BARRIERS TO OPPORTUNITIES

1. QUALITY, AFFORDABLE HOUSING
   Lack of affordable and quality housing was identified as one of the primary factors contributing to the poor quality of life for Des Moines residents. Poor housing conditions due to landlord's lack of commitment to improve quality has negatively impacted the health, a sense of belonging and overall well-being of many immigrant and refugee residents. Residents shared that lack of affordable housing has forced them to either live in substandard housing conditions or relocate to areas that are too far from necessary programs and services. Residents shared the desire to own a home, but experienced limitations due to lack of home ownership literacy, low income jobs and/or poor credit history.

2. ECONOMIC STABILITY
   RIAS youth participants shared that they had to prioritize jobs over extracurricular activities as their parents/guardians were not earning livable wages. Most students shared their desire to relocate to surrounding smaller cities with more opportunities for higher-paying entry-level jobs. Residents in all three dialogue projects shared that underemployment and unemployment have led to limitations in finding and connecting with resources to pursue better economic opportunities. With increased housing costs, limited healthcare and resources, language limitations, transportation barriers, and other negatively contributing factors, residents expressed challenges in contributing to the economic prosperity of their family and their community.

3. WORKFORCE DEMOGRAPHICS & ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES
   In all three dialogue projects, residents shared lack of representation and reflective demographics in the city of Des Moines workforce, particularly in front-facing and management positions. They expressed that the workforce contributes to reduced trust in City government and its processes. Residents expressed they were hesitant seeking City services, participating in programs, or contributing to and engaging in City’s initiatives. Additionally, they shared the limited economic opportunities that support historically marginalized residents to be self-sufficient. Business owners and entrepreneurs reflected on the complex processes and limited resources to start and sustain small businesses, and believe the City can lead community-wide efforts to provide culturally-specific, economic empowerment programs.

4. LANGUAGE & CULTURAL DIFFERENCES
   Due to limited translation and interpretation services in the community, residents shared increased misunderstandings and misinterpretation of information disseminated by the City and service providers. This has led to increased discomfort and disengagement from landlords, employers, city services, other service providers, and businesses. As a result, residents have often been terminated from employment, denied services, and evicted from housing. This also makes it difficult for residents with limited English proficiency to effectively navigate the City and other public services. Lack of support for local ethnic-based organizations to be self-sufficient and self-sustaining prevents individuals from receiving culturally-specific services and resources.

“(Parents) are scared to talk because they’re not from here, they have the mindset that if they talk, they will be punished.”
— Lincoln High School Student

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

SAFETY AND JUSTICE DiALOGUES
The Des Moines Police Department and Civil & Human Rights Commission utilized a discussion packet entitled “Safety and Justice: How Should Communities Reduce Violence?” to facilitate 11 solution-focused, small group dialogues. Over 200 participants, across multiple sectors and leadership positions, shared creative ideas on violence reduction as well as stronger community relations with law enforcement and local government. These ideas and solutions were narrowed into nine overarching concepts, and shared with the community in an art-gallery format in three community locations. 400 community members voted to help prioritize the nine concepts for City of Des Moines and its partners to strategically implement actions.

REFUGEE AND IMMIGRANT ADVISORY SUBCOMMITTEE (RIAS)
RIAS is a commission subcommittee comprised of community members that are a part of or work directly with immigrant and refugee communities. The group works directly with those impacted to identify barriers that prevent individuals from prospering as Des Moines residents. Over the course of six months, nearly 50 high school students and over 200 residents participated in dialogues to share their experience living in Des Moines, and factors that prevent them from advancement. The Commission used this information and advice from RIAS to strategize and make recommendations as reflected on this document.

LESBIAN GAY BISEXUAL TRANSGENDER ADVISORY COUNCIL (LGBTAC)
LGBTAC, another Commission subcommittee, includes members of the LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, and other related orientations and identities) and allies to identify and share the experience living in Des Moines. The LGBTAC raises awareness, educates, and advocates for the civil rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer residents and visitors of Des Moines to ensure the city's department and services are fair and inclusive. The group also advocates for the civil rights of LGBTQ+ residents as well as provides information to the LGBTQ+ communities about the commission. LGBTAC conducted two listening sessions with over 40 community members, identifying several barriers to advancement among LGBTQ+ communities that are also incorporated in the recommendations.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADVANCEMENT

Championed by Mayor Frank Cownie, Bridging the Gap is a community-centered, solution-focused effort to address community issues and remove systemic barriers, so that all Des Moines residents can achieve their full potential. City, county, state government, business leaders, service providers, and community members across the Greater Des Moines Area were engaged in conversations and dialogues; Refugee and Immigrant Advisory Sub-committee; and LesbianGay Bisexual & Transgender Advisory Council.

Des Moines Civil and Human Rights Commission has identified preliminary and long-term action steps for the Des Moines City Council to consider for implementation. These recommendations were voted and prioritized by the community. These recommendations encompass input received through all three dialogue projects engaging a total of almost 900 Des Moines residents. The Commission strongly recommends incorporating equitable community engagement practices to ensure residents participate in the planning and implementation of our recommended action steps.

1. Quality, Affordable, Stable Housing

a. **IMMEDIATE IMPLEMENTATION:** Establish “Lawful Source of Income” as a protected class to ensure income generated from Disability, Social Security Section 8, Veterans, and other government-funded benefits are legally accepted for rent payments.
b. Require all landlords to participate in Fair Housing training every three years as a part of the rental recertification process.
c. Offer training to the landlords to increase awareness about cultural and language differences.
d. Remove overly restrictive denial of admissions in the Des Moines Municipal Housing Authority Section 8 program.
e. Adopt a policy for enforcing a strict, consistent, and stranger rental and neighborhood expectation to ensure tenants are not being charged market-rate rent for substandard quality homes.

2. Economic Stability #LadderUP

a. **IMMEDIATE IMPLEMENTATION:** Allocate and disburse $50,000 from the City’s budget for LadderUP Pilot Grant Program for community organizations to provide and/or expand on upskilling programs and sustainable business start-up support.
b. Implement #KnowTheProcessDSM campaign in collaboration with community organizations to inform and educate entrepreneurs and small-business owners on permitting, licensing, and financing processes designated by city codes.
c. Access and improve the City of Des Moines’ hiring process with a goal to have a workforce that is reflective of the demographics of the community.
   Considerations should be given to race or ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, language ability, religion, and other identities by being intentional about creating postings that are more accessible.
d. Support the metro-wide effort to establish an Ethnics Community Based Organizations Incubator program that aims to support community-based and smaller organizations to establish a strong, self-sustaining foundation to assist their ethnic communities in social and economic advancement.

3. City Programs and Workforce Demographics

a. **IMMEDIATE IMPLEMENTATION:** Implement and enforce a Des Moines Police Department-wide policy that focuses on positive first interactions.
   i. Police officers to pass out an Information Card (Officer Name, Badge #, Phone Number, Email/Website to submit comment/complaint) at the request of the public and during police encounters that involve case-specific questioning/query.
   ii. Mandate community engagement and provide compensatory hours when non-NBBS officers volunteer at community events or participate in community-led efforts.
   iii. Design and/or renovate public parks, facilities, and spaces that strongly incorporate community interests, needs, and cultural relevancy.
   iv. Update City forms that collect demographic information to include gender diversity and sexual orientation.
   v. Modify and update City-wide building codes to require single-stall restrooms be gender-inclusive.
   vi. Partner with Des Moines Public Schools for all first responders to interact with students in elementary schools and throughout middle-school to promote career options in public service.
   v. In the last two years of high school, offer college-level criminal justice courses to interested students followed by scholarships at area college to prepare to be first responders. Provide housing incentives for those that decide to live and serve the Des Moines community.
   vii. Adopt a Language Access Policy to ensure all key City of Des Moines documents and information are translated in at least the top 12 languages spoken in Des Moines, and additional translation based on need/request.
   viii. Offer additional scoring points to City of Des Moines job-seeking applicants for language skills.
   ix. An option for residents and visitors to file complaints or comments about experience with police encounters with the Civil & Human Rights Department, either on the website, phone, or in-person. Civil & Human Rights Department would complete the initial intake form.

b. **IMMEDIATE IMPLEMENTATION:** Update City forms that collect demographic information to include gender diversity and sexual orientation.

4. Ongoing, Mandatory Training for All City Staff

a. **IMMEDIATE IMPLEMENTATION:** Allocate resources, including staff positions, to offer regular and mandatory trainings to all City staff.
   i. Implicit bias and de-escalation training offered by a nationally recognized trainer to all first responders (Des Moines Police, Des Moines Fire and all Emergency Management Services staff). Assessments would be included in the annual review process to measure improvements.
   ii. Implicit bias, diversity, inclusion and equity, poverty simulation, cultural proficiency, institutional racism, and/or cultural sensitivity training to all City of Des Moines staff, executives, and elected officials. Assessments would be included in the annual review process to measure improvements.

“I fear not being promoted, if out. Sexuality will impact the opportunity to advance, especially because it’s a public-sector job.”
— Des Moines Resident

OTHER KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the most-voted recommendations, the Commission has identified additional strategies that, we believe, the City can act upon expeditiously to continue to become a model city.

1. Housing incentives (e.g. down payment or closing costs, renovation/upgrade fund, low/interest-free loan programs, etc.) to encourage all police officers and other City employees to work and live in Des Moines.

2. Policy to include Chief of Police and/or hiring police manager in reviewing police applications with Civil Service Commission prior to finalizing the list of approved applicants to ensure increased diversity in finalist pool.

3. Hire a Social Media Relations Coordinator in the police department to record and publish community activities led and promoted by Des Moines Police Department to increase public awareness and strengthen community relations.

4. Reorganize a position at the Police Academy as a Recruitment Officer to promote and gauge interest among youth and adults to consider career in policing to further diversify the applicant pool.

5. Make rules, policies, practices, and procedures available online to be easily accessible to the community (e.g. operations policy, training materials, etc.).

6. A policy that prohibits all City staff from inquiring about citizenship status unless required by law.