

# OFFICE OF IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE AFFAIRS

**ANNUAL REPORT 2014**



## MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR



In the early 1900s, Seattle's population became increasingly diverse. Scandinavians came to work in fishing and lumbering, African Americans to work as railroad porters and waiters, and Japanese to operate truck gardens and hotels. A number of transcontinental railroads had arrived in Seattle and, with them, significant communities of Italians, Chinese, and Filipinos. Today, Seattle has become home to one of the most diverse zip codes in the country and boasts 129 languages in its School District. Almost one in five residents is foreign-born.

One of my first actions upon taking office in 2014 was to significantly expand the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs (OIRA) because I envisioned Seattle being one of the leading cities in the country on immigrant integration. On a day-to-day basis, we also make sure that OIRA is an active participant in decision-making about the City's future. Seattle now has a rejuvenated office with the talent and resources to help the City do a better job of serving immigrant and refugee families, while also engaging immigrant and refugee constituents.

As you read this report, we highlight several new programs to significantly improve the City's ability to serve our immigrant and refugee families and help achieve a fundamental goal of my mayorship – equity for low-income and under-served communities.

This is just the beginning. Together we will reach more milestones and create a City where immigrant and refugee families have an equitable share of Seattle's prosperity.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Edward B. Murray'.

Mayor Edward B. Murray

ABOVE: MAYOR MURRAY STANDS WITH MEMBERS AT A DACA CONFERENCE.

## MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Thanks to the extraordinary leadership of Mayor Ed Murray and community advocates in Seattle, the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs (OIRA) had an astonishing year of growth in 2014. We grew from a staff of three to seven, and our budget more than doubled from \$358,000 to more than



\$918,000. The budget will grow to more than \$2 million by 2016. These investments in immigrant and refugee families did not just happen on their own. They happened because advocates have for years made the case that our families are integral to Seattle, and the City can and must do a better job of serving and engaging us. Our Mayor understands this more than anyone and, as a result, has put a stake in the ground, setting a vision for Seattle to become a leading city on immigrant integration.

We are proud and excited to pursue this vision and understand the opportunities and challenges that come with it. Integration is not only about becoming a citizen or registering to vote. It is also about providing opportunities for each and every resident to live healthy, productive lives. Given the significant socio-economic and linguistic barriers that immigrants and refugees face, including high unemployment and underemployment rates, integration plans must provide opportunities for living wage jobs that support families, affordable housing, safe neighborhoods, quality schools, vibrant public transportation, financial empowerment and classes to improve English fluency. Framing integration in this way requires us to think differently about who we are as a City—one that is more diverse now than ever before with 129 languages spoken in our public schools and a population that is one-fifth foreign-born.

Achieving these integration goals is not the work of OIRA alone. These goals can only be realized if the entire City works together. If 2014 was an indicator, then I believe that we are well on our way to achieving new integration milestones. OIRA partnered with City departments on dozens of policies and programs from housing to free health clinics and utility discounts. We will continue to provide expertise on immigrant and refugee issues to ensure that our families are represented in decisions about the City's future.

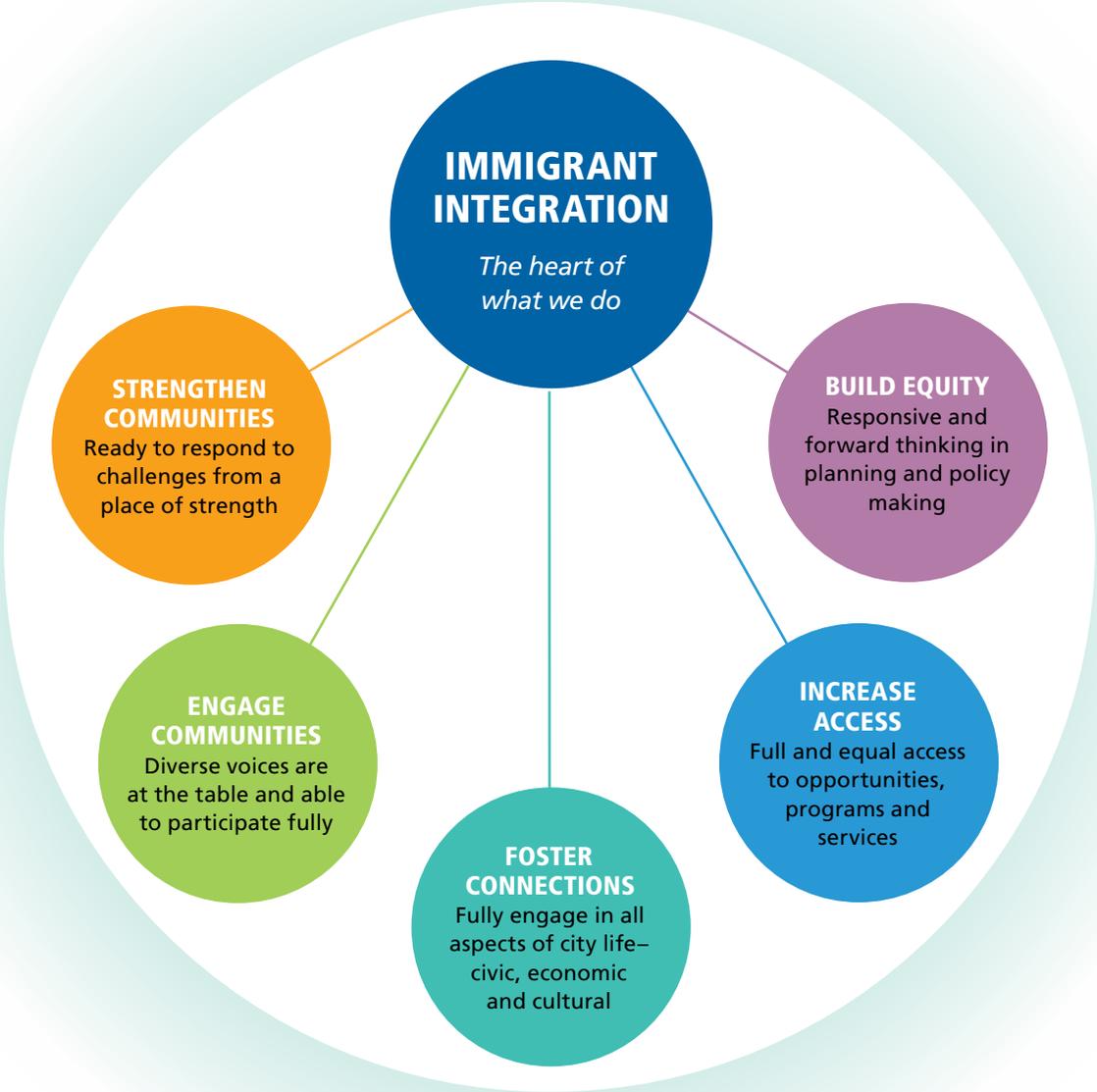
My journey as a refugee from war-torn Viet Nam began in Olympia and has come full circle back to Seattle after being away for 20 years working on comprehensive immigration reform and other seminal civil rights issues of our time. I am truly humbled and privileged to serve as Director of OIRA and to work with such a talented and dedicated staff. The brilliant leadership of one person in particular laid the foundation for OIRA's growth in 2014—Aaliyah Gupta. We are a stronger City because of her wisdom, creativity and courage.

We are making progress every day and our work is just beginning. You are a vital part of these historic changes.

Cuc Vu, Director, Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs

[ABOVE: OFFICE OF IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE AFFAIRS DIRECTOR, CUC VU PRODUCING THE REFUGEE WOMEN'S INSTITUTE VIDEO WITH SEATTLE CHANNEL.](#)

# OFFICE OF IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE AFFAIRS



## STRENGTHEN COMMUNITIES

**REFUGEE WOMEN'S INSTITUTE**

Through our Safe Communities listening sessions in 2013, we knew that there was a great need to increase communication between our communities and the police department.

We recruited 20 refugee women and 20 women police officers with the intent of building trust and understanding between both groups.

They met in the fall and were assisted by 13 interpreters in Bhutanese, Farsi, Arabic, Tigrinya, Oromo, Amharic, Nepali, Somali and Burmese. Stories were shared and relationships built using a curriculum that included hands-on exercises with real-life scenarios. Participants learned how to advocate for themselves and use City services. The results were transformative.

**READY TO WORK**

New approaches to ESL (English as a Second Language) and job training were identified as a high priority for immigrant and refugee communities, where we have high rates of unemployment and underemployment. This new program is intended for those at the lowest levels of English proficiency who need immediate access to jobs and are only able to spend a short amount of time learning employment-related English. A core group of experts and providers, the English Learner Steering Committee, guided the development of this collaborative, neighborhood-based model. We will welcome our first class in 2015.

*"It opened my eyes to many things. It gave me self-confidence and made me feel that someone was there to help us. After this program I feel safer. I feel police is [sic] here to help and solve problems. I am not scared."*

*–Amal, Refugee Women's Institute Participant*

*"My favorite part was just having the chance to talk. There were so many questions. Where are you from? What was the turmoil in your country? Do you have family back there? The questions almost couldn't be answered fast enough. They had just as many questions as we did."*

*–Officer Emerick, Refugee Women's Institute Participant*

READY TO WORK MEETING AT SEATTLE GOODWILL.





*“Now I know how to use 911 and have a friend in the police department.”*

*—Loko Wako, Ethiopia  
Refugee Women’s Institute Participant*

## IMMIGRATION REFORM

The lack of Congressional action on comprehensive immigration reform continues to impact many Seattle residents. Along with working on a local level, we forged new partnerships with national coalitions to work towards achieving equitable reform.

### Call for a Compassionate, Humane Response

Mayor Murray believes “Our City Government has a strong moral and leadership imperative to address this humanitarian crisis.” OIRA met with community organizations to assess the situation and prepare for the possibility of the region receiving large numbers of unaccompanied minors.

### Seattle Joined Cities United for Immigration Action

OIRA participated in a Mayors Summit on Immigration Action in New York, along with 20 other cities, to develop strategies to support the President’s deferred action program and to build momentum for comprehensive immigration reform.

### No More Deportations

We worked with Councilmember Nick Licata and community partners on a resolution calling on the federal government to suspend further deportations of people.

### Administrative Relief

When President Obama announced his Executive Order on immigration reform, we stood with community advocates to applaud his action and Mayor Murray pledged his full support.

### DACA Awareness Campaign

A PSA video directing Dreamers to resources and information, featuring Mayor Murray and Tania Santiago, was developed in partnership with Seattle Channel. <https://vimeo.com/user37827413/dacapsa>



DACA PARTICIPANTS ASK QUESTIONS AND LEARN THEIR OPTIONS.



**83 English Language Learners provided us with valuable insights that helped inform the Ready to Work program design.**

*“Computers are used in most jobs. I need to be ready to use one.”*

*“At the job interview they say, tell me about yourself, and I wish I could share more.”*

*“I’m afraid to ask the boss for a day off when I’m sick because I might say something that will be misunderstood.”*

*“The work of the Seattle Immigrant Voting Rights Task Force is an important example of how Seattle is working to strengthen the vitality of our immigrant and refugee communities by working with immigrants and refugees themselves to identify ways to strengthen civic engagement, government accountability, naturalization and voter registration. These are the building blocks of a stronger democracy.”*

—Rich Stolz, OneAmerica

## BRINGING COMMUNITY TO CITY HALL

Seattle is fortunate to have a rich and diverse array of immigrant and refugee community leaders, organizations and groups that work tirelessly on behalf of their communities. Our goal is to get to know all of our leaders and organizations, and understand the depth and breadth of the work they do so that we stay informed on community priorities. We want to ensure our leaders are part of public processes from the start.

## IMMIGRANT VOTING RIGHTS TASKFORCE

Fifteen community leaders and experts were engaged in deep discussions on the barriers to voting faced by immigrant communities. A report of their recommendations was released in 2015. Twenty-five community members convened at the Filipino Community Center to provide testimonials and community perspectives on challenges encountered in voting and elections processes.



## IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE COMMISSION

Representing a diversity of voices, the Commission brings key community perspectives to City Hall. Commissioners played an active role in advocating on key issues, providing input to City Council and the Mayor's Office, and partnering with other commissions on projects.



OIRA'S COMMISSIONERS MEETING IN 2014.

### Issues that Commissioners Were Active On

- Preschool for All Initiative
- Families and Education Levy funding
- Taxi, For-Hire and Limousine Regulations
- Funding initiatives in the Parks Legacy Plan
- No More Deportations Resolution
- Best practices for outreach to immigrant and refugee communities
- Seattle Housing Authority Step Ahead proposal
- Release of Nestora Salgado
- Affordable Care Act video, [http://youtu.be/YIDw\\_KMXIEs](http://youtu.be/YIDw_KMXIEs)
- Homelessness Super Subcommittee

## BRINGING COMMUNITY VOICE TO THE CITY

Many important discussions took place in 2014. We reached out to ensure community voices were heard and perspectives were shared. These included: Minimum Wage, Youth Violence, Emergency Preparedness, Immigration Reform, Restaurant Licenses, Financial Empowerment, SPD Outreach, Unaccompanied Minors, Preschool for All, ESL and Jobs Readiness, Youth Violence, and Administrative Relief.

### We Talked with Over 80

#### Leaders from the Following

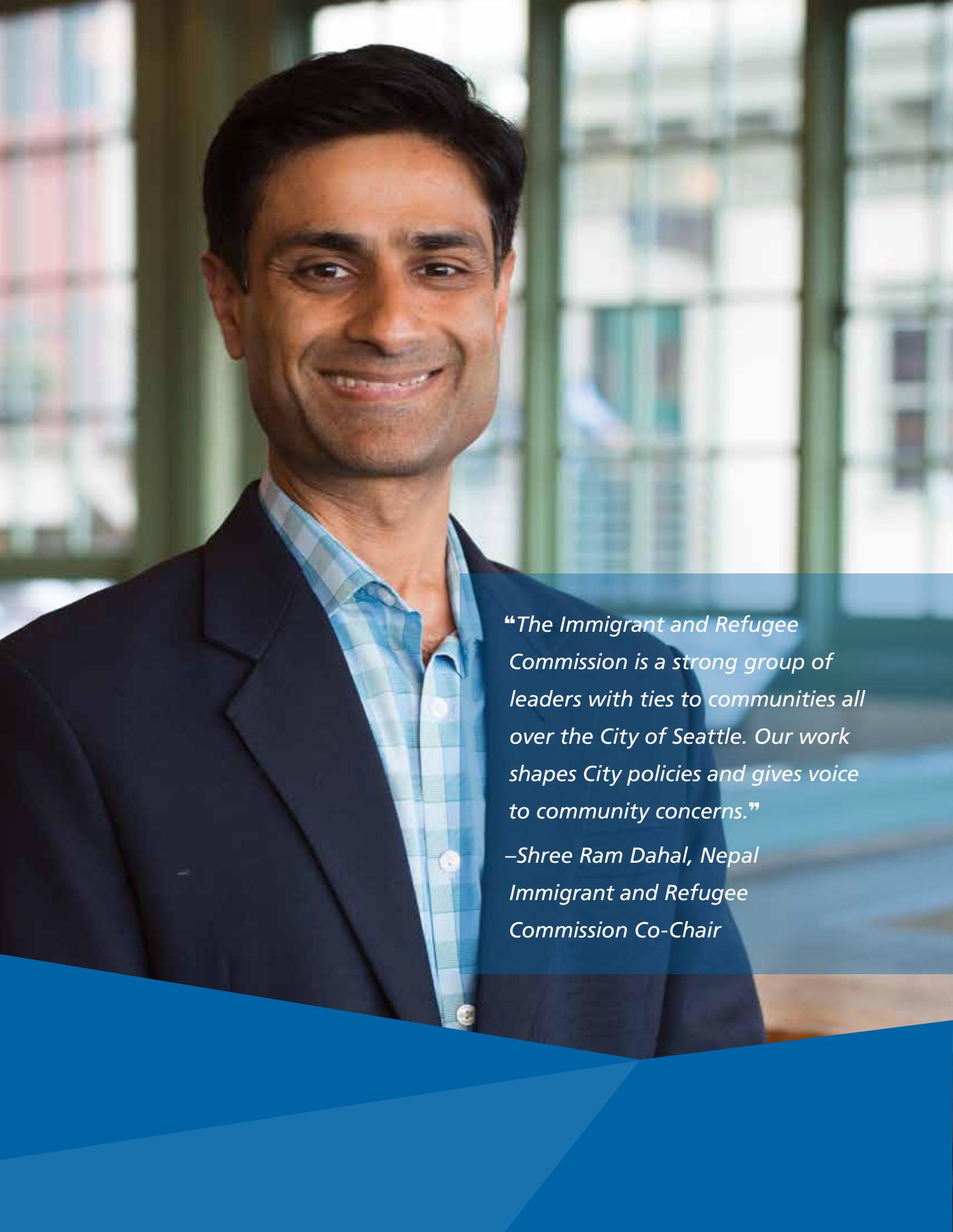
**Communities:** Chinese, Pakistani, Indian, Latino, Iraqi, Burmese, Filipino, Vietnamese, Hmong, Japanese, Iranian, Pacific Islanders, Somali, Ukrainian, Eritrean, Afghani, Bhutanese, Oromo, Cambodian, Ethiopian, Korean.

### We Heard About the Issues that Are Important to Our

**Communities:** Affordable Housing, Safe Neighborhoods, Small Business Assistance, Healthcare, Youth Employment, ESL Classes, Food, Citizenship Fees, Capacity Building, Living Wage Jobs, Unaccompanied Minors, Rental Assistance, Youth Violence, Cultural Competence, Education, Summer Programs, Funding for Social Services, Faith-based Discrimination, In-Language Services and more.

### Community Events Were a

**Priority:** We covered a lot of ground with hum bao eating contests, Eid festivities, vigils, Communities in Action meetings, a visit to the Duoc Su temple, an Eritrean Community Forum, SeaMar, and the Ukrainian Community Center.



*“The Immigrant and Refugee Commission is a strong group of leaders with ties to communities all over the City of Seattle. Our work shapes City policies and gives voice to community concerns.”*

*–Shree Ram Dahal, Nepal Immigrant and Refugee Commission Co-Chair*

## ETHNIC MEDIA PROGRAM

Information is key to connection and engagement. Ethnic media played an important role in informing refugees and immigrants in the languages they are fluent in, through radio, newspapers and television. OIRA's Ethnic Media program is growing into one of the largest programs of its kind.

## CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship provides many benefits, both to immigrants who become citizens and to the communities where they live. Many Seattle residents are eligible to be naturalized and yet they are not. The process is long, expensive and confusing.

The New Citizen Program will move to OIRA in 2016, allowing us to develop more integrated and robust programming. We also entered into a partnership with U.S. Citizenship and Information Services (USCIS) to host Citizenship Corners.



A GROUP OF NEW CITIZENS GO THROUGH THE SWEARING IN CEREMONY IN 2014.

## We Built Relationships with Over 80 Ethnic Media Outlets

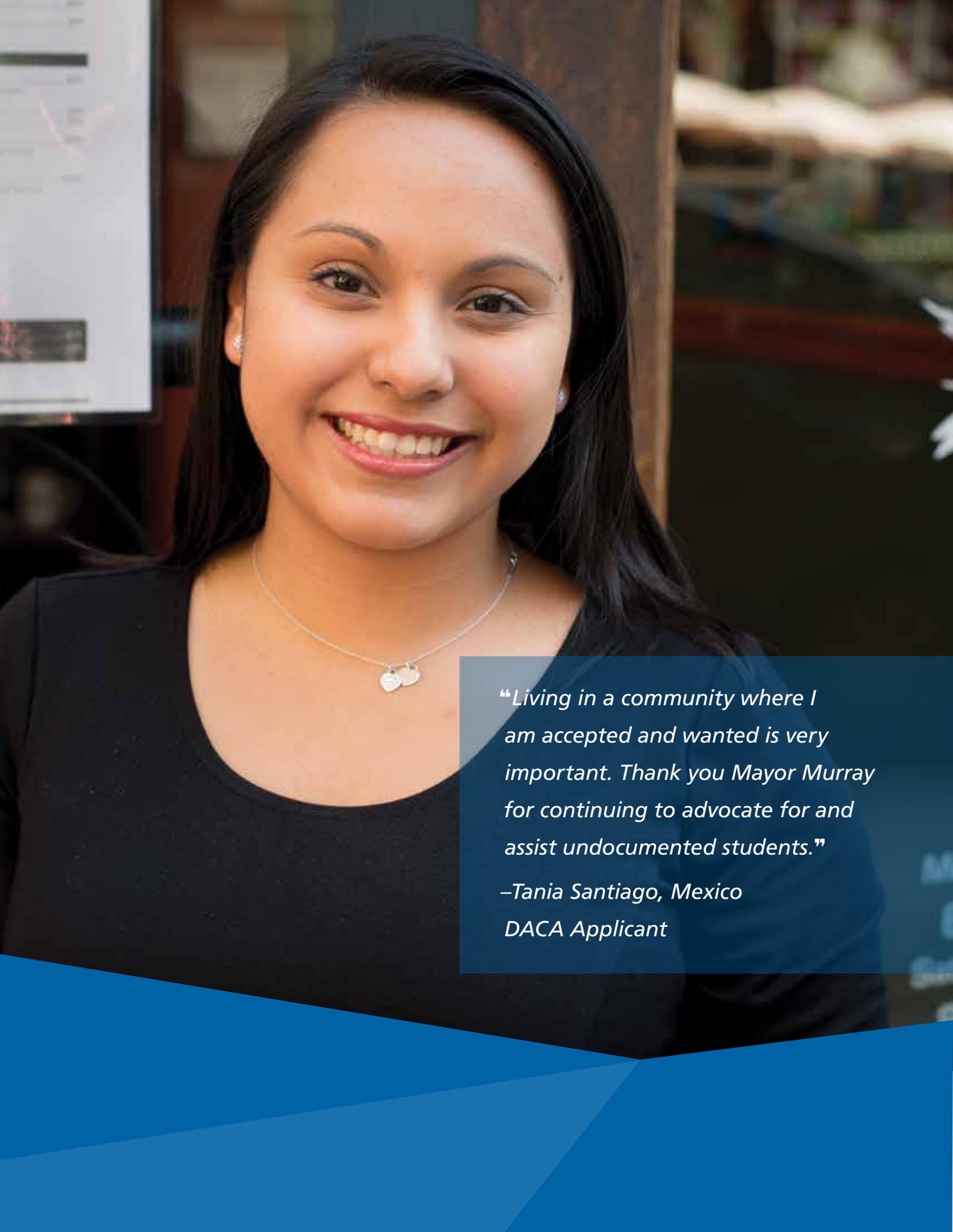
Ethnic media outlets carried over 120 stories in 2014, highlighting key issues, new policies and City programs and events.

*“The Ethnic Media program has played a pivotal role in helping to create a dialogue between Asian Pacific Islanders and our City’s leaders. We here at the International Examiner hope the City will continue to reach out to ethnic media and the communities we serve.”*

–Travis Quezo,  
International Examiner

*“MMRTI as well as other ethnic media agencies have been invited a couple of times for press conferences to ask questions to the Mayor of Seattle. It was the first time to see this kind of opportunity with the Mayor. I think this kind of work relationship with the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs has to continue in order to be effective and provide service to the larger immigrant community.”*

–Assaye Abunie, MMRTI



*“Living in a community where I am accepted and wanted is very important. Thank you Mayor Murray for continuing to advocate for and assist undocumented students.”*

*–Tania Santiago, Mexico  
DACA Applicant*

**LANGUAGE ACCESS**

Everyone should be able to access city services regardless of the language they speak. And everyone has a right to information. We created a Language Access Plan so that the City can better serve residents for whom English is not a first language. This includes providing interpretation, translating important documents and outreach materials, and simplifying access. The plan will be implemented in stages over the next few years.

**We Now Have Over 110 Community Based Interpreters and Translators on Our Roster and in the Online Business Directory**

Complex bid and contract processes were simplified and made more accessible as a result of our partnership with City Purchasing and Contracting Services.

*“Once I started attending the sessions I realized that there were many services available for immigrants and refugees that I was not aware of. It was fulfilling to help impart that information to the women refugees in my native language and assist them to interpret their questions and concerns. I felt I was a valuable member of the community.”*

*–Reham Elkhayat, Interpreter*

**REDUCING BARRIERS**

While the City has a range of programs and services, we know that many immigrant and refugee residents either do not know about them, or are unable to access them. We worked with City departments to ensure that barriers to accessing services are removed and that programs are equitable for all residents.



**Utility Assistance**

We led a team to develop recommendations on how to make this program more accessible to immigrants and refugees.



**Financial Fitness**

We worked closely with the Financial Empowerment Center on outreach, messaging and types of services that would be useful to offer, particularly for Muslim communities who are not able to work within traditional banking structures.



**Remote Area Medical Clinic**

Our team worked hard to make sure our communities knew and were able to utilize this free medical clinic, which served nearly 3,400 people over 4 days.

OUR GOAL IS TO PROVIDE MORE OUTREACH MATERIALS IN MULTIPLE LANGUAGES, GIVING LIMITED ENGLISH SPEAKERS GREATER ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES.



*“The Office of Emergency Management has been blessed to work with the professionals in the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs to better understand the needs of those in our community who are isolated by language, custom or distrust of government.”*

*–Barb Graff, Director of Office of Emergency Management*

OIRA IS ENSURING PLANNING AND POLICYMAKING THAT TAKES INTO ACCOUNT THE NEEDS OF IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES.

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

We played an active role on interdepartmental teams within City government to ensure that planning and policy-making take into account the needs and priorities of immigrants and refugees right from the start.

### Comprehensive Plan/Seattle 2035

Our team is helping develop an equity framework and infusing community well-being into all aspects of the plan.

### Disaster Planning and Emergency Management

We provided recommendations on best practices for community engagement and interpretation and translation, and helped develop specifications for an Emergency Notification System.

### Environmental Equity

Immigrant and refugee communities need to be part of priority setting processes on environmental issues. We are bringing more diverse voices into the conversation and policy making around environmental issues.

### Preschool for All

This demonstration project will make high quality preschool available and affordable to all Seattle residents. OIRA provided input and support throughout, including convening almost 100 parents from the East African community for an education forum.



DAYCARE WAS PROVIDED FOR THE REFUGEE WOMEN'S INSTITUTE PARTICIPANTS.



## THANK YOU

OIRA is deeply grateful to everyone who partnered with us, advised us, talked with us, and helped us set our priorities moving forward.

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Abdullahi Jama	Heather Villanueva	Lupita Ayon	SeaMar Radio Variedades
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Alex Miller	Heide Wrigley	Maru Mora Villapando	Seattle Medium
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Annie Laurie Armstrong	Jeffrey Sikora	Mohamed Adan	Susan Mercado Alvarado
Arsalan Bukhari	Jennifer Calleja	Nimco Bulale	Tania Santiago
Carin Weinrich	Jennifer Malloy	Northwest Asian Weekly	The North American Post
Carlos Muerentes	John Bowers	Northwest Vietnamese News	The Scanner
Charlie McAteer	John Forsyth	Rebecca Smith	Trang Tu
Courtney Chappell	John Kim	Renee Hopkins	Tsegaba Woldehaimanot
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Epoch Times	Communications		
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Grace Huang	Leslea Bowling		
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