



# IDEAS THAT INNOVATE

## State & Local Policies





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# Establishing Welcoming Advisory Boards and Working Groups

## Policy

Local advisory boards and/or working groups focused on strategic planning and implementation of efforts to promote immigrant inclusion and the engagement of the receiving community can greatly enhance local governments. Engagement of leaders from the nonprofit, business and immigrant community is useful to inform municipal efforts and actors with implementing policy and programming.

## Where it's working

- Dayton, OH
- Pittsburgh, PA
- Allegheny County, PA
- and many other cities and counties across the country

## Players

- Local policymakers
- Local government agencies
- Local foundations
- Community-based organizations
- Employers
- Schools
- Libraries
- Health care
- Immigrant leaders

## What does it mean?

Understanding to what extent a city or county is welcoming to immigrants and making the most of its local talent requires ongoing input from diverse stakeholders. Each brings a different perspective based on personal experiences and can help local government be responsive to emerging needs and opportunities.

**Advisory boards** can provide a structure by which to receive invaluable guidance, input, and advice to city agencies. Working groups tend to “roll up their sleeves” and actively work to implement strategic plan priorities in the community.

## What is a Welcoming Advisory Body?

A **welcoming advisory body** (whether construed as a commission, board, council, or working group) brings together both immigrants and the broader receiving community to discuss demographic changes in the community and how the city or county can respond and make the most of its diverse talent.

Members provide critical input by sharing an outside perspective that government employees may not typically receive. Members can also serve as ambassadors for municipal efforts back in their own ethnic communities—sharing updates and information, and helping foster a deeper sense of connection. Some advisory bodies become involved in program implementation, helping to make specific city outreach projects a reality.

The **Welcome Dayton Committee** is an example of an advisory board that functions as a working group of public and private sector community partners who provide advice on how the policies and practices of local government and other community institutions can be more welcoming to immigrants and the receiving community. They help elevate the work in the community and help businesses and other organizations learn how they can engage with Welcome Dayton. Their leading charge is to help local organizations consider how they can do “one more thing” to make Dayton more immigrant-friendly.

<http://www.welcomedayton.org/about/committee/> ↗

**Welcoming Pittsburgh’s Advisory Council** was convened by the Mayor to help establish a plan for a citywide initiative that celebrates the city’s immigrant past and builds a more welcoming future. This 40-member council developed an implementation plan that engages both new and established community members and encourages welcoming practices across local government, business, nonprofits and residents.

<http://pittsburghpa.gov/mayor/release?id=3421> ↗

**Allegheny County’s Immigrant and International Advisory Council** guides the Department of Human Services on its cultural competency and accessibility to immigrants and internationals. The council is composed of immigrants, refugees and service providers. Many credit the Council with making the region more immigrant-friendly across multiple domains. The lessons learned report from the advisory council is available:

<http://www.alleghenycounty.us/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=37964> ↗

## Why does it matter?

Participation in municipal service programs and community social cohesion will likely flounder without meaningful outreach to immigrant communities. Linguistic and cultural differences across diverse populations mean that local governments need a wide array of input into their welcoming strategies if they want to successfully integrate newcomers. Advisory bodies are an efficient way to gather information, test approaches, and begin an ongoing dialogue across ethnic lines and sectors to ensure effectiveness.

## Additional Reading

High Point, North Carolina's immigrant advisory committee, a result of their comprehensive planning process Building Integrated Communities:  
<http://isa.unc.edu/files/2013/02/BIC-newsletter-summer-2012.pdf> ↗

Charlotte, North Carolina convened a 20-member task force to conduct a listening tour with diverse communities and examine opportunities for access to services and civic engagement with an eye towards immigrant integration:  
<http://charmeck.org/city/charlotte/cic/getinvolved/Pages/Immigrant-Integration-Task-Force.aspx> ↗

Cincinnati, Ohio has an 80-member task force of volunteers working to advise the mayor on how to make the city more immigrant-friendly:  
<http://www.cincinnati-oh.gov/mayor/immigration/> ↗

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# State & Local Government-Supported EB-5 Investor Visa Regional Centers

## Policy

Connecting local economic development initiatives to the federal EB-5 investor visa program through state and local government-sponsored regional centers can help leverage millions of low-cost foreign investment capital into key economic development projects.

## Where it's working

- State of Vermont
- Dallas, TX
- Other cities and states

## Players

- State or local economic development offices
- Elected officials
- Foreign investors
- Local developers

## What does it mean?

The **EB-5 investor visa program** was created in the early 1990s and is authorized to issue up to 10,000 visas annually. It allows foreign investors to obtain conditional residency, legal permanent residency, and, eventually, citizenship by investing \$1 million into a U.S. business that they “control” and by creating 10 U.S. jobs. Investments in “Targeted Employment Areas (TEAs)” lower the investment threshold to \$500,000. TEAs are defined as a rural area (outside of a city with population of 20,000 or greater) or an area with high unemployment (150 percent of the national average).

## What is an EB-5 Regional Center?

The **EB-5 Regional Center program** allows investors to pool their resources through regional centers that have developed foreign investment plans to spark regional economic growth. These plans must be pre-approved by the Department of Homeland Security. EB-5 regional centers eliminate the restrictive “control” requirements that require the single EB-5 investor to manage the business and they enable investors to use econometric models to include “indirect” job creation as part of their job creation requirements. The vast majority of the EB-5 investments have come through these regional centers because of these advantages.

A 2014 Brookings Institution report highlights the opportunities for local economic development agencies (EDAs) to work more closely with EB-5 regional centers. Local EDA staff have the best access to high-quality economic development projects and have well-established and researched economic development plans that target growth and impact industries. They also know which economic sectors and investments need low-cost capital to grow.

Each region has a unique mix of international assets—immigrants, refugees, global industry ties, trading partners, international students, etc. These familial, cultural, and commercial links

suggest that a metropolitan area and local regional center may attract potential EB-5 investors from areas of the world that have not been as solicited as certain Asian communities. As competition increases for investors in Asia (nearly 75% of the EB-5 investors have come from China [46 percent], South Korea [17 percent], and Taiwan [10 percent]), local relationships with Africa, Mexico, Brazil, and other Latin American nations, Europe, and the Middle East present ripe opportunities for securing new EB-5 investors.

The **Philadelphia Industrial Development Corporation (PIDC)**, worked in partnership with CanAm Enterprises, to establish its EB-5 regional center in 2003. CanAm Enterprises, which also operates EB-5 regional centers in four other locations, provides technical assistance related to EB-5 program navigation in Philadelphia. PIDC serves as a conduit to local development projects and, at times, public funding to support those projects. The PIDC Regional Center/CanAm partnership website claims to have raised \$600 million in EB-5 loans to support 45 projects, including the redevelopment of the Philadelphia Navy Yard into a mixed-use business campus, the expansion of the Pennsylvania Convention Center, the construction of administrative headquarters for the Temple University Health System, and the construction of the corporate headquarters for Comcast Corporation. Over 10,000 jobs have been created for these projects.

Similarly, the **City of Dallas Regional Center (CDRC)** reflects a public-private partnership between the city and a private partner, Civitas Capital Management. This partnership allows the city to apply EB-5 investments to their own interests and combine those funds directly with tax abatements, grants, and other programs. The CDRC portfolio of EB-5-funded projects includes real estate development of assisted living facilities, hotels, call centers, restaurants, and multifamily apartments. The CDRC has invested nearly \$300 million in low-cost EB-5 capital into projects creating some 8,000 jobs through its partnership with the City of Dallas.

Other states, such as Vermont and Michigan, have sponsored their own regional centers. In Vermont, which launched the first state-sponsored EB-5 regional center, successive governors have promoted the **Jay's Peak EB-5 Regional Center** and credit the program with bringing in \$250 million in low-cost capital from immigrant investors from some 56 countries.<sup>1</sup> Michigan's state-sponsored EB-5 regional center has yet to place its first investment.

Regional centers and local EDAs should consider utilizing skilled intermediaries and partners who can help secure international investors, a new regional center's biggest challenge. Efforts should be made to capitalize on existing global trading relations enjoyed by the local region, including unique relationships with businesses and investors stemming from local industries' global presence, as well as the region's immigrant populations.

## Why does it matter?

Collectively, the Brookings Institution estimates that the EB-5 investor visa program has created 85,500 full-time jobs and attracted some \$5 billion in direct investments since the program's inception.<sup>2</sup> Today there are over 400 approved EB-5 regional centers. There has been tremendous growth in the EB-5 program in just the last few years, growing from less than 1,000 visas issued in 2007 to 6,627 visas in 2012. In fact, reports in August 2014 suggest that the 10,000 EB-5 visa cap was reached during the fiscal year ending September 30, 2014 due to a large influx of Chinese nationals seeking to utilize the program, as well as Canada's actions to close its investor visa program.<sup>3</sup> This growth has been entirely through regional centers as the number of direct EB-5 investments secured without a regional center has declined since 2009.

Connecting local economic development agencies, as well as local immigrant-focused economic development programs to existing EB-5 regional centers or launching a government-sponsored EB-5 regional center can help to harness the power of immigrant connections, as well as insure that EB-5 investments are considering investment opportunities furthering regional economic goals and strategies.

## Resources for Action

### List of USCIS Pre-Approved EB-5 Investor Visa Regional Centers

<http://www.uscis.gov/working-united-states/permanent-workers/employment-based-immigration-fifth-preference-eb-5/immigrant-investor-regional-centers> ↗

## Additional Reading

Audrey Singer and Camille Galdes, "Improving the EB-5 Investor Visa Program: International Financing for U.S. Regional Economic Development," brookings.edu. February 5, 2014.

[http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/reports/2014/02/05\\_eb5/eb5\\_report.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/reports/2014/02/05_eb5/eb5_report.pdf) ↗

### ENDNOTES

1. Ali Jahangiri, "New Public Agencies Jumping Aboard the EB-5 Train," The Huffington Post, June 26, 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ali-jahangiri/new-public-agencies-jumpi\\_b\\_5530368.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ali-jahangiri/new-public-agencies-jumpi_b_5530368.html) ↗
2. Audrey Singer and Camille Galdes, "Improving the EB-5 Investor Visa Program: International Financing for U.S. Regional Economic Development," brookings.edu. February 5, 2014, [http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/reports/2014/02/05\\_eb5/eb5\\_report.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/reports/2014/02/05_eb5/eb5_report.pdf) ↗
3. Sophia Yan, "U.S. Runs Out of Investor Visas as Chinese Overwhelm Program," money.cnn.com. CNN Money, August 27, 2014, <http://money.cnn.com/2014/08/27/news/economy/china-us-visa/> ↗



# Integrating Highly-Skilled Immigrants and Refugees

## Policy

Providing State resources to support efforts that recognize and utilize the talent of the highly-skilled immigrants who are permanently authorized to work in the United States, but who are underemployed or unemployed.

## Where it's working

- State of Michigan
- Similar elements of highly-skilled immigrant integration in California, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, and Pennsylvania

## Players

- State of Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA)
- Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC)
- Upwardly Global
- Michigan employers

## What does it mean?

Working with Global Detroit, the Michigan Office for New Americans (MONA), and other state and regional economic development partners, the State of Michigan's Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA) has worked to assist Upwardly Global to develop licensing and credentialing tools and to open an office to assist highly-skilled immigrants and refugees in Michigan.

Upwardly Global (UpGlo) is a national non-profit that works with highly-skilled immigrant job seekers who are permanently work authorized but who are either unemployed or underemployed, due to their inability to resume their professional careers in the U.S. UpGlo provides training and acculturation on the professional job search process, supporting job seekers with soft job skills in the areas of resume development, developing a professional U.S. network, and interview skills; and actively connecting them with employers in state and national networks. UpGlo's mission is to eliminate employment barriers for highly-skilled immigrants and works toward a vision where highly-skilled immigrants are seamlessly integrated into the professional workforce and the fabric of American life and for the value they add to both. Click on this link to learn more about UpGlo: [www.upwardlyglobal.org](http://www.upwardlyglobal.org) ↗.

The State of Michigan, through LARA and the MEDC raised resources to help cover the costs of an UpGlo staff person for two years to be located in Detroit and to launch the Global Engineers in Residence (GEIR) Program. GEIR expands on the traditional paid internship model to connect foreign educated, trained and experienced engineers with interested employers in a collaborative, low-risk workplace immersion program. Additionally, Michigan State University has generously donated office space for the UpGlo office in Detroit.

Additionally, UpGlo has created a template for Michigan's professional licensing processes. UpGlo licensing guides are written to make the statutes and regulations more easily

understood to help job seekers understand the steps required to secure a state professional license. With funding from the New Economy Initiative of Southeast Michigan and cooperation from LARA, UpGlo published ten professional licensing guides for skilled immigrants onto the UpGlo and LARA websites, making Michigan the fourth state (after California, Illinois, and New York) for which such UpGlo guides exist. (New Hampshire guides have since been added to the UpGlo site).

LARA has since expanded the on-line resource and currently has created guides for 20 occupations, with the plan to add five new guides every six months. The Guides all provide a step-by-step overview of how to complete the licensing process in the State of Michigan for those who received professional education, training, or experience outside the U.S. LARA partners with MONA in determining the next set of professions for which guides will be written based upon input from a wide variety of ethnic chambers and ethnic business organizations. Additionally, LARA has implemented a centralized process for providing assistance for professional licensing questions.

## Why does it matter?

There are more than 1.8 million immigrants in the U.S. who are college-educated but are unemployed or significantly underemployed.<sup>1</sup> Immigrants often possess important labor skills for the regional economy, but can be underemployed because of professional licensing issues, cultural differences in the job search process, or language barriers. We see the impact of these barriers in taxi drivers and janitors who, in their home country, were, for example, engineers, doctors, or veterinarians.

The benefits of tapping into this pool of highly-skilled immigrants are well documented. Independent research of more than 500 highly-skilled immigrant clients served by UpGlo suggests that the full employment of these workers in their professional capacity created nearly 1.4 additional jobs for U.S. workers.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the increase in wages by fully-employing these highly-skilled immigrant professionals (which also creates job openings

as they leave their current positions as nannies, cab drivers, wait staff, etc.) itself has a positive impact on local economies. If just five percent of these under-employed immigrant professionals nationwide could be placed into professional-level jobs paying \$40,000 per year, they would add approximately \$6 billion in tax revenues alone over five years.<sup>3</sup> Increased professional integration can spur other positive outcomes, including homeownership, civic participation and citizenship.

In many regions, including Michigan, there is a STEM talent shortage. A recent Detroit-area job fair included 50 companies with approximately 3,000 open engineering jobs. Unfortunately, only 276 engineers applied for these positions.<sup>4</sup> More than two-thirds of Michigan's UpGlo clients have degrees in the STEM fields. Connecting talented, highly-skilled immigrants with employers can be a critical element of a regional economic growth strategy and plan, generating opportunity not only for an immigrant and his/her family, but to employers and the local community as well.

The State of Michigan's efforts to support UpGlo reflect one of the strongest public commitments to not only collaborate in the technical information needed to develop the licensing guides, but in providing public resources to create a local UpGlo office and to focus on connecting immigrant talent to a need in the labor market that is not being met—in this case, engineering talent.

## Resources for Action

### **Michigan Department of Licensing & Regulatory Affairs**

[http://www.michigan.gov/lara/0,4601,7-154-10573\\_68301---,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/lara/0,4601,7-154-10573_68301---,00.html) ↗

### **Michigan Office for New Americans**

[www.michigan.gov/ona](http://www.michigan.gov/ona) ↗

### **Upwardly Global**

[www.upwardlyglobal.org](http://www.upwardlyglobal.org) ↗

### **Global Detroit**

<http://www.globaldetroit.com/partner-initiatives/upwardly-global/> ↗

### **IMPRINT**

<http://www.imprintproject.org/about-imprint/immigrant-professional-integration> ↗

## Additional Reading

Qngoing Ji and Jeanne Batalove, "College Educated Immigrants in the United States," Migration Policy Institute, December 27, 2012.

"A Look at Skilled Immigrant Workers in the U.S.: Tapping into Global Talent Already Here Results in Clear Economic Benefit for Immigrants and for Nation," Upwardly Global, April 2013.

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1. Qngoing Ji and Jeanne Batalove, "College Educated Immigrants in the United States," Migration Policy Institute, December 27, 2012.
2. "A Look at Skilled Immigrant Workers in the U.S.: Tapping into Global Talent Already Here Results in Clear Economic Benefit for Immigrants and for Nation," Upwardly Global, April 2013.
3. IMPRINT website at <http://www.imprintproject.org/about-imprint/the-challenge> ↗
4. Tom Walsh, "Michigan Can't Afford to Lose Its Lead in Engineering Talent," Detroit Free Press, December 1, 2013.



# Enhancing the Economic Contributions of International Students

## Policy

Using state higher education assets to attract international students, retain them as valuable talent in the economy, and enhance global competitiveness of domestic students.

## Where it's working

- State of Ohio

## Players

- Ohio Board of Regents
- Ohio State Legislature
- Governor of Ohio
- Ohio Colleges and Universities

## What does it mean?

In 2014, the Ohio Legislature unanimously passed and Governor John Kasich signed House Bill 484, a mid-term budget bill that, in addition to funding higher education, included in its boilerplate requirements that the Chancellor of the Ohio Board of Regents consult with a broad stakeholder team to study current international student recruitment practices and retention activities to “consider implications of, and opportunities for, encouraging international students to remain in the state after graduation.” In December 2014, Chancellor John Carey issued the recommendations of a 30-person stakeholder group in his 40-page report.

The report focuses on the economic benefits projected from increasing the share of international students at Ohio postsecondary institutions, as well as increasing the retention of international students after graduation. Noting that international students comprise 4.1 percent of the current share of postsecondary students in Ohio (a rate that approximates the national average), the report suggests “setting a target to increase the number of international students at postsecondary institutions in Ohio to a total of 6 percent within the next two years.” This would require attracting 15,000 additional international students and is estimated to produce 5,751 additional jobs and \$420 million in additional economic investment from the enhanced tuition and fees paid by international students, as well as the cost of living expenditures from these additional international students.

Citing data from the Brookings Institution’s 2014 Foreign Student study, *The Geography of Foreign Students in U.S. Higher Education: Origins and Destinations*, the Ohio Board of Regents’ report notes that 45 percent of international students in the 120 largest international student geographic centers around the country remained in those metro areas after graduation on Optional Practical Training (OPT) visas, while only 31.3 percent of Ohio’s international students did so. The report recommends setting a goal of a 50 percent retention rate, which would require

5,514 additional international students to remain in the state after graduation. According to the Board of Regents' report, these workers would "generate almost a \$100 million in the state's economy and support more than 1,000 new jobs."<sup>1</sup>

Finally, in addition to providing "a vital opportunity for native-Ohio students to expand their scope of knowledge and be more prepared to succeed in global environments," the report estimates that increasing the number of international students by six to eight percent "would result in a 56.9 percent increase in the number of patents awarded at universities statewide."

The impetus for language in House Bill 484 requiring a study and report concerning the recruitment and retention of international students, as well as how global experiences (both interacting with international students and study abroad programs) enhance student experience, came from two primary sources. First, the business community had communicated with Governor Kasich that there was and continues to be a large unmet demand for high-skilled workers, especially STEM talent, and that international students could be a key supply of that talent. Second, universities, that were actively recruiting international students and running international programs, expressed the desire for more attention, investment, and support from the Chancellor. The inclusion of these provisions into the budget bill was uncontested during the legislative process.

## Why does it matter?

America is rapidly facing a skilled workforce crisis (for the purposes of this chapter, skilled jobs are those that require at least a four-year college degree). Like many northeastern and midwestern states, however, Ohio is rapidly aging. In fact the report cites data from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services noting that demographers expect Ohio to have at least 5 percent fewer high school graduates in 2022 than in 2011. The net result is an estimated 90,000 shortfall in skilled labor positions in Ohio. The national picture is equally bleak and by 2018, the

postsecondary system is estimated to be producing 3 million fewer college graduates than demanded by the labor market.<sup>2</sup>

The skilled workforce crisis is even more severe in the business, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. Yet, according to the Ohio Board of Regents report the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)—a data system maintained by the National Center for Education Statistics—almost 80 percent of all international students were enrolled in these fields of study.

## Resources for Action

**House Bill 484** - The text of the bill contains sample boilerplate language that other state legislatures could consider to insure that state colleges and universities, as well as other key stakeholders, are required to consider the economic impacts of international students and their retention. Requiring a report of these economic impacts can provide broad justification for developing and implementing international student retention programs.

**Ohio Board of Regents Report on “Ohio’s Postsecondary Globalization Initiative”** - The text of the report provides a framework for the economic analysis of increasing the numbers of international students, as well as the benefits from enhanced international student retention. The report also tackles a policy issue specific to Ohio (renewal/extension of drivers licenses for international students working in the state post-graduation under their student visas) and provides some general recommendations on how to enhance international student recruitment, as well as retention.

## Additional Reading

Brookings Institution Study on “The Geography of Foreign Students in U.S. Higher Education: Origins and Destinations”

<http://www.regents.nysed.gov/meetings/2012Meetings/November2012/1112p12d1.pdf> ↗

Institute for International Education Open Doors Report (2014)

<http://www.iie.org/en/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data> ↗

Ohio Board of Regents Report on “Ohio’s Postsecondary Globalization Initiative”

<https://www.ohiohighered.org/sites/ohiohighered.org/files/uploads/global/GREATreport.pdf> ↗

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1. Ohio Board of Regents, “Ohio’s Postsecondary Globalization Initiative,” (December 2014), page 5-6.
2. Anthony Carnevale, Nicole Smith, and Jeff Sprohl, “Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements through 2018,” [georgetown.edu](http://cew.georgetown.edu/jobs2018). Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, June 15, 2010, p. 16, <http://cew.georgetown.edu/jobs2018> ↗



# Resident Leadership Academies

## Policy

Providing opportunities for immigrants to learn about city government, navigate services more efficiently, communicate needs, network across ethnic lines, and serve in leadership capacities, resulting in greater community engagement across the immigrant community.

## Where it's working

- Nashville, TN
- New York City, NY
- Cupertino, CA; among others

## Players

- Local policymakers
- Local government agencies
- Local foundations
- Community based organizations
- Residents

## What does it mean?

Communities have long known that stronger neighborhoods depend on more effective delivery of local government services. Local municipal governments are increasingly developing new methods to nurture an understanding of local government and sense of connection to it through leadership opportunities that target both new immigrants and established residents. A number of diverse resident leadership academy models have emerged, each building off of local city strengths. There are many different approaches to take, depending on local resources, partners, and needs.

## What is a Resident Leadership Academy?

A resident leadership academy provides resident grassroots leaders with an opportunity to get to know local government, including its policies, processes, and programs. Such academies foster a sense of connection between immigrant participants and local government and typically encourage participants to share what they learn with others from their own community or neighborhood. These hands-on opportunities provide participants with the knowledge, confidence, and connections they need to view government as a resource and partner.

One example of a resident leadership academy is Nashville's **MyCity Academy**. The Academy empowers both immigrants and established residents to fully understand and participate in Nashville's government. Over the course of seven months, MyCity participants meet with leaders across local government departments and tour facilities. This experiential learning allows them to gain a deeper understanding of how government works, how to resolve issues and obtain information, and how to serve as a resource to help others in their ethnic communities understand and access government services. An active alumni network helps keep participants engaged with each other.

The **Neighborhood Leadership Institutes** in New York City provide a second example that targets priority neighborhoods with fast-growing immigrant communities. They offer free skill-building workshops for emerging immigrant leaders, which include navigating city government, community organizing, and fundraising. The goal is to bring residents together to work on issues of concern to the community, building networks of community partners, developing community organizing skills, and increasing knowledge of how government works. Participating groups are invited to apply for micro-grant funds and project planning assistance to undertake a community improvement project upon completion of the program. The Neighborhood Leadership Institutes are a partnership of the New York City's Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, New York Community Trust, and Citizens Committee for New York City.

A third example can be found in the city of Cupertino, California's **Block Leader Program** that was created over a decade ago to enhance emergency preparedness and to help address social cohesion concerns from rapidly changing demographics. Block leaders are identified and receive training and support on city services and processes, as well as training in cultural awareness and communication. To date, almost 350 block leaders, who each coordinate their own block or community and foster connections across residents, have been trained.

## Why does it matter?

As communities grow increasingly diverse, forward-thinking local governments must be proactive in connecting to new populations. Helping immigrants and established community members better understand how to navigate local systems, organize themselves to express their concerns, and develop networks among and across ethnic groups will build greater cohesion and has the potential to result in cost savings, such as through decreases in code violation enforcement.

## Resources for Action

### Links

<http://www.nashville.gov/Mayors-Office/Priorities/New-Americans/MyCity-Academy.aspx> ↗

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/imm/html/initiatives/nli.shtml> ↗

[www.cupertino.org/blockleader](http://www.cupertino.org/blockleader) ↗

## Additional Reading

City of Beaverton, Oregon's BOLD program trains immigrant residents on civic participation and connects them with opportunities to serve:

<http://www.beavertonoregon.gov/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/4141> ↗

Margie McHugh, "Immigration Civic Integration and Service Access Initiatives: City-Sized Solutions for City-Sized Needs," Migration Policy Institute, September 2014.

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# Seal of Biliteracy

## Policy

Recognizing multi-lingual proficiency and attainment as a valued educational achievement and workforce skill.s.

## Where it's working

- State of California
- State of New York
- 8 states and over 150 local communities

## Players

- State Boards of Education
- Local School Boards
- State and Local Policymakers
- Bilingual Education Advocates
- Chambers of Commerce

## What does it mean?

Eight states and over 150 local communities have developed an easy-to-implement tool to recognize high school students who attain a high level of proficiency in two or more languages (including English) by graduation. The **Seal of Biliteracy** encourages students to pursue language acquisition, honors the skills our students attain, and provides evidence of skills that are attractive to future employers and college admissions offices.

## What is the Seal of Biliteracy?

The Seal of Biliteracy is an award given by a school, district, or county office of education in recognition of students who have studied and attained proficiency in two or more languages by high school graduation. The Seal of Biliteracy takes the form of a gold seal that appears on the transcript or diploma of the graduating senior and is a statement of accomplishment for future employers and for college admissions.

The Seal of Biliteracy originated in California in 2008 in response to attacks that anti-immigrant forces made on Limited English Proficient (LEP) students. The decade saw its share of English-only proposals, as well as proposals seeking to restrict state benefits. Proud immigrant parents and supporters correctly identified that their children's graduation from Californian high schools represented a triumph for students who were fluent in another language and who had demonstrated their ability to master English as well on their educational journey.

**Soon the business community learned of this program and recognized that, indeed, bilingual high school graduates represent an economic advantage to the corporate sector,** especially to a state like California that serves as a gateway to Latin America and Asia. Business and immigration advocates joined together to make this a state policy. By 2012, more than 10,000 graduating high school students in California earned this recognition for biliteracy, demonstrating proficiency in English

and at least one of 40 other languages, including American Sign Language.

## Why does it matter?

One appeal of the Seal of Biliteracy is its simplicity and extremely low cost of implementation. Most programs put the burden on the student to demonstrate that bilingual literacy by taking achievement, advanced placement, or other tests on their own dime. The Seal of Biliteracy honors the hard work that ESL learners do in the classroom to achieve high school graduation mastery of English, as well as recognizing students who have worked to achieved proficiency in a foreign language, in addition to their native English.

## Resources for Action

### Seal of Biliteracy Website

<http://sealofbiliteracy.org> ↗

Californians Together, a statewide coalition of parents, teachers, education advocates and civil rights groups committed to improving policy and practice for educating English learners, maintains a separate website to assist communities in the proliferation of the Seal of Biliteracy. Since 2009, Californians Together has been working with schools districts statewide to develop and implement the Seal of Biliteracy.

### Materials for Implementation

<https://velazquezpress.com/velázquez-press-seal-biliteracy-recognition> ↗

Velazquez Press, a division of Academic Learning Company, LLC, assists school districts in creating and implementing a seal of biliteracy, including offering testing to confirm language proficiency.

## Additional Reading

California State Seal of Biliteracy

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/er/sealofbiliteracy.asp> ↗

Washington State Seal of Biliteracy

<https://www.k12.wa.us/WorldLanguages/SealofBiliteracy.aspx> ↗

New York State Seal of Biliteracy

<http://www.regents.nysed.gov/meetings/2012Meetings/November2012/1112p12d1.pdf> ↗

Republic of Texas State Seal of Biliteracy

<http://sealofbiliteracy.org/texas> ↗

Minnesota State Seal of Biliteracy

<http://sealofbiliteracy.org/minnesota> ↗

Illinois State Seal of Biliteracy

<http://sealofbiliteracy.org/illinois> ↗

New Mexico State Seal of Biliteracy

<http://tinyurl.com/oh5pgfk> ↗

Louisiana State Seal of Biliteracy

<http://sealofbiliteracy.org/louisiana> ↗

“Foreign Language Push Features New Credential,” Chicago Tribune, October 8, 2014.

<http://my.chicagotribune.com/#section/-1/article/p2p-81612897/> ↗

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# State-Funded Opportunity Centers

## Policy

Utilizing State resources to support local nonprofit integration efforts across the state.

## Where it's working

- State of New York
- 27 Opportunity Centers across the state

## Players

- New York Governor Andrew Cuomo
- New York State Office for New Americans
- Local Community Based Organizations

## What does it mean?

On January 2012, New York Governor Andrew M. Cuomo called for the creation the New York State Office for New Americans (ONA), the first statewide office in New York with a sole focus on assisting the State's immigrants in their efforts to integrate, contribute to the economy, and become a part of the communities across New York. Last year, Governor Cuomo and the State legislature codified the Office for New Americans as a statutory office of State government, making it the first state-level immigrant office created by statute in the country. In one of its first programmatic endeavors, ONA was able to allocate \$6 million in State resources to support 27 Opportunity Centers across the state.

## What is a State-Funded Opportunity Center?

In the example of New York, **Opportunity Centers** are State-funded resource centers that serve a range of immigrant communities. They are positioned throughout the state within existing culturally competent, language accessible community-based organizations. Opportunity Centers help New Americans learn English, prepare them for the U.S. citizenship exam, help them start and grow businesses, and help eligible young people apply for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).

To develop the application process, ONA staff conducted significant field research to better understand the integration needs among New York's immigrant communities. ONA met in different parts of the State with more than 130 individuals representing 95 immigrant and refugee service organizations, including visiting multiple English language education and naturalization programs to see how services are delivered, while researching and analyzing the skills and vulnerabilities of immigrants in the state's rural, suburban and urban communities. ONA spoke directly with immigrants, immigrant service providers, and governmental agencies in other states and abroad to identify

service delivery approaches that could be tailored to New York State's needs.

Awarded through a competitive process, ONA Opportunity Centers are located throughout the state within existing culturally competent, language-accessible community-based organizations. Opportunity Centers are asked to help New Americans learn English, prepare them for the U.S. citizenship exam, help them start and grow businesses, and help eligible young people apply for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). Each ONA Opportunity Center is asked to blend the work and efforts of trained professional staff with that of community volunteers and technology to help newcomers. Neighbors volunteer their time to help their new neighbors become part of the community. In its two years of operation over 88,600 immigrants have been assisted.

ONA is also supported by a toll-free, multi-lingual hotline to respond to general questions about immigration and naturalization and provides referrals to other immigrant-related public and private programs. This New York State Office for New Americans Hotline already receives more than 24,000 calls and makes over 32,000 referrals annually.

Each ONA Opportunity Center is required to provide at least 200 hours of ESOL instruction to more than 200 Limited English Proficiency clients per year in an effort to expand access to English language instruction in New York.

ONA has set a goal to increase New York's naturalizations. To that end, each Opportunity Center has been asked to utilize CitizenshipWorks, a new software program that simplifies the naturalization process, very much like TurboTax streamlines the tax process. Moreover, each ONA Opportunity Center is asked to assist at least 100 immigrants annually through the naturalization application process and provides direct access to exam preparation training. In the first two years of ONA's inception over 6,000 naturalization applications were completed and reviewed by legal counsel.

Additionally, to better harness the unique entrepreneurial spirit immigrants bring and to help them start new businesses, each ONA Opportunity Center is required to host at least four “starting your own business seminars” per year. After the seminar, immigrant clients sit with a business coach to assess the level of business development assistance needed. Those with a business background from their home countries meet between five and nine times with a business coach. New budding entrepreneurs are tracked separately into a multi-week intense business class to develop a business plan. At the end of either track, both sets of entrepreneurs are provided access to capital through a variety of State and private sources.

## Why does it matter?

While the laws governing immigration are set forth by the federal government, immigrant integration is experienced on the state and local level. Compared to many developed countries, the U.S. federal government provides very few resources to facilitate immigrant integration. The impacts of immigration and integration, however, are felt across local communities and states across the nation.

Increasingly, state and local governments are responding. Several states (Illinois, Michigan, Massachusetts, New York) have established State Offices for New Americans.

Providing state and local resources to support the nonprofit community-based efforts to integrate immigrants and refugees is important to speeding the integration process. Immigrant communities that are more efficiently and effectively integrated within their new communities foster even greater positive economic and social benefits to those communities.

The Opportunity Centers program of the New York Office for New Americans represents a creative and important vision of utilizing state and local resources to support the best practices in the field.

While the outputs and impacts of New York’s 27 Opportunity Centers can vary, the vision and concept of the program deserves highlighting. Future efforts may focus more on the entrepreneurship, workforce development, as well

as economic development aspects of integration, but New York's effort is exemplary in its vision and scale, as well as its use of local partners.

## Resources for Action

### **New York Office of New Americans Opportunity Centers Website**

<http://www.newamericans.ny.gov/opportunity/opportunity.html> ↗

The website for the New York Office of New Americans Opportunity Centers includes information to assist New York residents in finding one of the twenty-seven Opportunity Centers, as well as accessing their English language classes, citizenship services, entrepreneurship and business support services, job training, information on Deferred Action, and other resources.

### **Illinois Office of New Americans Website**

<http://www2.illinois.gov/gov/newamericans/Pages/default.aspx> ↗

### **Massachusetts Office for Refugees and Immigrants**

<http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/ori/> ↗

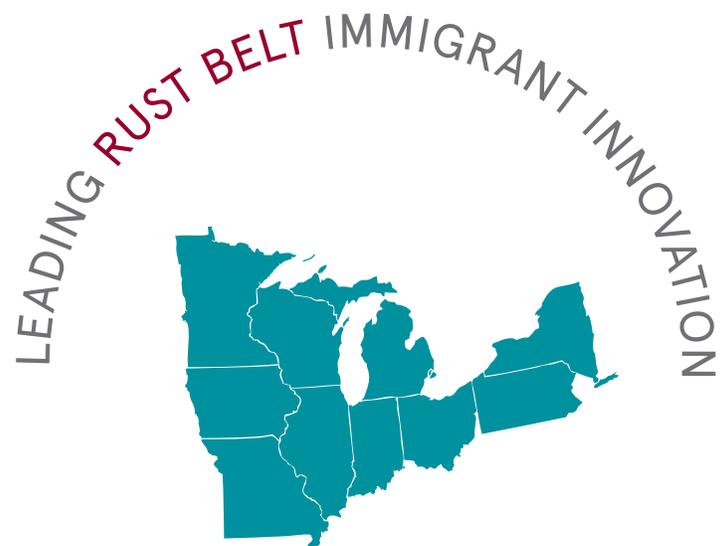
### **Michigan Office for New Americans Website**

<http://www.michigan.gov/ona> ↗

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