livable wages. Another benefit to training is that newcomers meet other people in their field, and begin to build a network and identify opportunities for their future. A participant in Jacksonville said, "I learned a lot from the program and I know now how to go and find things in my field. I'm planning to go ahead and continue studying because I know more about resources." Another participant in Baltimore enthused,

> I believe NAC program is one of the unique programs that I've found amongst the resettlement agencies and the organizations that I have been connected with so far. What is amazing is the capacity building programs that you guys have, particularly the Coursera platform. It's like a great platform to build a capacity and of course learn a lot of things.

A Jacksonville participant shared,

> [NAC] opened door for me. I got my certificate in MA [medical assisting] but I will continue to get LPN or RN to work for my son at home. It's hard for me—I went to [the local college] and they told me a lot of things and a lot of time to complete all my documents. [The NAC staff] did it in one day. They translated, they did all my documents, they opened the door for me. Now I can go further. I can work for my son at home.

Beyond the technical courses accessible through the program, NAC staff work with participants to build their personal capacity and soft skills, including knowing how to search for and access additional resources—a key goal of the program—tailor their resumes for U.S. hiring managers, and convey culturally responsive body language in interviews. While job readiness programs nationwide vary in the nature of services provided, NAC's focus on empowering participants with transferable skills and knowledge is a distinguishing feature.

> "My language got better—they gave me confidence to speak up and talk. Before, I was at home, I didn't go anywhere, I didn't talk to anybody. But in this program, they gave me confidence that I can do that, that I can speak English."
>
> - Jacksonville participant

Path 5: Dropping Out (or Unaccounted For)

23% of all participants

LIRS built and implemented a shared data system across sites that local staff used to enter case-level data, but data were not always entered consistently across sites, despite efforts to provide training and support. Stretched-thin career navigators found it time consuming and difficult to keep up with data entry. A NAC staff shared,

> The problem I feel like I'm facing is input. I'm wearing a lot of different hats. I'm a recruiter. I'm the enroller. I'm sometimes driving my clients to places because they don't have a car. I'm doing a lot of different things. And input is a lot. I have to input, you know, what I did with the client, I need to do the applications for the degree evaluation. I'm having to look for and do a lot of admin stuff. I'm just feeling like I need another person to be me so I can go do some things . . . I could definitely use an intern to do all this notetaking and application filling-out.

Members of the NAC network valued seeing monthly updates on city-level and national program progress and learning from interviews and focus groups throughout the program, but the case-level aspect of data collection and management could be improved for the future. In part because of the quality of data and in part because NAC experienced recidivism like all workforce training programs, a total of 23% of the original 580 enrollees either dropped out or lack clear exit data. For the purposes of illustrating all known pathways, here we share findings that explain why the NAC

program was not the right fit for everyone.

Although many participants enrolled in and completed training or certification programs, NAC staff were unable to assist every individual in finding the right opportunity—a reality for all career pathways programs, given the multitude of factors involved in securing meaningful employment. Some participants are still actively learning English and were not quite strong enough to succeed in interviews, even if many of the jobs require only minimal English skills. A NAC staff mused,

> I can see that English level, like, improving, but I still think it's kind of a barrier, especially when we're going on remote job interviews. You know, when I meet people in person, they shine. But, when we're practicing over the phone for a job interview, and then when I get feedback from employers about interviews, I think language is a big barrier.

Others needed different types of support to access a specific vocational education. One Baltimore participant explained why some of their community members were still struggling:

> For us, when we are coming from a very different country—a different country with a different background—and are starting with zero with family members, and all the lots of expenses, it's very much difficult to start a certification program, or an education program to enrich our knowledge and capacity here.

Physical and mental health issues also acted as barriers for some participants, many of whom have experienced multiple traumas. One Baltimore participant explained how stressful it is for people in their community to be engaged in an unsuccessful job search process and suggested that in some cases NAC participants could benefit from mental health support:

> Health is affected by different factors, from living conditions, from job, and from many different conditions . . . Health is not only the physical well-being. It also covers mental health. There are not any activity regarding mental health. According to my network . . . I know many of them has mental problem because of the difference of the culture, because they do not have a job, because of the worry about their raise and all these things.

Hope, Integration, and Power Outcomes

In addition to the large career advances and smaller micro-advancements that participants made in their careers, they also described being more hopeful about life in the United States and providing for their families. Participants talked about how the personal connections and check-ins with NAC staff motivated them to keep applying to companies. The staff send them potential job opportunities and help them navigate HR managers and general applications.

Participants, especially female participants, shared that they felt more empowered because of the New American Cities program. One Jacksonville participant said, "Especially for me, who just stay at home with baby, it's more empowering mom like me. I feel like I have something I'm holding onto. I can look forward to do something in the future with my certification." Another participant in Jacksonville shared, "I learned a lot. It helped me build myself, have confidence in me, and be positive in anything."

Woven into that hope is the feeling of becoming more integrated and welcomed in a community. A participant in Fayetteville said,

> I think I've never felt welcomed here . . . Where I felt a little more support was once my [spouse] introduced me to the [NAC staff] for the job. I mean, to me, it was as if it opened doors for me. I don't know, it was so encouraging to get a job that I always thought, 'The problem is I will never be able to have it' . . . It encouraged me to carry on.

Another participant in Jacksonville said,

> By attending the [program], I had a lot of confidence that I can actually get into the [local] community from here. Another thing is that in the training we got to meet a lot of different races and learn about their country, about their race, so I think we learned about each other as well and so I've improved my communication skills as well.

NAC outcomes extend beyond individual benefits, especially for people who hold more collective cultural values about resources and wealth. Staff members and participants described the positive ripple effects of one person securing a stable and well-paying job, noting that entire families had more resources and communities were uplifted. One NAC staff observed, **"The clients that we've got, seeing that somebody is working with them and helping them impacts their family positively because now they're making more money."** A Jacksonville participant said, **"My life completely changed with NAC . . . They opened doors for me. Now I can start, I can proceed, I can go further."** Another NAC staff said, **"I have seen the work that we've done really change a complete household."**

Participants talked about the importance of giving back to their communities and connecting others to the opportunities they received through the New American Cities program. A participant in Jacksonville shared,

> I don't want to just jump into the nursing program without any experience so I want to work in the healthcare entry level for a few years to get experience and be a good example for the community—even as a refugee, we can become MA or nursing. I wish I can give hope. I wish I can help them.

"I learned a lot. It helped me build myself, have confidence in me, and be positive in anything."
- Jacksonville participant

Community-Level Findings

This section provides an overview of the five cities that joined LIRS in this experiment to figure out what it takes to become "New American Cities."[6] Findings are drawn from multiple sources, including background research, key informant interviews, staff focus groups, fieldwork, and participation in ongoing LIRS-NAC affiliate meetings. By offering these community portraits, we illustrate the key social, institutional, and structural factors that shape refugee and immigrant employment and advancement outcomes in each site.

Baltimore, MD

With a population of around 570,000 residents, Baltimore is Maryland's largest city and primary resettlement site.[x] The city is predominantly Black (62%) and white (30%), with English and Spanish the most-spoken languages. Most Baltimore-residents are U.S.-born (92%).[xi]

The City of Baltimore Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MIMA) serves the city's 45,600 residents (8%) who are refugees and immigrants.[xii]

Immigrants and refugees are crucial to Baltimore's well-being, starting businesses, purchasing homes, and establishing community relationships. Data from 2019 shows that refugees and immigrants pay $4.2 billion in taxes and hold $9.3 billion in spending power.[xiii] Newcomers in Baltimore, particularly newly arrived residents with limited English proficiency, are concentrated in the manufacturing, food production, and commercial laundry sectors.

The recent influx of highly skilled Afghan refugees into Baltimore catalyzed an important dialogue between NAC and workforce development leaders about a long-unsolved challenge, namely, how best to utilize the skills and knowledge of highly skilled immigrants and structure effective

pathways to rapid employment in fields that draw on their previous education and work experience. The Baltimore NAC site is developing relationships with key employers in the area with the goal of placing NAC participants in jobs that match their experience and goals. NAC's burgeoning partnership with Johns Hopkins, one of the largest employers in

Table 3. Baltimore Job Placements by Industry

	Baltimore n=36
Construction	1 (2.8%)
Education	2 (5.6%)
Food Service	2 (5.6%)
Healthcare	6 (16.7%)
Hospitality	4 (11.1%)
Human Resources	0 (0.0%)
Information Technology	4 (11.1%)
Interpretation	0 (0.0%)
Manufacturing	3 (8.3%)
Office Administration	5 (13.9%)
Retail	5 (13.9%)
Social Services	0 (0.0%)
Transportation	4 (11.1%)

6. Since Albuquerque was unable to participate in the full study, we excluded it from this site-level analysis.

Baltimore, has led to several NAC clients securing mid-level positions there, including an Afghan MBA holder, who said,

> [NAC] helped me a lot. They trained me on how to attend an interview . . . And finally, I was able to secure my first job at the Johns Hopkins Medicine International . . . which is a big organization here . . . Finally, with the help of this organization and my own efforts, I was able to find a good job.

LIRS NAC leadership is also working with local coalitions and organizations like Their Story Is Our Story to identify needed policy changes and develop pathways for foreign-trained professionals.

Since enrolling in NAC, 111 of the 125 clients (89%) have enrolled in at least one certification, job readiness, or upskilling training and 104 (83%) have completed a training. Half of all clients are now paired with a mentor, while 38 (30%) secured new jobs. Promisingly, 33 (26%) participants reported quality improvements in their current jobs, with higher wages the most common micro advancement, followed by new job titles and improved benefits or work schedule.

> "I'm an electrical engineer and as part of that, I worked for . . . the United Nations for almost 12 years . . . I [managed] a 2.5 million dollar project . . . and developed a national strategy for women in agriculture development . . . I worked for USAID . . . [Here], I gave my CV, resume to many people and I have interviews with many people but nothing happened because, I don't know . . . it's the rule here that we should have some kind of certification or something like this in the United States."
>
> **- Baltimore participant**

As shown in **Table 4**, **the refugees and immigrants who found a job or advanced through NAC Baltimore now earn on average $23.06 per hour—nearly $10 more than the state minimum wage of $13.25 per hour**.[xiv] While still below the living wage needed to support a family of four in Baltimore,[xv] this higher wage represents an important step in participants' journeys to economic stability and mobility.

Table 4. Difference Between Hourly Wage at Time of Enrollment in the NAC Program and Highest Paid Career Advancement [a]

Population Type at Enrollment [b]	N	Enrollment Wage (T1) Mean (SD)	Job Placement Wage (T2) Mean (SD)	Difference (T2-T1)	Percent Change (T2-T1)/T1 * 100	p-value
Unemployed	21	0 (0)	25.81 (13.65)	26	N/A	<0.001
Below 100% FPL	8	13.06 (1.39)	16.63 (2.52)	4	27%	0.004
Above 100% FPL	7	17.99 (1.86)	22.14 (6.51)	4	23%	0.131
Overall	36	6.4 (7.91)	23.06 (11.37)	17	260%	<0.001

a. Career advancement corresponds to job placement or promotion, the highest salary for each person was selected for this analysis.
b. Categorization made for wage at entry assuming a full time job and a family of 4.

Denver, CO

The capital of Colorado, Denver is the state's largest city with a population of approximately 713,000 residents.[xvi] The fastest growing city in the United States, Denver is predominantly white (81%)—of which 26% are Latine—and Black (10%).[xvii] Denver has been a refugee resettlement hub since the 1980s, becoming home to refugees from Afghanistan, Burma, Vietnam, the USSR, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, and Ukraine.[xviii] The Denver Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs (DOIRA) serves the city's 101,000 refugee and immigrant (14%) residents (8%).[xix]

Immigrants in Denver contribute millions of tax dollars to the local economy and are crucial members of the workforce. New Americans in Denver are thriving business owners, with immigrant entrepreneurs totaling 24,400 people.[xx]

Of the 104 NAC clients in Denver, 101 (97%) have enrolled in at least one certification, job readiness, or upskilling training, while 91 (87%) participants have completed at least one training. NAC staff successfully assisted 49 participants (47%) in finding a new job. A further 45 clients (43%) reported quality improvement in at least one aspect of their job, with wage the most common micro-advancement, followed by hours/schedule and occupational title.

While Denver is seeing its fair share of highly skilled refugees and immigrants making the city their new home, of the five sites, NAC Denver has the highest percentage of clients with less than high

Table 5. Denver Job Placements by Industry

	Denver n=47
Construction	4 (8.5%)
Education	5 (10.6%)
Food Service	8 (17.0%)
Healthcare	1 (2.1%)
Hospitality	4 (8.5%)
Human Resources	1 (2.1%)
Information Technology	1 (2.1%)
Interpretation	3 (6.4%)
Manufacturing	1 (2.1%)
Office Administration	0 (0.0%)
Retail	6 (12.8%)
Social Services	4 (8.5%)
Transportation	9 (19.1%)

school education. As such, the NAC staff have tailored the program accordingly to best serve the participants. A staff member shared,

> There are so much resources out there in Denver, but the issue is getting connected to these resources, you know, knowing who to reach out when you face a challenge . . . The majority of refugees also . . . come in from a refugee camp or from precarious sort of circumstances and they might not have the technology or the education to reach out to resources.

Table 6. Difference Between Hourly Wage at Time of Enrollment in the NAC Program and Highest Paid Career Advancement [a]

Population Type at Enrollment [b]	N	Enrollment Wage (T1) Mean (SD)	Job Placement Wage (T2) Mean (SD)	Difference (T2-T1)	Percent Change (T2-T1)/T1 * 100	p-value
Unemployed	37	0 (0)	20.48 (5.5)	20	N/A	<0.001
Below 100% FPL	6	12.83 (1.72)	18.5 (1.84)	6	44%	<0.001
Above 100% FPL	6	18.97 (4.04)	21.67 (3.16)	3	14%	0.227
Overall	49	3.89 (7.22)	20.38 (4.97)	16	423%	<0.001

a. Career advancement corresponds to job placement or promotion, the highest salary for each person was selected for this analysis.
b. Categorization made for wage at entry assuming a full time ob and a family of 4.

As shown in **Table 6, the refugees and immigrants who found a job or advanced through NAC Denver now earn on average $20.38 per hour—almost 1.5 times the state minimum wage of $13.65 per hour**.[xxi] While this figure does not reach the living wage needed to support a family of four in Denver,[xxii] this increase in wages is an important step in participants' goals of providing for their families and being self-sufficient.

"A lot of people work at Goodwill. A lot of the husbands of the women we work with work at the Amazon facility. Lots of hotel work, housecleaning, assembly-line work, and restaurants. Also, many people work in the meatpacking industry, although we do not send people there. It is really hard work but the pay is high so people are attracted to it."

- LFSRM staff

![Leah Zallman Center for Immigrant Health Research logo]
Fayetteville, AR

Located in the Ozark Mountains, Fayetteville is the second-largest city in Arkansas and the largest in Northwest Arkansas with a population of approximately 99,000.[xxiii] The majority of Fayetteville's population is white (80%), followed by Black (6%) and Asian (3%).[xxiv] Latin Americans and Asians comprise most of the foreign-born population (38% and 36%, respectively), with Mexico (41%) and El Salvador (14%) the top sending nations. The City of Fayetteville runs an online Immigrant Welcoming Hub, one of the first products created out of the Welcoming Fayetteville Plan.[xxv]

Table 7. Fayetteville Job Placements by Industry

	Fayetteville n=41
Construction	3 (7.3%)
Education	1 (2.4%)
Food Service	5 (12.2%)
Healthcare	2 (4.9%)
Hospitality	1 (2.4%)
Human Resources	0 (0.0%)
Information Technology	1 (2.4%)
Interpretation	0 (0.0%)
Manufacturing	6 (14.6%)
Office Administration	3 (7.3%)
Retail	7 (17.1%)
Social Services	6 (14.6%)
Transportation	6 (14.6%)

Northwest Arkansas, including Fayetteville and its nearby cities and surrounding countryside, would not be where it is today without the refugees and immigrants who stimulated much of the economic development in the region. Newcomers from El Salvador, the Marshall Islands, Mexico, India, and other countries joined the workforce, filling jobs in trucking, poultry production, construction, and computer programming.[xxvi] Refugees and immigrants in Fayetteville regularly fill labor needs in the manufacturing and poultry production industries, with Walmart and Tyson Foods headquartered nearby.[xxvii]

Canopy NWA, LIRS' affiliate in Fayetteville, only began resettling refugees in 2017. Despite Canopy's relatively recent entry to the field, the NAC and Canopy staff have begun establishing strong relationships with employers. Of the 89 NAC clients who enrolled from 2021-2023, 68 (76%) enrolled in eat least one certification, job readiness, or upskilling training, while 60 participants (67%) have completed at least one training. Almost one-fifth (17%) have been paired with a mentor. Through the joint efforts of NAC staff and participants, 42 clients (47%) secured new jobs and 43 (48%) reported quality improvement in at least one aspect of their job, with the most common micro-advancement being higher wages followed by better hours/schedule and a change in job title.

As shown in **Table 8**, **the refugees and immigrants who found a job or advanced through NAC Fayetteville now earn on average $19.91 per hour—almost double the state minimum wage of $11 per hour.**[xxviii] While still below the living wage needed to support a family of three in Fayetteville,[xxix] the higher wage speaks promisingly to micro-advancements and improved quality of life.

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Table 8. Difference Between Hourly Wage at Time of Enrollment in the NAC Program and Highest Paid Career Advancement [a]

Population Type at Enrollment [b]	N	Enrollment Wage (T1) Mean (SD)	Job Placement Wage (T2) Mean (SD)	Difference (T2-T1)	Percent Change (T2-T1)/T1 * 100	p-value
Unemployed	24	0 (0)	17.33 (5.99)	17	N/A	<0.001
Below 100% FPL	6	12.67 (1.08)	25.69 (15.32)	13	103%	0.064
Above 100% FPL	7	20.43 (7.85)	23.78 (16.92)	3	16%	0.643
Overall	37	5.92 (9.07)	19.91 (10.78)	14	236%	<0.001

a. Career advancement corresponds to job placement or promotion, the highest salary for each person was selected for this analysis.
b. Categorization made for wage at entry assuming a full time job and a family of 4.

"[This participant] was an electrician, he made the cell phone towers in his home country. He led teams. And then he came here, and he's working at a chicken plant, cutting chickens . . . He was begging for assistance with getting back into the field that he studied . . . I remember his main words: 'I want a technical job. This is not technical.'"

- NAC staff

Jacksonville, FL

Jacksonville is the largest city in Florida with a population of approximately 971,000.[xxx] With Florida's refugee program the largest in the country, Jacksonville is one of the state's top refugee resettlement sites, receiving Bhutanese, Burmese, Eritrean, Iraqi, Afghan, and other refugees.[xxxi]

Jacksonville is predominantly white (56%) and Black (31%), with Spanish, Tagalog, and Vietnamese the most commonly spoken languages after English.[xxxii] The city does not have an office or department dedicated to the advancement of immigrants and refugees, relying instead on the state and refugee resettlement agencies.

In 2019 alone, immigrants contributed $4.1 billion to Jacksonville's economy and paid $1.4 billion in taxes.[xxxiii] Estimates suggest that Jacksonville is home to approximately 20,000 undocumented immigrants, roughly 3% of Florida's unauthorized population.[xxxiv] Education levels among immigrants in Jacksonville mirror those of U.S.-born residents, with 52% of immigrants having completed high school and some college and 24% holding a bachelor's degree.[xxxv] Many refugees and immigrants find jobs in Jacksonville's large tourism industry, with medical tourism a key component of the city's economy.

Since Lutheran Social Services, referred to as "Lutheran" by participants, began offering NAC services in 2021, 109 clients have enrolled in the program. Of those, 59 (54%) have enrolled in at least one certification, job readiness, or upskilling training, while 58 participants (53%) have completed at least one training. NAC staff

paired 14 clients (13%) with mentors and placed 22 participants (20%) in new jobs. Additionally, 21 NAC participants (19%) reported quality improvement in at least one aspect of their job, with higher wages the most common micro-advancement, followed by better hours/schedule and increased benefits.

Table 9. Jacksonville Job Placements by Industry

	Jacksonville n=41
Construction	3 (7.3%)
Education	1 (2.4%)
Food Service	5 (12.2%)
Healthcare	2 (4.9%)
Hospitality	1 (2.4%)
Human Resources	0 (0.0%)
Information Technology	1 (2.4%)
Interpretation	0 (0.0%)
Manufacturing	6 (14.6%)
Office Administration	3 (7.3%)
Retail	7 (17.1%)
Social Services	6 (14.6%)
Transportation	6 (14.6%)

The NAC staff in Jacksonville developed a strong relationship with many medical institutions in the city, in part due to clients' interest in (re)joining the medical field. One of the program's most valued offerings is the medical assistant class, through which NAC is able to place participants in clinics. As a participant

shared, "It was a big support. My dream came true. I reached my goal—I always wanted to be a medical assistant or in the medical field. It was perfect for me, especially a mom with kids."

As shown in **Table 10**, the refugees and immigrants who found a job or advanced through NAC Jacksonville now earn on average $17.30 per hour—slightly more than 1.5 times the state minimum wage of $11 per hour.[xxxvi] While still below the living wage needed to support a family of three in Jacksonville,[xxxvii] this higher wage is particularly key for those who were previously unemployed.

Table 10. Difference Between Hourly Wage at Time of Enrollment in the NAC Program and Highest Paid Career Advancement [a]

Population Type at Enrollment [b]	N	Enrollment Wage (T1) Mean (SD)	Job Placement Wage (T2) Mean (SD)	Difference (T2-T1)	Percent Change (T2-T1)/T1 * 100	p-value
Unemployed	5	0 (0)	16.33 (3.83)	16	N/A	<0.001
Below 100% FPL	7	14.57 (0.53)	17.04 (1.84)	2	17%	0.005
Above 100% FPL	6	18.26 (2.08)	18.4 (2.11)	0	1%	0.909
Overall	18	11.75 (7.76)	17.3 (2.59)	6	47%	0.001

a. Career advancement corresponds to job placement or promotion, the highest salary for each person was selected for this analysis.
b. Categorization made for wage at entry assuming a full time job and a family of 4.

Utica, NY

With a population of approximately 64,000, Utica is the 10th most populated city in New York.[xxxviii] With over 40 languages spoken and 50 nationalities represented,[xxxix] Utica is known as "The Town That Loves Refugees": The city prides itself on being a welcoming city for newcomers and a cultural melting pot.[xl] Utica is primarily white (61%) followed by Black (16%) and Asian (11%).[xli]

Since 1981, The Center, Utica's refugee resettlement hub, has resettled close to 17,000 refugees from all over the world, including Vietnam, Burma, Bosnia, the former Soviet Union, Iraq, Nepal, Somalia, Sudan, Cambodia, Laos, Poland, and Afghanistan.[xlii]

Table 9. Utica Job Placements by Industry

	Utica n=47
Construction	0 (0.0%)
Education	1 (2.1%)
Food Service	0 (0.0%)
Healthcare	6 (12.8%)
Hospitality	0 (0.0%)
Human Resources	1 (2.1%)
Information Technology	1 (2.1%)
Interpretation	1 (2.1%)
Manufacturing	12 (25.5%)
Office Administration	2 (4.3%)
Retail	8 (17.0%)
Social Services	5 (10.6%)
Transportation	10 (21.3%)
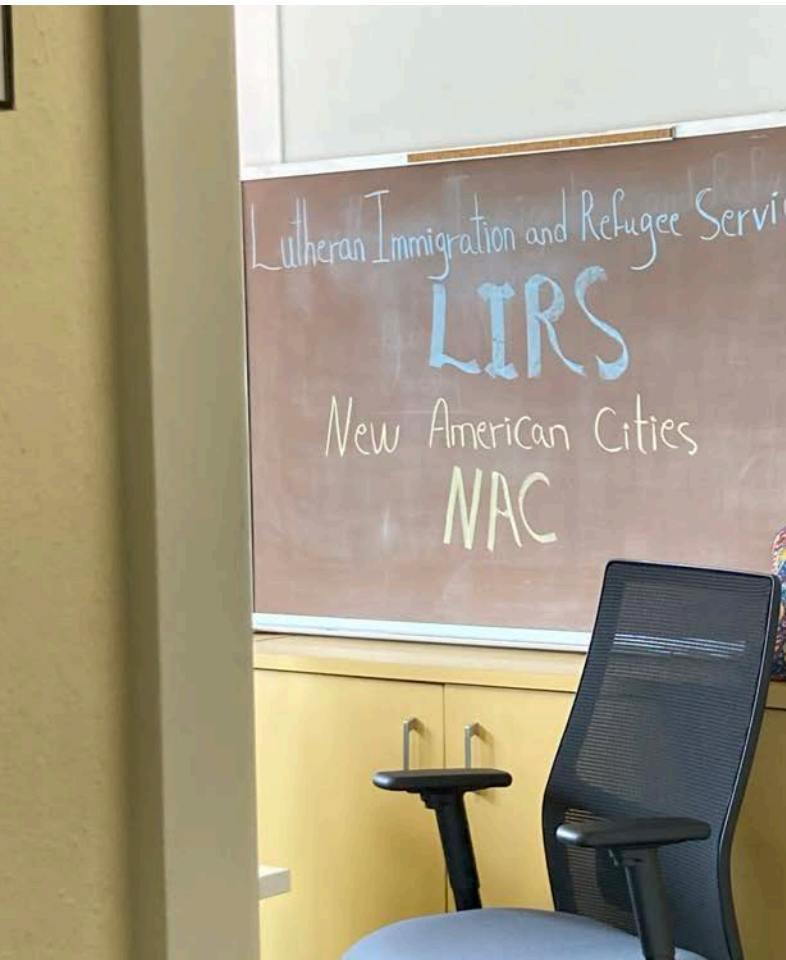
In 2017, immigrants in New York's District 22, which includes the cities of Utica and Rome, earned $1 billion and paid $112 million in state and local taxes and $201 million in federal taxes.[xliii] Today, immigrants and refugees comprise nearly 22% of Utica's population.[xliv] Many secure employment in the city's strong manufacturing, healthcare, education, and transportation industries. Building on the city's strong welcoming infrastructure, NAC Utica enrolled the most number of clients overall. Of the 131 participants who joined the program, 119 (91%) have enrolled in at least one certification, job readiness, or upskilling training, with 87 clients (66%) successfully completing at least one training. Working closely with NAC staff, 39 clients (30%) obtained new jobs and 35 (27%) more saw micro-advancements in their current jobs,

including higher wages, better hours, and increased benefits.

A new career pathway that NAC helped refugees and immigrants develop in Utica is transportation, with the commercial driver's license (CDL) program proving especially popular with participants. Through partnerships, NAC staff were able to offer the course free-of-charge to clients, saving them thousands of dollars. A NAC staff shared,

> We have a certification program at MVCC . . . And what they do is a four week program during the week, Monday through Thursday, and they finish in four weeks . . . The jobs are here. And, you know, we've made connections with . . . some of the other places the manufacturers actually have on site. CDL drivers, so this is Class A I'm talking about—so they're looking at salaries in the six figures. $65,000 to $100,000 a year, starting.

As shown in **Table 12**, **the refugees and immigrants who found a job or advanced through NAC Utica now earn on average $19.78 per hour, or 140% of the state minimum wage of $14.20 per hour.**[xlv] While still below the living wage needed to support a family of four in Utica,[xlvi] across the board in the different categories, participants recorded a wage increase in their new job placements.

Table 12. Difference Between Hourly Wage at Time of Enrollment in the NAC Program and Highest Paid Career Advancement [a]

Population Type at Enrollment [b]	N	Enrollment Wage (T1) Mean (SD)	Job Placement Wage (T2) Mean (SD)	Difference (T2-T1)	Percent Change (T2-T1)/T1 * 100	p-value
Unemployed	23	0 (0)	16.56 (3.87)	17	N/A	<0.001
Below 100% FPL	6	14.16 (0.75)	19.45 (5.49)	5	37%	0.041
Above 100% FPL	12	19.67 (2.94)	26.1 (5.94)	6	33%	0.003
Overall	41	7.83 (9.26)	19.78 (6.3)	12	153%	<0.001

a. Career advancement corresponds to job placement or promotion, the highest salary for each person was selected for this analysis.
b. Categorization made for wage at entry assuming a full time job and a family of 4.

Value-Add of the NAC Model to Workforce Programs and Cities

While the cities involved in the New American Cities program are unlikely to see the immediate impact of their participation in this pilot, we saw consistent patterns across sites suggesting that NAC is building a foundation for long-term impact. Research shows that refugee employment strengthens economies.[xlvii] Employer-based data show that refugees are like American-born workers in many ways, with a few key differences: They have lower turnover rates and are more likely to work in high-demand occupations in both entry-level and highly skilled positions. Refugees in manufacturing have a 4% turnover rate, compared to an 11% overall rate; in the hotel industry, which has an extremely high overall turnover rate (36%), the turnover rate was seven percentage points lower (29%) for refugees.[xlviii]

Nationally, refugees make up a greater share of the workforce than their share of the U.S. population in healthcare, manufacturing, educational services, and retail, among other sectors, especially those in which English fluency is not necessary to perform the job. Refugees and other immigrants form clusters regionally and in specific sectors and companies due to resettlement patterns, word of mouth, and labor market trends. For example, 13 out of every 1,000 refugees work in meatpacking (animal slaughtering and processing),[xlix] and some groups have built communities in or near rural areas with meatpacking plants due to the plentiful, albeit dangerous and difficult, jobs.[l] Refugees also made up a disproportionate share of essential workers during the pandemic in front-line roles such as personal care aides[li] and agriculture and food processing.[lii]

> **Refugees are like American-born workers in many ways, with a few key differences: They have lower turnover rates and are more likely to work in high-demand occupations in both entry-level and highly skilled positions.**

Many NAC participants entered the program with high levels of education, looking to find careers in the United States where they can apply their skills and training. Every year, thousands of immigrants bring extensive career histories and highly specialized skills to the United States, which have the potential to drive and transform our economy. In the absence of strong employment and career pathway programs, the aspirations and capabilities of many highly educated and skilled immigrants go untapped, creating long-term losses for families and the U.S. economy, which loses $40 billion in wages and $10 billion in taxes due to underemployment of college-educated immigrants annually in "brain waste."[liii]

Despite benefits to local economies, not all cities are welcoming to newcomers. So far, we documented how the demographic, socio-economic, and political contexts of each New American City vary, as did the participants and their paths at each NAC

site. **Table 13** synthesizes the key city-level factors that we found present to varying degrees. NAC's success is partially shaped by these factors, and the program model was designed to impact the community in some of these domains to structure a more welcoming city.

Our assessment of each factor on a 3-point scale is a rough estimate based on data from key informants, participants, and program staff and should not be read as an evaluative metric. Instead, we offer this as an initial framework for dialogue and engagement for leaders at LIRS, other refugee resettlement organizations, mainstream workforce training programs, and labor policy agencies as they consider the impact of city-level factors on workforce programs and design those programs to improve cities. As LIRS generates additional resources to scale the NAC program to other cities, LIRS can also use these factors to consider the

"readiness" of potential partner sites to implement the NAC model.

Taking city-level factors and the diversity of participants' educational, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds (**Table 14**) into consideration, we believe that NAC was well-designed to fit the most refugees and immigrants possible. We also note that no single workforce model can serve everyone. Below, we describe the key programmatic components of the NAC model that contributed most to participants' successes. These can be viewed as the "value-add" that NAC contributed to the workforce system in each city, as well as programmatic components that could be incorporated into existing mainstream workforce systems to make them more welcoming and inclusive to newcomers.

The original NAC model involves two full-time staff—a pathway builder and a

Table 13. Strength of City-Level Factors at the 2-Year NAC Sites (1-3 stars)

	Baltimore	Denver	Fayetteville	Jacksonville	Utica
Partner Resettlement Legacy	**	***	**	***	***
Mayor-level Support or Office	**	***	***	*	***
Workforce System Climate	**	*	**	**	**
Employer Partners	**	**	***	**	***
Labor Market Openings and Career Pathways to Match Skills	*	**	***	***	***
City legacy countering structural racism	*	**	*	**	***

Table 14. A Snapshot of NAC Program Demographics by Site

	As of July 2023				Point-in-Time Demographics at Enrollment				
	Total Number of Clients	Mean Age	Male: Female Ratio	Average Family Size	Percent with Some College	Percent with Less than High School	Percent with Household Income between $10,000-$49,000	Percent Unemployed	Percent with Income Below 100% FPL
Baltimore	125	37	55:45	4	85	6	44	57	31
Denver	104	39	43:57	4	40	39	30	30	54
Fayetteville	89	36	54:46	3	56	20	35	35	47
Jacksonville	109	34	35:75	3	50	11	86	86	53
Utica	131	30	69:31	4	48	12	88	88	29

career navigator—who are supervised by a local manager on-site and supported by the LIRS NAC leadership team. All sites hired from within refugee and immigrant communities, and/or ensured their staff were **culturally and linguistically** effective. They were either multi-lingual themselves or seasoned intercultural communicators with experience working with interpreters in diverse or global settings.

The **pathway builder** role is a new and innovative one for workforce programs, and there was little, if any, precedent that staff could look to as they shaped the work on the ground. Some NAC staff talked about the challenges of the blurred lines between the roles of the pathway builder and career navigator. Since staff bring their personal connections and knowledge to their jobs, their own expertise sometimes lends itself to them taking on or having to do the work of the other staff member. One NAC pathway builder reflected,

I'm doing a lot of job counseling, maybe because I know what kind of jobs are out there or I know what trainings are being offered. It's kind of the career navigator's role to do that part of the client's goals. I think one of the reasons that it's hard for us is because [the career navigator] isn't always aware of the different things going on in the city because it's not part of [their] job description . . . It's like a fine line. I'm also asked to do other information presentations for client recruitment. And then isn't that a career navigator role?

Due to the labor market churn over the past two years, not all the sites were always fully staffed, which meant that the remaining NAC staff often had to perform both the career navigator and the pathway builder roles. In some cases, NAC staff supplemented the local resettlement sites' capacity during the series of international crises in Afghanistan and Ukraine, working

with new arrivals who received a special immigrant visa (SIV) status that afforded refugee benefits but were not included in annual refugee admissions numbers. A community partner pointed out,

> We have some agencies like Lutheran Social Services, charities, but they are all overworked. And what happened is when Trump came, he got the funds, so they let people go. Then now, money is coming but it's very slow. So, they're so short-handed, they can't even pick up the phone.

Many staff members became burnt out, and there was significant turnover during the program. One NAC staff ended up doing both roles and said,

> In each city, there are two staff. But here, there's only me while they are recruiting. I'm doing it by myself . . . It's one thing to provide service to the client—employment—but NAC is different. When thinking of a career, it's a package of services: needing to maintain strong relationships with workplaces; training institutions; overseeing clients' participation in trainings; after training, passing the national test—I have to do this for every client, so it's a whole package. Also, I work on soft skills, foundational skills training, mentorship as part of that, also community engagement.

Despite the propensity for overwork and burnout, staff shared how meaningful it was for them to work in a program that prioritizes an **individualized approach to career counseling and a focus on advancement**. Across the board, leadership and staff noted the uniqueness of this program compared to the traditional resettlement and workforce systems they interact with daily. Asking refugees what

they want to pursue in terms of jobs or which resources they need is not always the norm, simply because of the way U.S. refugee resettlement has historically placed people in jobs as soon as possible. One staff explained,

> Having worked, like, with the newly arrived clients, it was kind of really hard to lower those expectations for people. "No, you can't get back into the field right away as a doctor," or "No, you can't do this." And that was a lot of no's. And I think in this program, it's a lot of "Yeah, let's try it. Yeah, let's explore it. You know, okay. Yeah, that might be, like, too high. But, like, let's start here. You can, you can eventually reach that." So I think there is a lot of optimism, and a lot of possibility that feels really, really exciting . . . Overall, there's a lot of hope and optimism.

> **Staff shared how meaningful it was for them to work in a program that prioritizes an individualized approach to career counseling and a focus on advancement.**

A Baltimore participant noted this difference as well, saying,

> Other resettlement agencies, I have been to some of them in hope of trying to find a better job. The number one answer that they will give you on the first time is to start from, let's say, Amazon delivery or start from warehouse package handler or to start from serving as a cashier. So, with these jobs, these opportunities, I personally believe there are less pathways for advancing your careers . . . What I found from the NAC

program was sort of paving the ground for the applicant or for the participant to meet those employers who are in the same area and who could somehow find the best opportunity that meets their career.

One of the main reasons this is possible with NAC is that it is privately funded. Most public funding for refugees limits services to specific timeframes after a person's arrival in the United States. Even programs that are designed to support "longer-term" outcomes are typically limited to people who have been in the United States for five years or less. In contrast, NAC's **eligibility guidelines allow work with refugees after five years**. This means that NAC is there to provide supports when people were ready to go back to school, explore higher level careers, or advance. One staff explained how this structural difference fills a gap:

> I think being in the NAC program, having private funding has been awesome. I think there's more flexibility, there's more resources . . . I think that we're really like improving people's lives and, and like, because of ORR's, the government's restrictions, people after five years really don't have that support and navigating to their pathways. And so that really fills that gap in helping immigrants get out of those entry level minimum wage jobs and filling that mid-level.

This funding flexibility also takes the pressure off case workers and participants to find and accept the first job in front of them. Instead, NAC encourages exploration of high skilled recertification and training options based on each participant's prior skills, education, and work histories both in the United States and overseas. Many of the Afghan refugees in the NAC program spoke of deep prior experience working with USAID and other U.S. organizations

in Afghanistan and abroad—and learning that those years counted for nothing here. A NAC staff highlighted the vast knowledge many skilled immigrants bring with them, saying, "They have huge experience, they have amazing degrees—bachelors', PhDs. But most employers are looking for experience here in the United States." One affiliate partner observed,

> We have this gentleman who has two doctorates from India. And unfortunately, because he doesn't speak English, he's having to work at Walmart until he can get his English up . . . We have a lot of people who are unable to utilize their education because it's either not recognized in the United States or they don't have the English capacity in order to put it across to whoever the interviewer is— their capability and capacity.

Some highly skilled immigrants end up in entry-level jobs temporarily while they learn English, and others get stuck in low-wage positions because their academic degrees or professional certificates are not recognized. Yet others struggle because they do not know where to start to reenter their field in a new country. Pathways to mid- and high-skilled jobs are not always clear to case workers either, as generalists. This prompted NAC to develop a **mentorship program**, in which participants can choose to be matched with an expert in their field. The mentor provides in-depth knowledge and guidance to NAC participants so they can identify next steps for advancement.

Part of the pathway builder's role is to develop in-depth knowledge and networks in one or more fields that have family-sustaining mid- or high-skilled jobs in high demand, so that as NAC participants enrolled, they could learn more about available opportunities.

NAC staff and leadership conducted **sector-specific employer development** in healthcare, transportation, IT, and others as they saw opportunities. A few even gained entry to some notoriously inaccessible companies for refugees such as Johns Hopkins Medicine in Baltimore. Repeatedly, key informants noted that welcoming employers can make all the difference by opening career doors to newcomers, promoting them, providing time and space for cultural adjustments and differences, and supporting their career aspirations and journeys. A NAC staff shared, **"[Newcomers] need more chances with the employers. They need to give them more chances because they don't have enough experience here."** In the following case that is unfortunately rare, one employer got to know a colleague as a professional and offered her just the right amount of guidance she needed to succeed:

> **I have a colleague who is very highly educated and has a very strong accent . . . I would have [people saying they had] a hard time understanding her. I could see where they were coming from because what I could articulate in two sentences would sometimes take up five or six because English is not her first language. But it wasn't that you couldn't understand her—it just took her longer to explain. And I found that people didn't have that much patience to give her the space to communicate . . . I coached her and helped her create templates that she could use that would easily communicate what she needed to communicate.**

Training employers and partners to understand the path that led refugees to where they are can help them to become more welcoming and inclusive. Unfortunately, many immigrants and refugees are passed over for jobs or promotions because English is not their first language or because employers do not understand that refugees are authorized to work. A Baltimore participant said, **"They are still hesitating to hire, and the reason behind is that because the recent wave of these immigrants have caused some background uncertainties, and the employers are kind of hesitating or being scared."** NAC staff gave trainings in each New American City to employers and other partners that focused on the contributions of immigrants and refugees to community economic prosperity. These trainings counter harmful and incorrect status-quo narratives about immigrants and refugees as burdens and encourage longstanding Americans to learn how newcomers contribute to and are a part of their community. A coalition partner noted, **"[Refugees and immigrants] have a lot of skills that people underestimate just because they don't speak English."** One NAC staff reflected, **"We really work hard with [newcomers] to help them, to assist them. But they really need more opportunities, more understanding from most of the employers."**

If a skilled resettlement professional spends time cultivating friendly local contacts over their career, they can build a strong network of individuals that are welcoming and supportive of refugees and immigrants. But, this is not sustainable for long-term city-level change. Instead, NAC

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7. Data were not detailed or accurate enough to incorporate time spent in training or lost wages into the individual calculation. Similarly, we did not have large enough city-level samples or contextual data to calculate an accurate Social Return on Investment (SROI), but we developed a comprehensive multi-level methodology for future calculations of SROI if NAC continues and cities are interested in partnering to analyze the costs and benefits of refugee career pathways in more depth.

focused on **institutional coalition building for resource networks** as a longer-term approach. The outcomes of this aspect were mixed, partially because of the pull towards crisis-oriented supports in the timeframe of this pilot. However, in cities where NAC staff were able to leverage their institutional networks, participants directly benefited. For example, key informants noted the important role that English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) institutions play in the career journeys of many refugees and immigrants. These institutions might be community colleges, public libraries, or literary centers. As one NAC staff shared, **"The public library is a great help, you know, because they have so many programs . . . and they would help with ESL classes, they would help with citizenship classes."** Another NAC staff said, **"We have a really great relationship with the community colleges that we have in our area . . . They just have a vast amount of programming that can help people lead into other positions."** Ideally, continued funding in New American Cities would catalyze these initial networks into more widespread coalitions. A coalition of the right combination of people with institutional power and resources and those with lived experience and professional training could lead to a more equitable and inclusive workforce system for all.

LIRS estimates that New American Cities cost approximately $5,400 per capita, which includes funding that was distributed to sites and two full-time administrative positions that worked out of LIRS' national headquarters. National coordination and training by LIRS was critical in supporting the implementation of this pilot. NAC administrative leadership procured and distributed program funding, coordinated training for site staff and facilitated co-learning opportunities, developed data and learning systems, provided direct program assistance with employer engagement and development of career pathways, and forged national partnerships, among other administrative duties.

We estimated a simple return on investment (ROI)[7] of NAC to participants one year after exit and over 10 years (**Table 15**). The average benefit to participants who became employed or advanced is $28,000 after one year, which is the equivalent of a 515% return on investment. This calculates to over $320,000 over ten years, or a ROI of 5905%. **Table 15** also illustrates the varying ROIs for each pathway. We excluded those who stayed in or dropped out from the estimate of benefits, but accounted for them in the per capita investment, which means that if future programs utilize

Value-Add Program Features of NAC

- Culturally and linguistically effective career navigators
- Pathway builder role
- Individualized career counseling and focus on advancement
- Eligibility guidelines that allow work with refugees after five years
- Exploration of high skilled recertification and training options
- Mentorship program
- Sector-specific employer development
- Training employers and partners
- Institutional coalition building for resource networks
- National coordination and training from LIRS

Table 15. Projected Individual Return on Investment (ROI) at Year 1 and Over 10 Years

	At Year 1		Over 10 Years	
FPL Level at Entry	Benefit to Participant [a]	Return on Participant-Level Investment to NAC [b]	Benefit to Participant [c]	Return on Participant-Level Investment to NAC [b]
Unemployed	$40,834.96	751%	$468,127.06	8608%
Below 100% FPL	$11,477.22	211%	$131,573.47	2419%
Above 100% FPL	$7,682.33	141%	$88,069.27	1619%
Overall	$28,011.89	515%	$321,125.00	5905%

a. Benefit estimated based on information of hourly salary assuming a FT job.
b. NAC investment = $5,438.56 per participant, based on year 2022 total expenses divided by the total number of cases.
c. Benefit estimated based on information of hourly salary assuming a full-time job held over 10 years and a 3% COLA yearly adjustment.

this ROI for estimating investments, they should account for approximately 38% of the total cohort enrolled staying in and 23% dropping out.

We also estimated the tax contributions that participants in each pathway would make towards their city after 1 year and over 10 years (see **Table 16**). On average, participant tax contributions after one year equal $6,700 per person more than they would have without NAC.

If the city were to pay for the program, for every dollar spent they would get $1.23 back, which equals a 123% return on investment. Over 10 years (assuming standard COLA increases), the average tax contributions going back to the city equal $86,706 per person. The return on each dollar spent, 10 years later, is $15.94 or a 1594% ROI.

Table 16. Projected Tax Contributions and Tax Benefits to Community at Year 1 and Over 10 Years

	At Year 1		Over 10 years	
FPL Level at Entry	Participant Tax Contribution [a]	Tax Benefit to Community Per $1 Invested [b]	Participant Tax Contribution [c]	Tax Benefit to Community Per $1 Invested [b]
Unemployed	$6,255.00	$1.15	$81,241	$14.94
Below 100% FPL	$5,633.00	$1.04	$75,618	$13.90
Above 100% FPL	$8,910.00	$1.64	$112,176	$20.63
Overall	$6,696.86	$1.23	$86,706	$15.94

a. Tax contribution based on 2022-2023 tax brackets for a single filer based on yearly salary assuming a full-time job.
b. Assuming a NAC initial investment of $5,438.56 per participant, based on year 2022 total expenses divided by the total number of cases.
c. Tax contribution estimated based on information of hourly salary assuming a full-time job held over 10 years and a 3% COLA yearly adjustment using 2022-2023 tax brackets for a single filer.

The average benefit to immigrants who became employed or advanced through NAC is

$28,000

after one year, which calculates to over

$320,000

over ten years.

NAC participants will pay

$6,700

more in taxes after one year than they would have without NAC, and

$86,700

more over ten years.

If a city were to invest in the NAC model, for every dollar spent the city would get

$1.23

back after one year. After 10 years, the return on each dollar increases to

$15.94.

Conclusion: Creating Welcoming and Prosperous Communities

Traditional refugee employment programs provide new Americans with core services so they can orient themselves in new communities and labor markets. Some immigrants and refugees come from unsafe or unstable conditions where food and other basic needs are scarce and/or risk their lives to come here. Others have full and prosperous lives that were cut short by conflict. Since the start of the U.S. refugee resettlement program in 1980, newcomers have moved through trauma and hardship and found footholds in this economy through sheer determination and adaptability, creative skill building or recertification, and a willingness to take low quality, high-risk jobs in high-demand, growing industries.

Although jobs are the cornerstone of refugee resettlement, the structure of U.S. labor markets and social systems does not make it easy for newcomers to thrive through work. The resettlement program is structured by the belief—a longstanding American narrative—that families in the United States can achieve economic security and well-being through work. In other words, successful economic integration for refugees is defined as employment that provides enough resources for families to live independently from the U.S. social welfare system.

This goal is shared by new Americans and longstanding Americans alike, but low-wage work, wealth and income inequality, and high costs of living[liv] mean that self-sufficiency through work is unachievable for many Americans. In fact, one third of the U.S. population and half of all U.S. children receive some form of social safety net assistance.[lv] This suggests that our economic and labor systems are not equitably structured for all families to achieve self-sufficiency through work. Too often, structural barriers prevent refugees and immigrants from achieving career mobility. LIRS saw these barriers and designed the New American Cities program to dismantle them wherever and however possible.

How NAC Dismantles Barriers to Refugee Success

Barrier	Response
Federal requirements mandate that refugees take the first job they are offered, and agencies only work with people for up to five years.	**LIRS privately funded a pilot that enabled flexibility around program eligibility and success metrics.**
Existing workforce development programs are difficult for newcomers to navigate.	**NAC provides culturally and linguistically effective staff and trains mainstream institutions on refugee circumstances and communication access.**
High costs of living, labor market inequities, and institutional and structural racism make it difficult for newcomers to move past entry-level jobs.	**NAC links participants with mentors and pathway builders work to develop sector- and employer-based opportunities for advancement.**
Harmful anti-immigrant narratives and local politics mean local leaders are not always supportive of hiring and integrating newcomers into the community.	**NAC staff work with champions, provide trainings, and establish new partners to seed local coalitions to support economic integration.**

The NAC pilot provided an initial proof of concept and shows potential, but the program needs more time until we will be able to fully understand and evaluate its impact. As we have shown, NAC fills a vital hole in the refugee resettlement and workforce landscape. One Jacksonville participant verbalized this on a personal level: "I just wished I knew this program earlier once I moved here. I moved here in 2014 but I didn't have the environment to introduce this to me. I will introduce [my friends] to Lutheran. I didn't have anyone to introduce me to this program."

This report is an invitation to support NAC and engage with LIRS in building pathways for refugee economic security and hope.

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