THE CITY OF CHARLOTTE'S INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY AND SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION



Mayor's International Cabinet Strategic Plan (1993)

The City of Charlotte's intentional international strategy dates to 1993, with the release of the City of Charlotte's "Mayor's International Cabinet Strategic Plan." At the time, Mayor Vinroot invited members of the Charlotte community to advise him on how best to facilitate Charlotte's transition into an international city. The Cabinet identified six essential goals: 1.) Visibility and Awareness; 2.) Community Services and Welcome; 3.) Education; 4.) Higher Education and Business; 5.) International Business and Economic Development; 6.) International Organization.

- <u>Visibility</u>: improved global awareness of Charlotte as an international city
- <u>Community Services and Welcome</u>: creation of an environment that welcomes and values international visitors and citizens. Further, for citizens, this includes (equitable) access to all community services, regardless of language skills or country of origin.
- <u>Education</u>: educate the Charlotte community on tolerance and assist in the development of cultural understanding. This education can encompass languages and skills, as well as history, geography, and a sense of global interconnectedness.
- <u>Higher Education and Business</u>: coordinate higher education and business to leverage an educated and trained workforce able to meet the demands of international business and manufacturing.
- <u>International Business and Economic Development</u>: Support the current economic development of the City, County, Charlotte Chamber, and Carolinas Partnership in promoting both foreign investment in Charlotte and the expansion of local industry abroad.
- <u>International Organizations</u>: Enhance the visibility, credibility, and viability of local nonprofit international organizations, promoting their effective coordination.

Furthermore, an action plan identifying the most important, feasible, and least expensive steps that citizens and regional institutions can take to make Charlotte an international city-state. The action plan outlined both short-term and long-term goals in achieving the above. Numerous short- and long-term goals have been fulfilled over time. The complete Action Plan is located on pages 5-10 of the "Charlotte International Strategic Plan." Some example goals as outlined include:

Overall Goal: Make the City and region friendly and accessible to visitors and citizens

• Some Short-Term Goals Outlined

- Provide multilingual capabilities for public services
- Arrange programs to teach members of various ethnic communities and organizations how to seek social services for their community members.
- Enhance the availability and visibility of English language (ESL) and literacy classes by publicizing the opportunities.

Some Long-Term Goals Outlined

- Support the continued growth of CLT airport, both with additional international freight and passenger services.
- Support the design of a flexible and affordable regional transportation system to accommodate international visitors.

Overall Goal: Develop cultural understanding in the Charlotte community

• Some Short-Term Goals Outlined

Design an orientation program for international newcomers.



- Increase community awareness of growing international populations, their contributions, and needs.
- Include the need for understanding and tolerance of cultural and religious diversity in all educational criteria.
- Some Long-Term Goals Outlined
 - Develop cross-cultural training programs for individuals working with international citizens, such as those in banks, hospitals, social service agencies, and schools.

Mayor's Immigration Study Commission (2007)

In January 2007, the Mayor's Immigration Study Commission released the report, "Immigration: Legal and Illegal, Local Perspective- Charlotte, NC." Former Mayor Patrick McCroy, concerned about the impact of the changing immigration landscape, created the Commission. Mayor McCroy charged the 28-member Commission to analyze the effect of immigration on the Charlotte region's quality of life, public safety, and economic opportunities. The executive summary highlights the impacts of "illegal" or undocumented immigration as well as recommendations that facilitate the implementation of local, state, and federal public policy.

The executive summary begins by establishing the current state of immigration in the US and North Carolina, before asserting that Charlotte, NC, was the first known City in the US to conduct an in-depth study of its kind. Highlights of the report's findings and the data gathered focused on public safety, economic development/workforce, education, and healthcare. For each topic area, the report highlights the current state of the United States and North Carolina, as well as the County and City specifically. The summary ends with the identification of 26 recommendations for elected officials to enact. The complete set of recommendations is located on pages 6-10 of the Executive Summary PDF.

CIC Evaluation & Recommendations Report (2012)

The Charlotte International Cabinet (CIC) was created in 2008 through a merger of the Mayor's International Cabinet (MIC) and Charlotte Sister Cities (CSC). In June 2012, The Lee Institute assessed the current CIC mission and structure to create recommendations surrounding 1.) the mission, vision, and objectives of the Cabinet; 2.) the optimal structure to support the mission and vision; 3.) clarity around CIC's role in the community; 4.) engaging cabinet members in the organization's work; 5.) leadership needs for the organization. The methodology included interviewing 20 CIC stakeholders, researching best practices of the International Cabinet/International Affairs Department, examining Sister City Organizations, and conducting an online survey of Charlotte City Council Members and CIC Cabinet members. The Lee Institute's complete recommendations are on pages 9-14.

<u>Mission and Focus</u>: The CIC's primary focus, as identified by the Lee Institute, included creating and maintaining working relationships that support and foster the City of Charlotte's international economic development, as well as enhancing its status as a global city through oversight of the Sister Cities program. The CIC should not take the primary role in economic development, but instead serve as the entry point for international relations between governments, supporting and working collaboratively with the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, the Charlotte Regional Partnership, and other organizations involved in international economic development.

Structure and Organization: Two options were proposed_for the CIC's continued structure and organization: 1.) maintain its current 501(c)3 status and quasi-governmental affiliation with the CoC. The Sister Cities would remain a part of CIC with changes to the structure and oversight; 2.) become an Office of International Affairs housed in the City Manager's or Mayor's Office or Economic Development. Recommendations on the board



structure included reducing the CIC board to 18 to 24 members, in line with best practices for nonprofit boards. Additionally, the Institute proposed that the Sister Cities program become a committee of the board. A staff structure was proposed to support the International Cabinet or Office of International Affairs that would include an Executive Director, Program and Events Director, Sister Cities Director/Coordinator, Protocol Officer, Administrative Assistant, and Interns. Furthermore, the following year or so, the City established the Office of International Relations, housed within Neighborhood & Business Services (NBS). While the Office has since been disbanded, the International Relations Manager at the time, still engages in international work on behalf of the City through the Economic Development department.

<u>CIC Program Focus</u>: Sister City Relationships, MICA Awards, CIC Forums, International Organization Meeting, International Entrepreneur and Small Business Owners Meeting, Student Exchange Program, and Beaujolais Festival (restructured as a fundraiser for the Sister Cities committee).

Resolution Creating the Immigrant Integration Task Force (2013)

On November 25, 2013, the Charlotte City Council adopted the "Resolution of Charlotte City Council Creating an Inter-Agency Task Force to Maximize Immigrants' Economic and Civic Contributions to the City of Charlotte," outlining the structure of the task force, appointment guidelines, and scope of work.

- 1.) The Task Force shall consist of up to 29 members, with Mayor Patsy Kinsey appointing seven members representing specific areas of expertise, Mayor Patrick Cannon appointing up to four at-large members, and the City Council appointing the remaining members. Mayor Kinsey also selects a Chair and Vice-Chair from the appointed members. Lastly, Mayor Cannon did not make any appointments as he was out of office before the appointments were made.
- 2.) The work of the Task Force is to be sponsored by the Charlotte International Cabinet, Neighborhood and Business Services, and may receive private funds as required to complete work.
- 3.) The Task Force is charged with a.) reviewing the recommendations of the Mayor's Immigration Study Commission (2007) to leverage previous research and conclusions; b.) research and recommend policies; c.) prepare a report with recommendations to Charlotte City Council promoting the availability of existing programs and services to the public; d.) seek opportunities to better educate the overall Charlotte community on embracing immigrant communities to move the City forward.
- 4.) The Task Force shall deliver its findings to the Council within one year of their first meeting.
- 5.) Upon delivering the findings and recommendations, the Task Force will work with the Charlotte City Council to promote initiatives that facilitate immigrant integration in financial inclusion, education, civic integration, public safety, collaboration, and the celebration of diversity.
- 6.) The Task Force will meet quarterly to assess progress on recommendations and to ensure that city services and public-private partnerships are being effectively implemented. Lastly, the task force must periodically invite public comment and participation.



Immigrant Integration Task Force Report (2015)

In 2014, the City of Charlotte, under the direction of the City Council, established the Immigrant Integration Task Force (IITF). The purpose of the special task force was to determine how immigrants could better integrate into the Charlotte community. Over the years from 2014 to 2015, the IITF held numerous community listening sessions before presenting its findings to the public on January 15, 2015. It then presented the final plan to the full Council the following March. Many of the ideas focused on ways to improve relationships between immigrants and law enforcement, as well as increasing the accessibility of City services. Another part of the plan emphasized immigrant-owned businesses (WCNC Charlotte, 2015).

What resulted was a 35-page report outlining the current state of immigration in Charlotte, specifically the percentage of foreign-born residents residing in the City, their demographic makeup, and where they reside within the City, among other details. At the time of the report, the percentage of foreign-born residents in Charlotte was 15% compared to Detroit, which had the lowest rate of 5% of foreign-born residents. Furthermore, the report noted that, contrary to popular perceptions of immigrant settlement patterns, most immigrants in Charlotte reside in suburban neighborhoods rather than the city center. These newcomers to Charlotte have spurred community development and bolstered the City's culture and arts activities. At the time, immigrants owned 16.3% of all businesses in the Charlotte region. The report noted that Charlotte's advantage as an attractive destination for foreign-born residents was at risk due to the presence of state-level policies and anti-immigrant activities.

The task force was created due to Charlotte's rapid population growth and increasing diversity, which thrust Charlotte toward national attention and identified the City as a new gateway city. On November 25, 2013, Mayor Patsy Kinsey and Councilmember David Howard introduced the resolution to create the interagency task force. Those appointed to the task force included various coalitions, City and County officials, faith leaders, and other community members. The City Council Resolution set the following charges for the Immigrant Integration Task Force:

- Review the recommendations set by the Mayor's (2007) Immigration Study Commission to leverage previous research and conclusions.
- Research and recommend policies, including those from other newly identified gateway cities, that facilitate access to city services while addressing gaps in civic engagement.
- <u>Prepare a report with recommendations for the City Council</u>, promoting public awareness of existing programs and services that facilitate immigrant integration.
- <u>Seek opportunities to better educate the overall Charlotte community</u> on embracing immigrant communities.

The task force was eventually split into six working groups, each focused on specific areas: economic development, public safety, transportation/housing, education, healthcare and social services, and civic engagement/receiving communities. The task force's guiding principles emphasized economic growth, equitable access, inclusion, connection, and well-being for all. The strategies recommended by the Immigrant Integration Task Force encompassed the following:

- Support Immigrant and Refugee Entrepreneurship and Small Businesses and Promote Economic Development by:
 - Supporting small business growth
 - Creating a Shop Local list of all small businesses and increasing Small Business
 Certification of immigrant-owned businesses
 - Prototyping economic development strategies



- Establishing a program for neighborhoods to apply for designation as International Corridors
- Creating stronger neighborhoods, business corridors, and grassroots leadership
- Creating a "Going Global" campaign

• Ensure and Enhance Access to Services of Local Government by:

- Establishing and staffing an "Office of New Charlotteans"
- Creating a welcoming Charlotte-Mecklenburg partnership
- Evaluating the charges and composition of existing and newly created City and County citizen advisory boards and commissions
- Creating a "fair housing/code enforcement" team
- Examining the needs of workers, employers, and services for public transportation
- Expanding City programs for youth
- Designating a City office, such as the Community Relations Committee, to oversee the investigation and enforcement of the "Notario" fund

• Promote citizenship by:

Encouraging eligible Legal Permanent Residents to naturalize and become citizens

• Promote Public Safety by:

- Increasing collaboration and communication between law enforcement and immigrant communities
- Creating an awareness campaign, in coordination with community organizations
- Creating a voluntary Community ID card
- Encourage the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department and Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office to collaborate.
- Enhance street lighting infrastructure to increase the safety of pedestrians and cyclists

• Promote Health by:

• Enhance/Increase educational efforts for incoming immigrants regarding health care and available options (ACA and Medicaid)

• Promote Education by:

 Establishing a framework to create Welcoming Schools and expand successful programs system-wide

• Promote Inclusion by:

- Increasing cultural competency, language proficiency, and access
- Enlisting community partners from all sectors who support launching and strengthening welcoming, immigrant-friendly programming in the broader community
- Partnering with festivals and cultural institutions that celebrate immigrants' cultures and heritage, promoting annual activities for the national Welcoming Week
- Aligning new/expanding programs for immigrants and refugees
- Convening meetings
- Supporting state and national efforts to enact inclusive, comprehensive reforms

Summary of International Cabinet Scope

Since the Cabinet's foundation, it has covered many different topics related to international affairs, most of the time they touched economic development in some way, typically the goal was to raise Charlotte as a world-class city that would be an attractive market for FDI and to attract talent from all



over the world. They often served as an intergovernmental bridge between other agencies, such as the CPCC, CMS, the County, and others. Their advisement was typically reactive, such as studying the need for better crisis communications with non-English speakers after the non-English speaking population was disproportionately affected by the 2002 ice storm (Hispanics sustained 23% of total injuries and 65% of carbon monoxide poisonings during the storm period). The Cabinet typically brought in other experts through their networks to help with research and building recommendations. The studies were often conducted with committees that ran concurrently with the daily business of the Cabinet.

There was a body where foreign businesses, immigrant communities, and others could go and express concerns and work with Charlotte to find solutions. Sometimes the board functions as the pilot for broader programs, such as hosting test listening sessions for the 2014/15 Immigrant Integration Task Force or the 'Know Your Services' campaign shared with refugees. Before 2009, the Cabinet met every other month and then would host stakeholder meetings (honorary consuls, educational partners, chambers, etc.) in the intervening months for the Mayor's Office. Between 2009 and 2013, the Cabinet meetings became monthly, and the stakeholder meetings were integrated into the schedule and used to help with the CIC's nonprofit programming.

From July 2013 to 2017, the stakeholder meetings remained Cabinet meetings, and City Staff shifted their focus to aid city programming after the sunset of the CIC's nonprofit arm. One of the Cabinet's last presentations to the Council took place at the Economic Development Committee meeting on May 9, 2022 (the other was related to global sustainability efforts, presented to full Council). The charges from the Council to the Cabinet at the time:

- 1.) Provide recommendations on international affairs.
- 2.) Promote a forum to convene the international, immigrant, and other communities.
- 3.) Encourage the growth of international business.
- 4.) Keep up on trends in the international immigrant communities and business-government relations
- 5.) Advise on international travel and formal invitations for incoming delegations

At the time of the last presentation, Charlotte's foreign-born population was 17%, over 1,000 foreign companies operated in the region, over 19,000 immigrants owned small businesses in the metro, and 87% of NC exporters were small and medium-sized enterprises. <u>Cabinet recommendations</u>:

- 1.) Support the language access policy
- 2.) Strategically include immigrants in Workforce Development and job efforts
- 3.) Create an International Business Strategy
- 4.) Promote civic global connections through Sister Cities
- 5.) Formulate a policy on Memoranda of Understanding between Charlotte and other cities globally
- 6.) Further support naturalization for its eligible members
- 7.) Leverage the United Nations Sustainable Development through Charlotte's 2040 plan



Other Cities' Use of International Relations

City diplomacy refers to the institutions and processes through which cities engage with actors on the international political stage, to represent themselves and their interests to one another. There are various dimensions of city diplomacy and foreign policy, with the six most often identified in the literature as security, development, economic, cultural, cooperative, and representative. One important motive for engaging in diplomacy is the economy. City diplomats can ensure economic gain in their City by attracting tourists and foreign companies, as well as hosting international organizations and events (van der Pluijm and Melissen 2007). According to the 2024 Cities and International Engagement Survey, the professionalization of city diplomacy is on the rise. While only 19% of cities had staff who had received relevant international work training in 2018, this percentage has risen to 57% in 2024, highlighting the growing importance of this work at the city level (Pejic et al. 2025).

Furthermore, while there are risks associated with cities 'going global, failing to engage in urban diplomacy means missing numerous opportunities related to social, political, cultural, and economic capital. Additionally, these cities run the risk of falling behind in comparison to other peer cities that compete on the global stage (Marchetti 2022). A majority of (larger) cities place some emphasis on diplomacy and international relations, often through the implementation of an international cabinet or task force, sister cities partnerships, and integration of diplomacy and/or foreign policy practices into an existing department (most often economic development). Although, as time has passed, more and more cities have started to take a more active role, moving toward the integration of Offices of International Affairs. Cities with these offices tasked to handle global affairs include:

- New York City Mayor's Office for International Affairs
 - Provides an international platform for the City to promote its goals for a more equitable and inclusive society, with services and programming that cultivate critical partnerships with the international community.
 - The Office collaborates with the Economic Development department to recruit international businesses and expand NYC businesses internationally (NYC Mayor's Office for International Affairs, 2025).
- Los Angeles Office of International Affairs
 - Unlike other cities, L.A. has a Deputy Mayor of International Affairs, appointed by the Mayor of L.A.
 - As with most other offices of its kind, the Office works to expand global ties, helping to bring jobs, culture, visitors, and even the 2028 Olympics to the City.
- Houston Mayor's Office of Trade and International Affairs (MOTIA)
 - The Office is dedicated to preserving, promoting, and fostering the continued growth of Houston's status as an international city.
 - The MOTIA works to promote Houston to the world, bridge international barriers to help Houston companies expand their businesses and embrace global partnerships and international trade.



- MOTIA assists foreign businesses seeking to expand in Houston, including arranging and managing incoming delegations and collaborating with local organizations to promote international services.
- Atlanta Mayor's Office of International and Immigrant Affairs ("Welcoming Atlanta")
 - The mission of this Office is to develop and foster relationships between Atlanta's international community, City departments, and external partners to empower Atlanta's foreign-born population. This is achieved through access to information, the identification of economic opportunities, and the addressing of local and global challenges.
- Austin- Economic Development Department
 - The City of Austin's international diplomacy and protocol work is engaged in by one employee (in Economic Development) with other staff members who help manage international business incentives and programs. Although, the City of Austin, in a special report from November 2024, stated that Austin has less resources than other leading cities.
- Philadelphia- Department of Commerce
 - The Department of Commerce has international business staff that can assist with international businesses hoping to establish in Philadelphia and can connect Philadelphia businesses with strategic (international) partners.
- Seattle- Office of Intergovernmental Relations
 - The OIR has an International Affairs Director who is responsible for developing and guiding the strategic direction of Seattle's foreign policy. The director uses resources and relationships with the City, the U.S. State Department, the Consular Corps, and other international partnerships to create economic, cultural, and academic opportunities for Seattle's businesses and residents. The director also oversees Seattle's Sister City relationships.

• San Francisco – Office of Protocol

Established over 70 years ago, the Office of Protocol serves as a bridge between the City and the world by welcoming global leaders, fostering international partnerships, and showcasing San Francisco's values of innovation, inclusivity, and global vision. In addition, the City of San Francisco has a Director of International Trade and Commerce, housed in the Economic Development department.

• <u>City of Charlotte- Continued International Efforts</u>

• Although, it was previously noted that the City of Charlotte no longer has a centralized Office of International Relations, it is important to note that the work continues in at least three locations: a staff member in Economic Development, a staff member housed in HR working on language access and community integration (as well as working with the International Cabinet), and through the City Manager's Office with our new City Chief of Staff. Sarah Hazel, our Chief of Staff's role includes leading intergovernmental affairs (local, state, federal, and international). With the integration of Sarah's new role, new opportunities for international relations are possible.



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