

# Immigrant & Refugee (I/R) Report and Action Plan

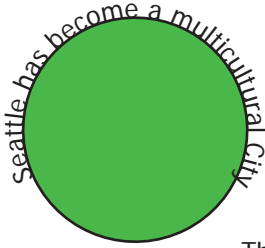
2007-2009



City of Seattle



# INTRODUCTION



The percentage of foreign-born residents (i.e. immigrants, refugees, persons on student or work visas, and undocumented individuals) has increased significantly in the last 25 years. In 1980, the foreign-born population constituted about 11 percent of Seattle's population. In 2000, it was almost 17 percent. By 2010, it could be almost 20 percent and total up to 120,000.

The foreign-born population is a very diverse group. The Seattle Public School District, for example, reports that it enrolls students from over 70 countries and that more than 90 languages are spoken by the students. Yet we know that the most common countries of origin for Seattle's foreign-born are the Philippines, China (including Hong Kong and Taiwan), and Vietnam. We also know that the number of individuals arriving from Mexico and Africa is increasing very rapidly.

As the face of Seattle changes, Seattle government has and will continue to change to welcome the newest residents of our city. This action plan describes some of the key steps the City has taken previously to meet the needs and engage immigrants and refugees in our community. It also sets forth next steps in the City's effort to change the way it does business so that immigrants and refugees are included in the life of the city. Key goals include helping immigrants and refugees access better City services and resources and increasing opportunities for immigrants and refugees to participate in the civic life of the city. As these goals are realized, the city will enjoy more fully the benefits associated with being a multicultural community.

## CONTEXTS FOR THE REPORT AND ACTION PLAN

This document is informed by the following efforts:

- A public forum on issues facing Seattle's immigrant and refugee community, conducted in May 2005 by the Seattle Housing, Human Services & Health Committee, chaired by Councilmember Rasmussen, which held a public forum on the issues facing Seattle's I/R community.
- An analysis of current City services and programs that assist and involve immigrants and refugees.
- A review of what some other jurisdictions are doing to assist and involve immigrants and refugees.
- The results of a community engagement process designed by the consulting firm Emerging Designs and involving 260 people.

The key issues that surfaced through the investigative process are the major themes and sections of this report and action plan.

### **Access to Services and Information    Protection of Civil Rights    Civic Engagement Workforce and Economic Development    Service Delivery**

Each section includes an overview of each issue, followed by a few highlights of current City efforts to address the issue. Each section then concludes with the action items to be pursued in the short-term (during 2007) and through 2009, as funding allows.

Taken collectively, the successful implementation of this plan will achieve the following results:

- City will improve its customer service with immigrant and refugees.
- Immigrants and refugees will report improved knowledge of, and access to, City services and City funding.
- Immigrants and refugees will report improved knowledge of US norms and customs.
- More immigrants and refugees will achieve citizenship and improve their English language skills.
- Relations between large and small CBOs serving immigrants and refugees will improve.
- Immigrants and refugees will have more opportunity to engage in the civic process and communicate with senior staff and elected officials.





# ACCESS TO SERVICES AND INFORMATION

## ISSUE STATEMENT

Immigrant /Refugee (I/R) communities too often do not know about City programs and/or how they can access them. During emergency situations, knowledge of and access to certain information and services can be the difference between life and death.

- Participants in the community engagement process would like a single point of contact at the City to help them access services and programs.
- Regarding language access, the City's current approach to translation and interpretation is on a department-by-department basis, which has sometimes compromised the quality and depth of these efforts. Thus, the availability of materials translated into the same languages varies among departments.
  - Participants in the community engagement process expressed a desire for higher quality and more consistent translation and interpretation services from the City.
  - In addition, the participants believe that services and programs (delivered by the City and/or by mainstream organizations) are best delivered by bicultural/bilingual employees and/or community liaisons who understand language, culture, and the process of adjusting to life in the United States.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF CURRENT CITY EFFORTS

- The City's web portal (<http://www.seattle.gov/html/citizen/language.htm>) features indexes of translated documents for 26 languages. While all documents are not available in all 26 languages, examples of the types of documents include information on domestic violence, resources for borrowers and victims of predatory lending, and a guide to City Light services.
- A re-vamped Employee Language Bank allows City bi-/multilingual employees to volunteer their time to meet the immediate, short-term language needs of City departments.
- In recent years, the Seattle Center has hosted the Discover Seattle - Newcomers Fair, which provides a forum for Seattle residents, including immigrants and refugees, to learn how the City works, and how to access City and community resources. It is also an opportunity for City staff to learn from residents about their needs and priorities.

## SHORT & LONG-TERM ACTIONS

### Short-Term (to be completed by December 2007)

1. Begin implementing the new City-wide policy on translation and interpretation. (OPM)
2. Market 684-CITY (2489 and selected Neighborhood Centers) as the initial point of contact for immigrants and refugees wanting to access City services and programs. (DON/CSB).
3. As a part of the City's emergency preparedness efforts, address the needs of immigrant and refugee (I/R) communities, establish adequate contacts within these communities, and provide translated information, per translation and interpretation policy. (SPD/OEM)
4. Determine and promote within the City the best communications, outreach and public engagement strategies for working with I/R communities. Strategies should be community-specific. (DON/SPU)

### Long-Term (Target Date 2008)

1. Complete implementation of the City-wide policy on translation and interpretation. (OPM)
2. Determine which City positions warrant bilingual skills as a preferred attribute, modify the City's hiring policies and practices, as appropriate, and recruit candidates accordingly. (OPM/Personnel)

### Areas for Further Exploration (TBD)

1. Conduct outreach within immigrant and refugee, and other minority, communities on the City's hiring policies and procedures, including the on-line application. (Personnel)



# PROTECTION OF CIVIL RIGHTS

## ISSUE STATEMENT

- Immigrants and refugees generally come to Seattle to join with family members or to work. Many are fleeing persecution, war, corruption in the courts, and police abuse, as well.
  - For many immigrants and refugees, the protections granted to them by our justice system may seem like a luxury. For others, they may seem impossible to achieve. Most undocumented workers, even when they have rights, are fearful of asserting those rights and are less likely to report crimes committed against them out of fear of deportation.
  - Other immigrants and refugees are uninformed of their legal rights and, like other low-income residents, may lack access to affordable legal services. They need education, advocacy, and legal assistance.
  - Since September 11, 2001, as a growing number of American citizens demand tough measures from federal and local governments to deter illegal immigration and to increase national security, the civil rights and liberties for all, including immigrants and refugees, are being eroded.
- In accordance with its policy #3.009, whenever possible, SPD utilizes interpreters and translators when dealing with non-English speaking persons and sign language interpreters and translators for hearing-impaired persons.
  - The Seattle Municipal Court provides language and sign interpreters for more than 60 different languages and dialects during proceedings and hearings before the Court. In 2006, the Seattle Municipal Court created the position of Interpreter Coordinator and is currently in the process of creating a formal Interpreter Services Program.
  - The City's Office of Civil Rights provides a number of services and resources to assist immigrant and refugee communities including: tips on identifying housing discrimination; trainings and materials on Employing Non-Citizens; and translated brochures on such matters as "How to File a Complaint with the Seattle Office for Civil Rights" and "Fair Housing."

## SHORT & LONG-TERM ACTIONS

### Short-Term (to be completed by December 2007)

1. Study and create in collaboration with community colleges, community organizations, or others a "US Laws & Customs 101" course that will effectively orient new I/R communities. (DON/OPM)
2. Continue support and advocacy for comprehensive and humane immigration reform. (OIR)
3. Organize and coordinate dissemination of relevant I/R rights information, including that which exists in the online resource directory. (OCR)

### Long-Term (Target Date 2008)

1. Advocate for State and Federal funding for organizations that provide affordable legal aid for low-income residents, including immigrants and refugees. (OIR)

### Areas for Further Exploration (TBD)

1. Secure private funding to implement the "US Laws & Customs 101" course. (DON/OPM)

## HIGHLIGHTS OF CURRENT CITY EFFORTS

- In March 2006, Mayor Nickels and the City Council notified members of the Washington congressional delegation of the City's support of the McCain-Kennedy "Secure America and Orderly Immigration Act of 2005," which provided for comprehensive, humane immigration reform.
- Between 2003 and 2005, the City of Seattle issued Executive Orders and legislation to support the rights of immigrants and refugees to access City of Seattle services: E.O. 04-03, accepting Mexican I.D. cards as a form of identification and Ordinance 121063 prohibiting City staff from inquiry into immigration status, unless needed for criminal investigations.
- Seattle Police Department has developed and implemented a number of policy initiatives to address the wide array of issues that exist when working with immigrant and refugee populations, including, for example, Directive 03-57, which prohibits officers from asking for specific documents for the sole purpose of determining someone's civil immigration status.



# CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

## ISSUES STATEMENT

- Few formal opportunities exist for immigrants and refugees to engage City staff and leaders. Without clear paths in place, immigrant and refugee communities do not always have sufficient access to communicate their needs and offer their perspective on how the City may best respond to those needs.
- Participants in the community engagement process would like to have a more active voice in how City government serves their communities; they positively responded to the idea of establishing an advisory group on immigrants and refugees.
- During the community engagement process, participants expressed a desire for more opportunities to interact with City officials through walking tours, community dialogues, and other events.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF CURRENT CITY EFFORTS

- Parks and SPD created a citizen-based Multicultural Board to advise them on emerging issues. For example, SPD currently sponsors eight demographic advisory councils, which represent the following communities: East African; Southeast Asian; Korean; Filipino; Latino; Arab; Muslim; and Sikh. Several other departments are considering similar bodies or are determining if they could use the existing boards.
- In 2006, the City Race & Social Justice Initiative (RSJI) Public Engagement work group conducted an analysis of the City's current public engagement strategies by surveying six City departments. The work group's findings and recommendations will form the basis of a plan to design and implement efficient, inclusive, culturally-appropriate public engagement. This information also will serve as the foundation of City-wide training offered to employees who plan, conduct, or facilitate public engagement activities.

## SHORT & LONG TERM ACTIONS

### Short-Term Actions (to be completed by 2007)

1. Develop a media and outreach strategy for City Departments to organize and coordinate the dissemination of information, such as press releases to immigrants and refugees. This would involve the Mayor's existing opportunities (e.g. walking tours) to interact with I/R communities, as well. (OPM/Mayor's Office)
2. Proactively recruit I/R community members who qualify for membership on the City's boards and commissions, as appropriate. (Mayor's Office)
3. Establish an advisory group to provide a more formal opportunity for immigrants and refugees to engage City staff and leaders. This group would have the following scope of work: (1) advise the Mayor and City Council about I/R issues and (2) advise departments about best practices for serving the City's many I/R communities, particularly in relation to the Immigrant and Refugee Action Plan. (OPM/DON)



# WORKFORCE & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## ISSUE STATEMENT

- Immigrants' rights marches in Seattle and across the nation have increased the visibility of the workforce challenges faced by immigrant/refugee populations. Some of these challenges include learning the English necessary for employment, gaining citizenship, and accessing the resources needed for success. At a City-sponsored brown bag forum on immigrant and refugee issues held in May 2005, several attendees voiced similar concerns about education and workforce development.
- Participants in the community engagement process voiced a strong desire for training on various systems and processes in the United States, including public schools, adult education, and employment.
- Participants in the community engagement process (across all groups engaged) also specified jobs and training as unmet service needs of high priority. A person's ability to speak English remains a central concern for these unmet needs.
- Several indicators of academic achievement show disparities between populations proficient in English and populations with limited English proficiency (LEP). Such disparities could adversely affect the skills held by and opportunities available to foreign-born workers in the future.
- The 2000 U.S. Census estimates that approximately 15,300 (25 percent of total) immigrants/refugees who entered the country between 1980 and 2000 reported the lowest levels of education (i.e. less than a high school diploma).

## HIGHLIGHTS OF CURRENT CITY EFFORTS

Classes on English Language and Computer Literacy:

- Seattle Public Library (SPL) is a major provider of City-funded ESL. Programs include "Talk Time," which gives adult participants an opportunity to practice speaking English in a comfortable environment. "Wired for Learning" provides classes in three languages – Chinese, Russian, and Spanish – for learning computer skills. Such skills can often help people learn another language.
- The Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) administers seven programs that strive to improve the English language skills of immigrants and refugees. One program, free ESL classes, involves a partnership with North Seattle Community College and

served approximately 50 persons last year. Another program, adult ESL basic computer classes, meets two times per week at Yesler Terrace.

- The Office of Economic Development helps support the Seattle Jobs Initiative, a community-based organization that works to eliminate barriers to good-paying jobs by establishing partnerships that align supportive services, like childcare, with job skills training and job placement assistance. About a third of those who participate in its programs are immigrants and refugees. This includes two specialized programs for immigrants and refugees offered in partnership with the Asian Counseling and Referral Service and Neighborhood Housing/Highline Community College, respectively; a two-week intensive vocational ESL/job skills hospitality course; and an eight-week vocational ESL/job skills janitorial course.
- In July 2006, the City granted Technology Matching Fund awards to 13 community projects aimed at helping further digital inclusion. These projects will provide web-based community conversations, audio and video technology to engage youth in conversations about social justice issues, and bring together International District youth with members of 10 other Seattle neighborhoods to use PDAs, community mapping, and photojournalism as tools to raise voices and foster discussion about the current status and future development needs.

Classes on Citizenship:

- The New Citizen Initiative (NCI) is administered by the Human Services Department (HSD) and delivered by 22 partners such as SeaMar Community Health Centers, Asian Counseling & Referral Services (ACRS), and the Refugee Women's Alliance (ReWA). The program provides citizenship instruction and other resources for immigrants and refugees. Between 2000 and 2005, NCI served approximately 5,300 persons. Of this number, approximately 2,000 persons or 39 percent became naturalized citizens.
- Through the Rainier Valley Community Development Fund, the City's Office of Economic Development (OED) provides support and funding to businesses in the Rainier Valley. OED estimates that immigrants and refugees own and operate approximately 270 businesses in the area (50 percent of all businesses in the area). The Fund has the goal of mitigating the closure and/or relocation of businesses during construction of Sound Transit's light rail line.

## SHORT & LONG-TERM ACTIONS

### Short-Term (to be completed by December 2007)

1. Enhance the effectiveness of the City's classes on citizenship. (HSD)
2. Reach out to immigrant/refugee-owned businesses and invite them to participate in the City's annual fair for women and minority-owned (WMBE) businesses. (DEA)
3. Conduct an assessment, including gap analysis, of the quantity and types of English as a Second Language programs and computer classes offered in Seattle and the populations served by the various programs. (Parks)
4. Complete an assessment of the economic impacts of small businesses in Seattle, including a special focus on immigrant and refugee businesses. This assessment also will include a compilation of information on the types of businesses, who owns them, where they are located, and their needs. (OED)
5. Establish a Career Pathways in Health Care (CCPHC) pilot project that will provide opportunity for immigrants and other working poor employees at a local health care organization to move into higher-skilled jobs. (OED)
6. In partnership with South Seattle Community College, Puget Sound Industrial Excellence Center, and other local economic development agencies, develop and deliver a business development and entrepreneurial training program targeting low-income and immigrant communities. (OED)
7. Provide in-depth, individualized technical assistance to immigrant and refugee businesses impacted by light rail construction in the Rainier Valley. (OED)
8. Assist the businesses in Little Saigon in assessing the benefits of forming a Business Improvement Area. (OED)

### Long-Term (Target Date 2008)

1. Create and distribute, in accordance with the City-wide policy on translation and interpretation, a list of City-sponsored technical assistance and other resources available to immigrant/refugee-owned businesses. (OED)

### Areas for Further Exploration (TBD)

1. In collaboration with community partners, expand the vocational English language and computer classes currently offered within the community, if appropriate. <sup>1</sup> (OPM)
1. The City of Boston has enjoyed tremendous success in securing philanthropic and corporate donations for its English for New Bostonians (ENB) program. Approximately \$3m was raised between June 2001 and June 2005 for the ENB (<http://www.cityofboston.gov/newbostonians/default.asp>)



# SERVICE DELIVERY

## ISSUE STATEMENT

- The immigrant and refugee community in Seattle is a very diverse one, representing numerous nationalities, ethnic groups, and languages. One marker of this diversity is Seattle Public Schools, which enrolls students from more than 70 countries and where more than 90 languages are spoken in the schools.
- In some cases, the communities (e.g., the East African community) are very fractionalized due to misperceptions, mistrust, and limited communication.
- Many different communities have organized community-based organizations (CBOs), often called Mutual Assistance Associations, that endeavor to create a bridge between the homeland and their new home in this community for recent immigrants and refugees. For the Somali community alone, 10 such CBOs exist. Over the last 10 years, 18 Somali CBOs have existed at one time or another.
- The immigrant/refugee-run CBOs struggle to survive. They lack staff capacity and have difficulty competing with larger, more established agencies, including larger immigrant-based agencies, for funding. Yet these agencies appear to have the closest relationships with recent immigrants and refugees. During the community engagement process, I/R community members communicated that they believed that their own grassroots organizations are best able to define their needs, and then design and deliver appropriate services. While mainstream, non-immigrant organizations do provide services for immigrant and refugees, many during the community engagement process expressed dissatisfaction with the services. Many members of the immigrant and refugee communities want more outside investment in their grassroots organizations.
- Members of the immigrant and refugee communities have challenges that are common to the mainstream community members (e.g., understanding and paying utility bills, accessing health care, and addressing violence in the family). However, language and cultural differences create barriers and hardships. Among key challenges are children-rearing, poor school performance, providing senior services, and preventing domestic violence.
  - 30 – 40 percent of I/R children are not prepared for learning as they enter K-12. Immigrant and refugee students with limited English proficiency, African, and Native American students perform very poorly on the WASL.

- Youth of color, including immigrant and refugee youth, account for 83 percent of middle school suspensions and 76 percent of high school suspensions.<sup>1</sup>
- In Seattle, the number of limited English-speaking children has increased 59 percent from 3,832 students in 1988 to 6,091 students in 2005.<sup>2</sup>
- About 25 percent of the 84,800 foreign-born residents of Seattle are over the age of 55.<sup>3</sup> In addition to physical and psychological changes that are part of the normal aging process, immigrant and refugee elders also must deal with dislocation, loss, isolation, and confusion because of language and cultural differences.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF CURRENT CITY EFFORT

- The City's Human Services Department and Public Health-Seattle and King County provide one-stop access to several benefit programs for low-income to moderate-income families and individuals, including child care, food, health care and utility/energy assistance, through the PeoplePoint: Bridge to Benefits Initiative. Multilingual staff conduct regular outreach activities at the International District Family Center weekly. Some program information (brochures) is available in the following languages: Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Russian, Cambodian, and Somali.
- In 2005, 14 percent of the 5,994 domestic violence service recipients served by the City of Seattle were identified as immigrants and/or refugees<sup>4</sup>, and about 29 percent of approximately \$1.8 million City expenditure was contracted with agencies that provide I/R-specific domestic violence prevention and protection services.
- The City supports the Multilingual Access Project (MAP), which has launched a new multilingual website on domestic violence ([www.map-seattle.org](http://www.map-seattle.org)), and trained almost 100 bilingual advocates on domestic violence since 2004.
- The City, in collaboration with various agencies, currently provides several services for older immigrant and refugees. In 2005, 1,500 frail, isolated immigrants, and refugees in public housing received case management services; over 3,200 received ethnic meals, fresh fruits, and vegetables and participated in social and fitness activities; and

1 SPS Data Profile, December 2005.

2 SPS Data Profile, 1989 and SPS Data Profile, 2005.

3 2000 U.S. Census.

4 City of Seattle 2005 client profile data for domestic violence services.



- 2,850 benefited from bilingual/bicultural information and assistance.
- In 2001, HSD's Division on Aging and Disability Services convened a coalition called Key Partners in Transportation. In December 2006, the partners finalized a formal King County Coordinated Special Needs Transportation Plan and hope to secure federal transportation funds that have become available recently. The coalition includes Metro, King County Community Services, Sound Transit, Puget Sound Regional Council, City of Seattle/Aging and Disability Services, City of Bellevue, Hopelink, and United Way of King County.
  - Cultural Competency/Capacity Building: The Reinvesting in Youth Project funded the development of an assessment/training protocol to help build the capacity of youth-serving community-based organizations, specifically in the area of cultural competency.
  - South Park Youth Violence Initiative: South Park has a large population of Spanish-speaking immigrants and residents of other immigrant communities (e.g., South Pacific Islanders). In response to rising youth violence, the City of Seattle, in 2006, invested an additional \$300,000. The funds help expand the Teen Center, provide youth counseling and gang prevention services through Consejo Counseling and Referral Services, and support Sea Mar's Youth Boxing Program as an alternative to anti-social behavior.
  - Seattle Youth Employment Program (SYEP): Forty-five percent of program participants are youth primarily from Southeast Asia and East Africa. The program includes counseling, homework assistance, and school re-entry services.
  - Seattle Team for Youth (STFY): This case management program focuses on providing culturally- and linguistically-appropriate services to help youth stay in school and succeed academically. HSD contracts with community-based organizations to provide intensive case management services to Latino, Samoan, Southeast Asian, African American, and Native American youth.
  - The City of Seattle provides high quality and culturally-appropriate early learning pre-school services in more than 11 languages in classrooms that are dual language or bilingual. Additionally, the Refugee and Immigrant Family Support Project provides 722 families assistance in becoming more involved in their children's school activities to support academic success.
  - The City provides funding to the Nonprofit Assistance Center (NAC) and other organizations to provide technical assistance and training services to small CBOs.
  - The City's Community Facilities Loan Program provides resources that assist community-based agencies with capital improvement projects. During the last three years, three immigrant-run organizations have successfully applied for funding support: Asian Counseling and Referral Service, Filipino Community Center, and the Lao Highland Community Center.
  - Since 2002, Seattle Public Utilities Environmental Justice Network in Action has worked with immigrant and refugee community-based organizations to identify and address the top environmental service and environmental health issues faced by immigrant and refugee communities. Some of the key issues: recycling, water quality, water and energy conservation, and household hazardous waste disposal.

### SHORT & LONG-TERM ACTIONS

#### Short-Term (to be completed by December 2007)

1. Improve access to funding opportunities for small I/R agencies by fully implementing HSD's Request For Investment (RFI) process that allows for longer response times, clarification to written proposals, and interview/site visits with individuals responsible for program implementation. (HSD)
2. As part of developing a new Area Plan on Aging strategy for I/R seniors, conduct at least one forum with existing partners including UW Nutritional and Science Department, School of Nursing, Pharmacy Department, and King County Public Health, to address emerging issues relating to I/R seniors and others. (HSD)
3. Work with the coordinated special needs regional transportation planning effort to address language and access barriers facing I/R seniors. (HSD)
4. Research and provide information about public gathering places for I/R seniors to socialize. (HSD)
5. Develop a strategy that clarifies how the City will work with small and large CBOs that work to meet the human services and cultural needs of I/R communities. Strategy should include use of partnerships between CBOs, where appropriate, and the types of outcomes the City will fund. (OPM/HSD/DON)

6. Work with the East African Community to assess service needs and organizational capacity to address these needs; if appropriate, develop a plan to strengthen organizational capacity over time. (OPM/DON)

#### Areas for Further Exploration (TBD)

1. Assess current domestic violence and sexual assault immigrant and refugee services offered by City-funded agencies; identify promising approaches, best-, and evidence-based practices that could be implemented in our community. Identify new funding sources (i.e. federal grants), if additional resources are necessary, to implement these programs; undertake an RFI in 2008 or 2009, and fund programs according to funding source timelines. (HSD)
2. Begin providing training on cross-cultural communication and relations to City employees as part of the City's Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI) and to mainstream organizations that work with I/R communities. (OCR)
3. Implement a coordinated, multi-lingual access system (e.g., services, crisis lines, shelters) so that domestic violence victims, including immigrants and refugees, need make only one or two calls in order to access the services they require. (HSD)

---

1 The City of Boston has enjoyed tremendous success in securing philanthropic and corporate donations for its English for New Bostonians (ENB) program. Approximately \$3 million was raised between June 2001 and June 2005 for ENB (<http://www.cityofboston.gov/new-bostonians/default.asp>).

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS