

IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION IN NC: A Summit for Cities and Towns

A report of the Latino Migration Project at the
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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THE LATINO **MIGRATION** PROJECT



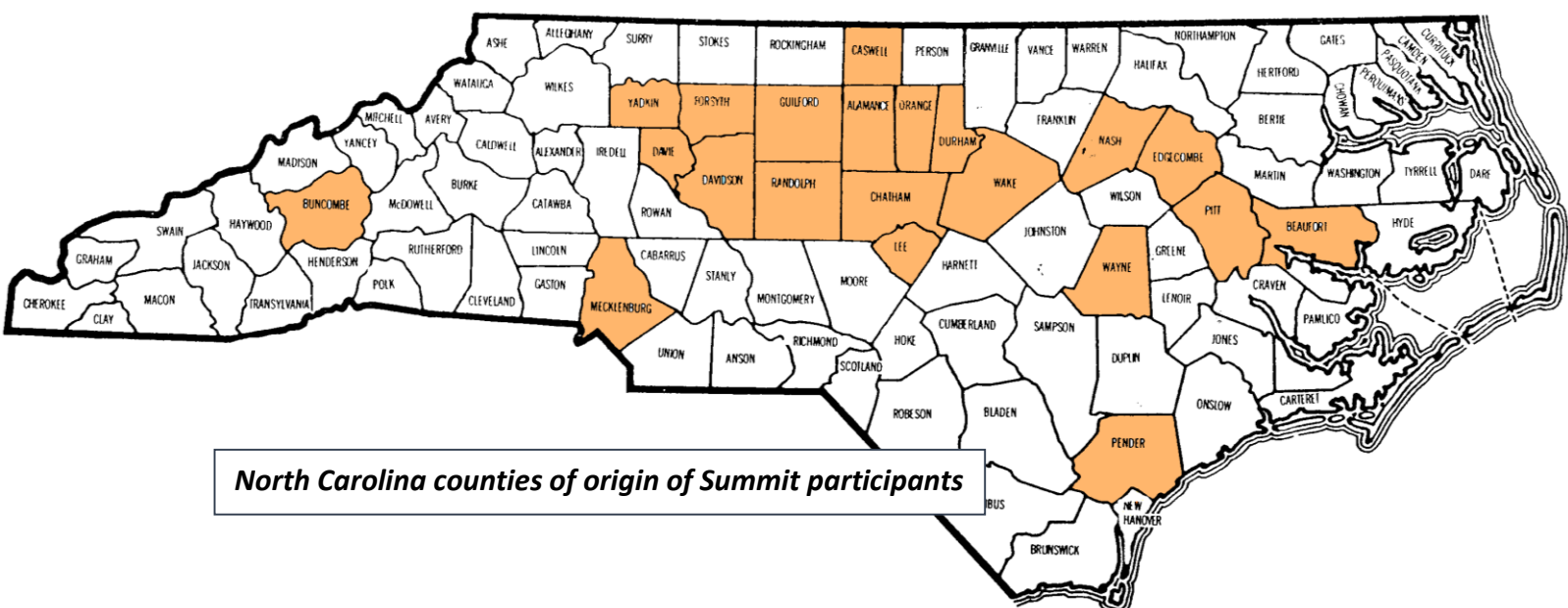
Overview

The Latino Migration Project hosted **IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION IN NORTH CAROLINA: A SUMMIT FOR CITIES AND TOWNS** on September 17, 2014 at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. This report summarizes activities and findings.



The purpose of the summit was to share innovative immigrant integration practices of municipalities in North Carolina and feature workshops with local government delegations and immigrant representatives in the region. Co-sponsors included the UNC Center for Urban and Regional Studies, The Center for International Understanding, Uniting NC, and the City of High Point Human Relations Department. Funding for the conference was provided by the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation and the UNC Chapel Hill College of Arts and Sciences.

The summit was attended by 75 people from across the state, including the cities and counties of Alamance, Asheville, Burlington, Chapel Hill, Charlotte, Greensboro, Goldsboro, High Point, New Hanover, Raleigh, Wilmington, and Winston Salem. In addition to municipal officials, participants included representatives from the private sector; law enforcement agencies; Chambers of Commerce; immigrant and refugee serving organizations; k-12 teachers; and faculty, staff and students from institutions of higher education across the state.





Activities

Activities at the Summit were designed to bring together municipalities across the state of North Carolina and share lessons and challenges they face in their ongoing work. The conference began with a welcome by Louis A. Pérez, Director of the Institute for the Study of the Americas at UNC Chapel Hill, and was followed by a presentation by Hannah Gill, Director of the Latino Migration Project, about the [Building Integrated Communities Program](#) and its process, history, and resources. A panel of representatives from four NC cities (Charlotte, Greensboro, High Point, and Greenville) then shared information about their current initiatives to promote immigrant integration, detailed below. Questions central to their presentations included the following: What practices and strategies is your municipality using to promote immigrant integration? What are the biggest challenges? Alvena Heggins, Director of the High Point Human Relations Department, facilitated the panel and a dialogue with the audience.

Charlotte

Representatives from Charlotte included Emily Zimmern, President and CEO of the Levine Museum of the New South; Stefan Latorre from the Law Offices of Stefan Latorre; and Jess George, Executive Director of The Latin American Coalition. They described the work of [Charlotte's Immigrant Integration Task Force](#), which is engaged in a study of strategies to maximize immigrants' economic and civic contributions. In 2014, the 29-member task force reviewed the recommendations of the [2007 Mayor's Immigration Study Commission](#); researching and recommending policies that facilitate access to city services for all residents of Charlotte; and addressing gaps in civic engagement. They are preparing a report



Panelists describe efforts in Charlotte. Left to right: Alvena Heggins, Jess George, Stefan Latorre, Emily Zimmern

with recommendations to the City Council about existing programs and services facilitating immigrant integration. Importantly, the Task Force is assessing the kinds of resources that the City of Charlotte will need to commit to implement recommendations. To support this work, the Task Force has engaged with staff and interns of the Charlotte International Cabinet (an advisory body to the Charlotte City Council). Emily Zimmern spoke of “framing our work as a moral imperative and also an economic imperative for the vibrancy of the state.”

Jess George described how immigrant service and advocacy organizations, which engage in the work of immigrant integration on a regular basis, provide an important foundation for city-wide initiatives. Organizations like the Latin American Coalition are working toward a “culture shift” to promote a greater respect and accountability for the welfare of immigrant residents. She emphasized how immigration policy may be federal, but immigrants are local because they are part of our communities. “They are who we are. . . We are each other’s people.” She recalled historical struggles of integration and incorporation, pointing out how power has to be taken rather than given. “We can’t rewrite history but we must demand justice for every person living now and in the future, and learn from those who have walked the roads.”



Panelists involved in the Welcoming Greensboro initiative share what they have learned. Left to right: Lori Khamala, Adamou Mohamed, Kathy Hinshaw, and Andrew Young.

Greensboro

Representatives from Greensboro described the Welcoming Greensboro Initiative, which represents a broad based community effort to make Greensboro a more inclusive community to all immigrants and refugees, regardless of their national origin or immigration status. The Welcoming Greensboro Initiative (WGI) was initiated by the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) in the fall of 2013 and has held 16 community conversations with over 200 people from 23 different countries with various immigration statuses and different ages. During the community conversations, participants shared what they liked about living in Greensboro, what their biggest challenges were as immigrants in the city, and what suggestions they had for

making Greensboro more inclusive. AFSC convened a Welcoming Greensboro Committee, which is a group of leaders of diverse immigrant communities in the city representing 13 different countries as well as staff from education, non-profit, refugee resettlement, and advocacy organizations. The Committee developed a series of recommendations for the Greensboro City Council and released a report based on the community discussions (tinyurl.com/WGIreport). As a result of this initiative, the City Council unanimously adopted a “Welcoming Greensboro Resolution” on April 15, 2014. Following this initiative was a May 2 launch of the International Advisory Committee by the city’s Human Relations Department and a June 19 press conference celebrating the release of the WGI report. The WGI continues to actively engage with city officials and other partners to push for the implementation of some of the important recommendations.

Panelists representing Welcoming Greensboro included Adamou Mohamed and Lori Khamala from the Immigrant Rights Program at the American Friends Service Committee, Kathy Hinshaw from the Center for New North Carolinians, and Andrew Young from Guilford College. They emphasized the importance of involving community members in the process from start to finish. “The only people who know what’s best are the people themselves,” Lori Khamala said. She highlighted five effective practices for municipal immigrant integration efforts:

- 1) It is critical to involve diverse immigrants from the beginning of the process (from different national, ethnic, racial and socioeconomic backgrounds).
- 2) There is a great deal of capacity within immigrant communities already to fill leadership opportunities.
- 3) Immigrant community members don’t always know the challenges faced by members of refugee communities and vice versa (language availability vs. legal status, etc.).
- 4) Many issues don’t just affect immigrants; they also affect people of color, low income people, etc.
- 5) It is important to recruit members from immigrant-led coalitions and organizations to participate in city boards and commissions to ensure representation of voices.
- 6) It is important to continue to report back to communities any results of these processes—don’t end communication with listening sessions or public meetings.

BEST PRACTICES FOR MUNICIPALITIES

- 1 Involve diverse immigrant groups from the beginning.
- 2 Recognize expertise within foreign-born communities.
- 3 Build in time for immigrants to learn about refugee issues and vice versa.
- 4 Consider how issues may be relevant for other community residents and seek their input.
- 5 Recruit foreign-born leaders to serve on municipal boards and commissions.



Adamou Mohamed and Kathy Hinshaw from describe immigrant integration efforts in Greensboro.

High Point Building Integrated Communities

The City of High Point has been active in past years in efforts to better integrate immigrant and refugee residents. Between 2011 and 2012, BIC participants met during a series of half-day summits, conducted interviews and focus groups, examined US census data to understand High Point's demographic changes, researched promising practices of immigrant integration policies from across the nation, and connected with other municipalities in North Carolina involved in similar efforts. This work was facilitated by the leadership of the Human Relations Department and the Building Integrated Communities team at UNC Chapel Hill's Latino Migration Project. All meetings were organized with the purpose of generating dialogue between immigrants and city leaders, examining a variety of different strategies to meet needs, creating consensus around specific action strategies, and finally, designing a community action plan. The Action Plan consists of 16 recommended initiatives, including the creation of two new committees under the Human Relations Department: the International Affairs Committee and the Interfaith Affairs Committee. The mission of the International Advisory Committee is to better represent immigrant perspectives to local government and in the wider High Point community, in addition to overseeing and addressing the recommendations put forth in the BIC action plan. The mission of the Interfaith Affairs Committee is to promote cultural and religious understanding by bringing people of diverse backgrounds together. Action items also include increased provision of bilingual information, access to the City's transit system in immigrant communities, and steps to link immigrants, service providers, and other residents through personal interaction and increased cultural knowledge. Download the full report at <https://migration.unc.edu/programs/bic/news-and-publications/>.



A delegation of representatives from High Point participated in the summit

At the summit, panel representatives from High Point included Narayan Khadka, Refugee Outreach Coordinator at Senior Resources of Guilford and President of the Triad Nepalese Community Center; Barbara Collins from the B'nai Israel Synagogue; and Cynthia Hall – all members of the now active Interfaith Affairs Committee of the Human Relations Department in the City of High Point. They described the creation of the Interfaith Advisory Committee out of the BIC process and described how the committee has brought together diverse members of different faiths to organize activities that promote cultural understanding and cooperation. Specifically, they described a number of activities they have organized over the past two years that include public forums and a World Religions Conference.



Cynthia Hall, Narayan Khadka, and Barbara Collins share details about their work in High Point

Greenville Building Integrated Communities

The City of Greenville has also been active in the Building Integrated Communities efforts under the leadership of the Greenville Human Relations Council. From 2010-2012, BIC participants in Greenville held five public meetings with community stakeholders that included non-profit and faith organization leaders; representatives from immigrant and refugee communities; educators from Pitt County Community College and East Carolina University (ECU); and city and county staff from a variety of departments such as the Sheriff, Police, and Emergency Services. More than 100 residents of Greenville, including representatives from 25 different countries, participated in this process. In addition to public meetings, the BIC planning team conducted interviews and focus groups, examined US census data to understand Greenville's demographic changes, and researched promising practices of immigrant integration policies from across the nation. Research highlighted that many immigrants want to get involved in the Greenville community and that immigrants face difficulties accessing city services (especially transportation) and information. In response to these findings, BIC created a proposal for an Immigrant Advisory Task Force and an action plan for the city of Greenville. The mission of the Immigrant Advisory Task Force is to encourage immigrants' involvement in local government, advise the Human Relations Council of issues relating to the immigrant community, and address the recommendations put forth in the action plan. Recommended initiatives in the action plan included making information about city services and events more available through public libraries, community festivals, resource fairs, radio stations, faith-based organizations, and local newspapers; providing bilingual information and building awareness about the City's transit system in immigrant communities. The final goal, to provide immigrants with more leadership opportunities in local government as well as learn about rights and responsibilities, will be addressed with initiatives such as a One-Stop Information Center, a Community Ambassador program, and monthly "Get to Know Your Neighbor" newspaper articles about immigrants and their contributions to the community. A full report about Building Integrated Communities in Greenville may be downloaded online at <http://isa.unc.edu/bic/news-publications/reports/>.

Participants from BIC Greenville at the summit included Juvencio Rocha-Peralta, Executive Director Association of Mexicans in North Carolina, Inc. (AMEXCAN) and Moses Pérez, Pastor and Community Advocate from Iglesia Pentecostal Unida. They spoke about some of the outcomes of this meeting process, including the Immigrant Advisory Board, which advises elected officials on challenges and possible solutions. Rocha-Peralta, who has worked for many years in eastern North Carolina to organize events and initiatives relating to Latino migrant communities on behalf of AMEXCAN, identified the challenges of working with local government and educational institutions, organizations, and community members. He spoke of the need to get more community members involved in local government activities and planning processes, particularly within Latino communities. He spoke of efforts to overcome resistance from public officials for creating new committees focused on the need to find a champion within local government to advocate for these efforts and change policies. One outcome of the process was the creation of a Latino Networking Group in collaboration with East Carolina University.

Moses Pérez spoke of the importance of relationship building that resulted from BIC meetings with city officials, and how better dialogue with law enforcement officials has positively impacted the faith community at his church. He also described how these relationships have led to new collaborations with ECU to create a Spanish medical interpretation training program that will provide more leadership and job opportunities for native Spanish speakers in the eastern North Carolina area.

Keynote address by Patience Lehrman

Following lunch, the summit featured a keynote talk by Patience Lehrman from the College of Education at Temple University (<http://vimeo.com/112829678>). Lehrman served as the National Director of Project SHINE, an immigrant integration initiative headquartered at Temple University with partners in 16 communities across the country. She is a 2012 recipient of the Presidential Citizens Medal, the second highest civilian award in the United States. She shared her personal story of moving to the United States from Cameroon, West Africa, securing her first job as a teacher in Washington State, and later running for Philadelphia School Board. Lehrman spoke of a larger vision for immigrant integration work and the importance of valuing and nurturing existing, organic, less formal community interactions (what she referred to as “little i” work) as much as larger policy and legislative efforts (“big I” work). “The ‘big I’ to me symbolizes the legislative arm of integration efforts while the ‘little i’ represents the myriad of ways in which newcomers and long-term residents form connections and develop bonds that allow for mutual acceptance and respect beyond what can ever be legislated. The message I wanted to get across was that we should explore ways to amplify the work of the ‘little i’ just as much as we work to promote legislation,” she explained.



Keynote speaker Patience Lehrman

“The little ‘i’ is . . . the myriad of ways in which newcomers and long-term residents form connections and develop bonds that allow for mutual acceptance and respect beyond what can ever be legislated.”

--Patience Lehrman

Workshops

In the afternoon, participants joined smaller workshops for reflection, networking, and dialogue. Facilitators recorded notes about each group discussion and later reported back to the large group about conversations. Below we summarize themes from the day's conversations and dialogue. Guiding questions for these conversations consisted of the following:

What practices/projects have you found compelling?

What are the major barriers to doing this work in your community?

What kind of support do you need to do this work?

How can we evaluate and institutionalize our work?

How can we measure the effectiveness of integration strategies?



Burlington Chief of Police Jeffrey Smythe and High Point Human Relations Director Al Heggins



Principles guiding our integration work

Throughout the panels, large group discussions, and small group workshops, participants articulated the importance of some crucial, shared principles that guide their work.

Core Values in our Integration Work

- Listen to, and meaningfully involve, immigrants themselves from the start of projects, and also prioritize the occupation of leadership positions by immigrants.
- Include all members from both immigrant and refugee communities who are of diverse racial, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds. This necessitates examination of within-group racism, classism, etc.
- Learn about local lessons learned from the integration of African American communities. Some panels and small groups emphasized the importance of acknowledging the local struggles of African Americans and involving African Americans in their projects.

Core Values

- 1 Involve immigrants in all phases of projects. Prioritize immigrant leadership.
- 2 Include and examine diversity within immigrant communities.
- 3 Learn about local lessons learned from the integration of African American communities.

The Challenges of Assessment to Action

- 1 Funding
- 2 Overcoming political resistance
- 3 “Winning hearts”

Moving From Assessment to Action

Many participants expressed a desire for information and tools to help them ensure that their assessment-based recommendations become realities. Participants shared both frustrations and strategies, as well as some new ideas, in overcoming political resistance; securing program and position funding; and “winning hearts” to counter deep-seeded racism and anti-immigrant sentiment. Successful municipal integration initiatives must assess and develop strategies for

overcoming these challenges early on in planning processes. Participants engaged in passionate dialogue about organizational messaging and debated the strengths and limitations of advocating for programming based on a “moral imperative” (sharing power) versus economic justifications (incentives for all).

Valuing “Small i” Work

One of Keynote Speaker Patience Lehrman’s primary messages—that we must value and nurture existing, organic, less formal community interactions (“small i” work) as much as we value and nurture larger policy and legislative efforts (“big I” work)—resonated deeply with participants. Following Lerhman’s speech, participants in both small group workshops and larger group discussions repeated the value of focusing on existing community interactions and organizations and ways to facilitate relationship building between individual people.

The importance of investing in local experts

In many municipalities, there are institutions and organizations that have been working toward immigrant integration and leadership development in its many forms for decades. These may be organizations with dedicated missions to serve a specific immigrant or ethnic group, but they also consist of public institutions with a mandate to serve all residents regardless of immigration status, such as k-12 schools, hospitals, and many government agencies. While many of the public institutions in North Carolina are in need of bilingual and bicultural staff that better reflect the composition of our diversifying demographics, these local organizations and institutions possess important knowledge and expertise and play a critical role in larger municipal dialogues and the formation of comprehensive, city-wide strategies. At the same time they have much to gain from increased funding to enhance or innovate existing programs and activities, particularly from national foundations that are driving many initiatives relating to municipal immigrant integration work.

A National Perspective

The summit closed with perspectives on municipal immigrant integration efforts on a national scale. Dan Rearick, Executive Director of Uniting NC, shared information about how Uniting NC has been active in Welcoming Greensboro and other efforts in North Carolina and is connected to national efforts through funding from the organization Welcoming America (WA). WA’s Cities and Counties initiative has resulted in a network of cities across the country signing welcoming proclamations for immigrants. Rearick discussed the benefits of being part of a larger national network, which provides access to other people who have already done research and have lessons we can learn from. Other benefits include national recognition, which can be important for attracting more support and potentially funding.

Invest in Local Experts

- 1** Local immigrant and refugee organizations
- 2** The local public sector: K-16 schools, hospitals, local government agencies
- 3** Non-profit and religious organizations
- 4** The local private sector: immigrant-owned businesses and media, entertainment and sports professionals



NEXT STEPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

At the closing of the summit, participants shared their recommendations and visions for next steps to build upon this statewide summit on immigrant integration. Many participants expressed a desire to continue the momentum gained from this statewide summit, voicing the need to come together to share best practices and lessons learned more frequently. Major recommendations included:

- 1) Develop stronger networks for information sharing
- 2) Build stronger networks and relationships across municipalities in North Carolina
- 3) Host an annual summit on Municipal Immigrant Integration
- 4) Prepare a comprehensive report on the summit activities and participant recommendations.

In response to these recommendations, Latino Migration Project staff created a listserv that includes conference participants and other interested colleagues to share information and continue communicating. This report outlines in detail some of the municipal integration initiatives and their contact information (below). Additionally, the proceedings of this conference are being shared with other national and state networks, including the White House Task Force on New Americans, the League of Municipalities, and the Partnership for New Americans. This report is available at <http://migration.unc.edu>.



Josh Hinson, Clinical Instructor at UNC Chapel Hill School of Social Work, facilitates a workshop.

RESOURCES AND INFORMATION ABOUT SPECIFIC INITIATIVES

The Latino Migration Project provides research and educational expertise on Latin American immigration and integration issues in North Carolina. It is a collaborative program of the [Institute for the Study of the Americas](#) and the [Center for Global Initiatives](#) at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <http://migration.unc.edu>.

Building Integrated Communities is an initiative of the Latino Migration Project that strengthens civic engagement, linguistic achievement, and economic and educational advancement for immigrants in NC municipalities. BIC helps local governments successfully engage with immigrants and refugee populations to improve public safety, promote economic development, enhance communication, and improve relationships. Between 2010-2012, more than 350 foreign-born residents representing 26 countries participated in these planning processes across the state. For resources and more details, see <http://migration.unc.edu/programs/bic/>

Welcoming Greensboro

Initiated by the American Friends Service Committee, the Welcoming Greensboro Initiative (WGI) represents a broad based community effort to make Greensboro a more inclusive community to all immigrants and refugees, regardless of their national origin or immigration status (tinyurl.com/WGIreport).

Charlotte Immigrant Integration Task Force

On November 25, 2013, Charlotte City Council adopted a resolution to create an inter-agency Immigrant Integration Task Force to maximize immigrants' economic and civic contributions to the city of Charlotte. In 2014, the 29-member task force will review the recommendations of the [2007 Mayor's Immigration Study Commission](#); research and recommend policies that facilitate access to city services for all residents of Charlotte, while addressing gaps in civic engagement; prepare a report with recommendations to the City Council that promotes awareness among the public of the availability of existing programs and services facilitating immigrant integration; and seek opportunities to better educate the Charlotte community on how embracing immigrant communities will help move the city forward.

High Point

The City of High Point has engaged in a number of different efforts to engage with its immigrant and refugee residents, including participation in Building Integrated Communities Program from 2010-2013. Out of this process, the Human Relations Department in the City of High Point created an immigrant integration action plan (approved in 2012) that is comprehensive in its scope (involving all city agencies as well as multiple community institutions, organizations, and businesses) and includes 16 different action items directly related to increasing immigrants' knowledge about city services, agencies, and programs. The HRC also created an International

Advisory Committee and an Interfaith Advisory Committee, tasked with implementing the action plan.

Greenville

The City of Greenville participated in the Building Integrated Communities Program from 2010-2013. The Human Relations Commission hosted a series of meetings over two years and partnered with faculty at ECU to map out immigrant neighborhoods. Greenville's action plan (approved by the City Council in 2012) was designed around several priorities that included improving access to services and information, particularly about the city's public transit system and emergency services, which research revealed to be underutilized by foreign born residents.

Sanford

Sanford joined Building Integrated Communities in 2014 and is currently in the process of asset mapping and needs assessments of immigrant residents. The City is partnering with local agencies to identify strategies to enable local Latino communities to better participate in local government, businesses, and the community as a whole.

Winston Salem

The City of Winston Salem joined Building Integrated Communities in 2014 and seeks to better communicate with and provide services for Latino residents through consolidation of information about services. Participants in the effort will include the Hispanic League, The International Center at Forsyth Technical Community College, Wake Forest University, Hispanic Interaction, the Indo-U.S. Cultural Association, Second Harvest Food Bank and Forsyth Futures.

Uniting NC

Uniting NC has been proud to support the efforts of community partners across North Carolina to build more immigrant-friendly, successful communities. To date, over 7,000 North Carolinians -- both longtime residents and recent immigrants and refugees -- have participated in Uniting NC's programs. In particular, the Welcoming Greensboro Initiative has been a model community-driven effort, led by diverse community members with outstanding support from AFSC. Together with the BIC Program and national partners, Uniting NC aims to help spread this model of positive engagement to cities across North Carolina. www.unitingnc.org



For more information, visit
<http://migration.unc.edu/programs/bic/>

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