



STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES BY WELCOMING ALL RESIDENTS

*A Federal Strategic Action Plan on Immigrant & Refugee
Integration*

The White House Task Force on
New Americans

April 2015





President Barack Obama participates in a naturalization ceremony at the War Memorial of Korea in Seoul, Republic of Korea, April 25, 2014. Walter Haith, Field Office Director, U.S. Embassy, calls the name of each candidate, and Robert Daum, Deputy District Director, USCIS Asia-Pacific Region, administers the oath of allegiance. (Official White House Photo by Pete Souza)

The Task Force on New Americans

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The Department of Agriculture

The Department of Commerce

The Department of Education

The Department of Health and Human Services

The Department of Homeland Security

The Department of Housing and Urban Development

The Department of Justice

The Department of Labor

The Department of State

The Department of Transportation

The Small Business Administration

The Office of Management and Budget

The White House Domestic Policy Council

The White House Office for Intergovernmental Affairs and Public Engagement

The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy

The White House National Economic Council

The White House National Security Council

April 14, 2015

Dear Mr. President:

It is our privilege to submit to you the Task Force on New Americans' strategic action plan on immigrant and refugee integration. As the daughter of immigrants, and the son and grandson of individuals who came to the United States as refugees, respectively, it is a distinct honor to lead this initiative on your behalf, and on behalf of the more than 40 million immigrants and refugees living in the United States.

As you have often stated, our nation has drawn great strength from its tradition of welcoming new Americans to our shores. It is what makes America exceptional, keeping our country young, dynamic, and entrepreneurial. With the exception of Native Americans, we are all descended from individuals who came from someplace else. Regardless of when and how we arrived, Americans are bound together by fidelity to a set of ideas that all are created equal, and that anyone can make it if they work hard, regardless of the circumstances of their birth.

On November 21, 2014, you established by Presidential Memorandum the White House Task Force on New Americans, an interagency effort to develop a coordinated federal strategy to better integrate immigrants into American communities.

Since you announced the creation of the Task Force, we have seen great enthusiasm and support for this initiative — both within the federal government and from the public. The Task Force has conducted a thorough assessment of existing federal integration initiatives, engaged with stakeholders at the local and national levels, and solicited recommendations from the public.

This plan outlines the Task Force's integration strategy for the federal government, including goals and recommended actions to build welcoming communities; strengthen existing pathways to naturalization and promote civic engagement; support the skill development, entrepreneurship, and protect new American workers; expand opportunities for linguistic integration and education; and strengthen federal immigrant and refugee integration infrastructure.

Task Force members successfully executed an aggressive stakeholder engagement strategy to solicit proposals and recommendations for the Task Force's consideration. We received input from numerous individuals, faith- and community-based organizations, local officials, agencies, the private sector, and so many others on what is working to support immigrant integration and where opportunity exists for improvement. These efforts showed us that American communities are already engaged in innovative work to bring all of their residents together and are eager to talk about what more can be done to promote immigrant and refugee integration.

We see this report as a beginning. In the coming months, the Task Force will begin to implement its strategic goals and recommendations. Critical to the success of our implementation efforts are maintaining a continued, coordinated effort across the federal government as well as an open dialogue with stakeholders. None of this can, nor should, be done by the federal government alone. The pillars of civic, economic, and linguistic integration cannot be supported without the collaboration of state and local governments, the nonprofit and private sectors, schools, philanthropic organizations, community-based organizations, immigrant- and refugee-serving organizations, religious institutions, and private citizens. Only with a sustained effort from all of us can we ensure that the integration of new Americans remains a national priority.

In December 2015, the Task Force will submit to you a status report, pursuant to the provisions of the Presidential Memorandum, to inform you of the progress made toward the recommendations outlined in this report.

Thank you for your ongoing leadership and commitment to welcoming and integrating newcomers into the fabric of our country. It is an honor to lead this initiative on your behalf.

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I. Executive Summary

“For more than 200 years, our tradition of welcoming immigrants from around the world has given us a tremendous advantage over other nations. It’s kept us youthful, dynamic, and entrepreneurial. It has shaped our character as a people with limitless possibilities — people not trapped by our past, but able to remake ourselves as we choose.”

— President Barack Obama, November 21, 2014

Our country has long been a beacon of hope and opportunity for people from around the world. Today, 41.3 million foreign-born residents live in the United States and are contributing to the vitality of our country and their communities.¹ This includes the over 3 million refugees who have resettled here since 1975 from countries that span the globe.² These immigrants and refugees are adding much to our country’s social and cultural fabric, and are also critical to our country’s continued economic prosperity.

While 13 percent of the overall population is foreign-born,³ foreign-born workers represent close to 17 percent of the current U.S. labor force.⁴ Over the next 20 years, immigrants and their children will account for 85 percent of the net growth in the U.S. labor force.⁵ Immigrants are entrepreneurial, starting 28 percent of all new businesses.⁶ Moreover, a study by the Partnership for a New American Economy found that immigrants or their children have founded more than 40 percent of Fortune 500 companies, which collectively employ over 10 million people worldwide and generate annual revenues of \$4.2 trillion.⁷

Our success as a nation of immigrants is rooted in our historic success in integrating newcomers into the social, cultural, and economic fabric of our country. Integration is a dynamic two-way process that brings together newcomers and the long-time residents of communities into which they settle (“receiving communities”) to foster greater understanding, promote inclusiveness, speed economic success, and build secure, vibrant, and cohesive communities. We achieve a great deal for very little effort. Though we have had no official strategy for integration, the family members, employers, and communities where immigrants settle — combined with the efforts of immigrants themselves — result in a rapid pace of immigrants becoming Americans, achieving proficiency in English, adapting to the workforce, and becoming productive members of society. At the same time, communities, business leaders, state and local governments, and policymakers are recognizing the value of undertaking deliberate integration efforts.

The Obama Administration has studied immigrant and refugee integration efforts, maintained dialogue with stakeholders, and applied best practices and key principles, particularly those inspired by the “welcoming communities” movement. Welcoming communities are cities, counties, or towns that strive to bring immigrants and refugees and native-born residents together to create a positive environment for all. Early on, the Administration also identified three integration pillars — civic, economic, and linguistic integration — that have been its focus over the past six years. Numerous agencies have worked to enhance opportunities for new Americans across each of these pillars through

programs that engage local immigrant populations and provide them with access to training around language needs, career development, and support services.

To take these efforts further, in November 2014, President Obama created a formal interagency body, the White House Task Force on New Americans (“Task Force”). The Task Force aims to further strengthen the federal government’s integration efforts by making them more strategic and deliberate. Today, the Task Force is taking this important step by outlining the federal government’s goals to strengthen its integration efforts nationwide and build welcoming communities. In the coming months, the Task Force will be guided by key goals identified in this plan.

Goals and Recommended Actions

The Task Force identified goals to strengthen our civic, economic, and linguistic integration and to build strong and welcoming communities. Achieving these goals will require action by all Task Force members, state and local governments, the private and philanthropic sectors, and immigrants and refugees themselves. The Task Force will implement the recommended actions contained in this report, and identify additional activities to further expand immigrant and refugee integration efforts and build welcoming communities.

- **Building Welcoming Communities:** Recognizing that integration is a two-way process that occurs primarily at the local level, the Task Force will support initiatives that build bridges among immigrant and receiving communities. Key actions include:
 - *Building Welcoming Communities Challenge:* This spring, the Task Force will launch a challenge to support existing efforts and encourage additional local governments to develop and implement integration strategies tailored to their communities’ needs.
 - *Toolkit for Local Communities:* Many communities have the will to build welcoming communities, but do not have models and resources to develop plans and implement reforms. The Task Force will develop a toolkit to guide these communities in their efforts and to share information on federal funding and other initiatives.
 - *New Americans Corps to Build Local Capacity:* Local communities, and states, are on the front lines of building welcoming communities, but their capacity to engage is often limited. The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) will inject energetic AmeriCorps VISTA members into communities to help them increase capacity, expand multisector networks, and develop and implement local integration plans.
- **Strengthening Existing Pathways to Naturalization and Promoting Civic Engagement:** Every day, immigrants and refugees living in our country are seeking out opportunities to serve and, in the process, are reenergizing communities. Millions

are also eligible to become citizens. The Task Force will engage in a thoughtful strategy to encourage immigrants and refugees to volunteer, give back, and consider the benefits of naturalizing. Key actions include:

- *Citizenship Public Awareness Campaign:* DHS will launch a national, multilingual media campaign to raise awareness about the rights, responsibilities, and importance of U.S. citizenship, and available citizenship preparation tools.
- *Citizenship and Integration Grants Program:* In April, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) announced up to \$10 million in competitive grant funding for citizenship preparation programs in communities across the country. The Administration will continue to request appropriated funding for this program.
- *Presidential Ambassadors to Promote Citizenship and Naturalization:* The Task Force will harness inspirational stories of new Americans and others to promote naturalization, bolster integration initiatives and increase awareness of the contributions of new Americans to our country.
- *Identify Opportunities to Inform Individuals Eligible for Naturalization:* USCIS will explore opportunities to notify permanent residents about their potential eligibility for naturalization. This will include leveraging its existing case status and e-filing tools to notify permanent residents seeking to renew or replace a permanent resident card about potential eligibility for naturalization.
- *Expand Citizenship Outreach Partnerships.* Over the past five years, USCIS has increased efforts to coordinate with cities and public libraries to provide information about citizenship in local communities. In 2015, USCIS will double the number of formal [letters of agreement](#) with local governments and seek out additional opportunities to expand these local partnerships.
- *Increase Mobile Immigration Services:* USCIS, will assess the feasibility of providing mobile services in areas where underserved populations are located and will partner with federal agencies, such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), that have footprints in rural and other underserved communities, to provide mobile immigration services.
- *Encourage New Americans to Serve:* CNCS will promote volunteer opportunities among immigrants and refugees. In September 2015, Task Force members will promote opportunities for new Americans and others to volunteer and serve, and highlight successful stories of new Americans who are volunteering or serving, during annual Citizenship Week activities.
- *Refugee AmeriCorps Program:* The Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) and CNCS will work

toward implementing a Refugee AmeriCorps program to assist local communities with integration of refugee populations. It will also encourage grantees to recruit more established refugees to serve in the Refugee AmeriCorps program and seek opportunities to expand the program.

- **Supporting Skill Development, Fostering Entrepreneurship and Small Business Growth, and Protecting New American Workers:** New Americans are contributing significantly to our economy as workers and entrepreneurs. Task Force members, including the Departments of Labor (DOL), Commerce, Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Justice (DOJ), and HHS, and the Small Business Administration (SBA), will continue promoting the economic integration of immigrants and refugees. Key actions include:
 - *Small Business Training Courses and Toolkit for New Americans:* SBA will pilot new “101” classes in targeted cities with concentrations of immigrants and refugees, in collaboration with local partners. SBA will also create a new toolkit to help new American entrepreneurs understand business and financial fundamentals so they can become lender-ready.
 - *“Made It in America” Campaign:* To promote success stories and motivate individuals to take advantage of SBA tools and resources, SBA will launch a new campaign, “Made It in America,” to highlight notable new American entrepreneurs who have used SBA as a small business resource. The Department of Commerce will also promote immigrant entrepreneurship through the President’s Ambassadors for Global Entrepreneurship program and Business Sunday initiative.
 - *Implement New Workforce Programs in Partnership with New Americans:* As the federal government implements its new workforce training and education law — the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) — DOL and the Department of Education (ED) will promote funding opportunities and best practices so that new Americans are provided the tools they need to succeed.
 - *Career Pathways and Credentialing Toolkit for New Americans:* DOL, ED, and HHS will collaborate to release a career pathways and credentialing toolkit. This toolkit will provide information for states, localities, and will include examples of immigrant-focused career-pathways programs. These agencies will reach out to additional Task Force members, including the Department of Transportation, as it develops the toolkit.
 - *Bolster Outreach to Immigrants and Refugees to Promote Awareness of Labor Protections and Rights:* DOL, in partnership with DOJ, USCIS, and others, will provide information regarding worker rights and protections to new Americans.

- *Meaningful Access to Housing Programs:* HUD will launch “HUD Speaks,” a two-year pilot to improve communication with and enhance efforts to serve ELs and LEP individuals. As a part of these efforts, HUD will develop interactive tools that provide information on HUD programs in multiple languages, redesign “I Speak” cards for staff, and distribute posters to spread awareness about HUD programs and services.

- **Expanding Opportunities for Linguistic Integration and Education:** English language acquisition is vitally important for new Americans’ success. The Obama Administration will implement cradle-to-career strategies to enhance access to high-quality language acquisition and increase opportunities for postsecondary education and training. Key actions include:
 - *Early Learning Toolkit for Parents:* ED and HHS will create a parent toolkit to provide families, including new American families, with information about the importance of early learning for their children and resources on how to find high-quality early learning programs.

 - *Highlight Promising Practices and Resources for Serving English Learners (ELs):* ED will highlight effective, evidence-based interventions for ELs and new Americans, for use in federal programs such as the existing program for immigrant children under Title III. These interventions should include professional development for educators to meet the unique needs of new Americans and ELs as a whole.

 - *Encourage Employers, Educational Systems, State and Local Governments, and Other Career-Building Institutions to Increase Access to ESL Courses:* Federal agencies, such as Commerce and SBA, will provide information and tools to employers about increasing access to ESL courses, education services, and other training programs for frontline immigrant and refugee workers. ED, in partnership with other Task Force members, will also explore opportunities to pilot and support innovative models of providing ESL instruction.

 - *Highlight Effective Institutional Programs, Community Models, and State Policies that Enhance Opportunities for New Americans:* ED will highlight effective institutional programs, community models, and state policies that serve young people who are new Americans. For example, Café College, in San Antonio, Texas, offers community-based college and career advising opportunities to new Americans and their children.

 - *Identify Education Grant Programs with Untapped Potential to Support New Americans, Including Programs that Employ Place-Based Strategies:* ED, as well as other Task Force members, will take issues confronting new Americans into consideration when developing education grant programs, or when awarding grants for programs under which new Americans are eligible to receive services.

II. Introduction

For more than 200 years, the United States has welcomed new Americans to our shores. It is what makes America exceptional. It has kept our country young, dynamic, and entrepreneurial. The Obama Administration is guided by the core principle that being American is about more than what we look like or where we come from. What makes us Americans is our shared commitment to an ideal — that all of us are created equal, and all of us have the chance to make of our lives what we will.

By bringing immigrants, refugees, and receiving communities together around integration strategies, we create communities with a welcoming culture and strengthen our ability to ensure that all community members have the tools and opportunities to succeed and fully contribute to our nation.

Trends in Immigrant and Refugee Populations

We are, and will continue to be, a nation of immigrants. In the past decade, the United States has welcomed, on average, approximately 1 million lawful permanent residents⁸ and more than 700,000 newly naturalized citizens each year.⁹ Today, the foreign-born population is estimated at 41.3 million and represents 13 percent of the total population.¹⁰ That's up from 9.6 million, or 5 percent of the overall population, in 1970, a period of historically low levels of immigration. Immigration to the United States has not reached current levels since the beginning of the 20th century, when the percentage of foreign-born residents comprised 14.7 percent (or 13.5 million) of the overall population in 1910.¹¹

Immigrant Settlement Trends

Over the course of several decades, the composition of the foreign-born population has changed, transforming and diversifying the nation's demographics, culture, and workforce.¹² In 1970, the foreign-born population primarily originated from European countries such as Italy, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Poland.¹³ Today, the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that the majority of the foreign-born population hails from Latin American and Asian countries¹⁴ though other foreign-born populations have grown considerably. For example, the foreign-born population from Africa increased from about 80,000 in 1960 to approximately 1.6 million today.¹⁵

Immigrants are also settling in parts of the country that have not historically been considered immigrant destinations. For example, in 1900, the 20 metropolitan areas with the largest immigrant populations included cities such as Chicago, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston.¹⁶ By 2010, the 20 largest immigrant destinations included several metropolitan areas in the South, such as Atlanta, and in the West, such as Las Vegas.¹⁷ Indeed, nearly two-thirds of all states now have foreign-born populations of more than 5 percent.¹⁸ While the top destinations for immigrants continue to be more traditional states

such as California, New York, Texas, and Florida,¹⁹ the shifting settlement patterns are reflected in the list of states with the largest growth in their immigrant populations between 1990 and 2000 — such as North Carolina, Georgia, Nevada, Arkansas, and Utah.²⁰

Refugee Settlement Trends

The U.S. refugee resettlement program reflects the United States' highest values and aspirations to compassion, generosity, and leadership. Since 1975, the United States has welcomed more than 3 million refugees from all over the world.²¹ From 1975 to the mid-1980s, refugees primarily hailed from Asia. The number of refugees from the former Soviet Union significantly increased in the late 1980s.²² More recently, the primary source regions have shifted, with the majority of refugees originating from the Near East and South Asia, followed by East Asia and Africa.

In fiscal year 2013, the U.S. refugee admissions ceiling was 70,000, with numbers allocated to five regions.²³ Ultimately, refugees from 64 different countries were resettled in American communities.²⁴ In 2013, the leading countries of nationality for refugee admissions were Iraq (28 percent), Burma (23 percent), Bhutan (13 percent), and Somalia (11 percent) — 75 percent of refugee admissions in 2013 were from these four countries.²⁵ The leading destination states for these refugees include Texas, California, Michigan, New York, and Florida.²⁶ Although one-third of refugees were minors (ages 0–17), more than half of admitted refugees were of working age (18–64).²⁷

These individuals bring a variety of skills, including the determination to persevere and rebuild their lives. In addition to refugees, the United States has also welcomed many other resettlement-eligible populations such as asylees; certified (foreign) victims of human trafficking; Cuban/Haitian Entrants; and Special Immigrant Visa recipients from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Community Impact

One of the clearest indicators of immigrant impact is reflected in their contributions to the workforce. Today, the foreign-born population accounts for nearly 17 percent of the U.S. workforce and continues to be an increasing component of the labor force.²⁸ Approximately 78 percent of the foreign-born population is of working age (18–64).²⁹ Foreign-born workers have higher labor force participation rates than native-born workers and contribute to a variety of sectors, ranging from service occupations to management, professional, and related occupations.³⁰

Job opportunities are one factor influencing destination choices, but destination areas for foreign-born individuals vary, presenting both opportunities and challenges for receiving communities. Highly skilled and entrepreneurial migrants tend to settle in vibrant metropolitan areas, financial hubs, or tech clusters, while other regions often struggle to attract and retain native-born and foreign-born workers alike.³¹ Moreover, job opportunities draw significant numbers of immigrants and refugees to cities with less

experience in integrating newcomers.³² When communities work together, they can maximize the benefits of immigration — for both new Americans and receiving communities — spurring economic growth, innovation, and revenues.

Economic Benefits of Immigrant and Refugee Integration

A large body of academic research has shown that immigration benefits the U.S. economy as a whole, the communities in which immigrants live, and the businesses where they work. Immigrants increase the size of the population and thus of the labor force and customer base, making an important contribution to economic growth. Immigrants are highly entrepreneurial and innovative. Immigrants, for example, are more likely than native-born individuals to start businesses,³³ and a study by the Partnership for a New American Economy found that more than 40 percent of Fortune 500 companies were founded by immigrants or the children of immigrants.³⁴ In 2005, over half of new tech startups in Silicon Valley had at least one immigrant founder.³⁵ A 2010 study by Jennifer Hunt and Marjolaine Gauthier-Loiselle found that foreign-born workers obtain patents at two times the rate of native-born workers because, compared to the native-born population, a greater share of immigrants have science and engineering degrees. Immigrants increase the rate of patenting per capita without reducing patenting rates of native-born individuals.³⁶ Creating welcoming communities can help to ensure that our nation fully reaps the economic benefits of this vitality and creativity.

In addition, research suggests that U.S. citizenship provides significant economic and practical benefits to workers, families, and the U.S. economy. Comparing naturalized immigrants to similar noncitizen immigrants, a number of studies have identified a “citizenship wage premium:” the amount by which naturalized immigrants earn higher wages than non-naturalized immigrants. This difference in earnings is not explained fully by differences in personal characteristics like education, experience, and occupation. In other words, wages for naturalized immigrants are higher than the wages of similar non-naturalized immigrants with the same level of education, the same experience on the job, and the same occupation, suggesting that naturalization itself boosts wages.³⁷

Using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, one study finds a citizenship premium of about 5 percent for young male immigrants.³⁸ A 2012 study by Manuel Pastor and Justin Scroggins estimates a larger earnings premium associated with citizenship of between 8 and 11 percent.³⁹ In their study, Pastor and Scroggins use data from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s Office of Immigration Statistics to simulate a scenario in which the population of legal immigrants eligible to become citizens under current law naturalize. They find that total income in the United States would increase by as much as \$9 to \$13 billion per year as a result of the citizenship wage premium.⁴⁰

The mechanisms that contribute to the citizenship wage premium are likely to include a number of factors, including the ability to obtain jobs and licenses for which citizenship is required;⁴¹ the ability to obtain jobs that require international travel, which is often easier for those with U.S. passports; and citizenship serving as a signal to employers that

a person means to stay in the United States.⁴² The largest factor, however, may be the least tangible: the added certainty that citizenship provides leads immigrants to be more likely to invest in themselves in the form of education or job skills training.

At the same time, naturalization has wider economic benefits. For instance, the certainty associated with citizenship also encourages investment in the communities in which immigrants live — by, for example, taking on the risk of starting a business or purchasing a home.⁴³ These investments not only grow the U.S. economy as a whole but also have important spillovers to the productivity of native-born workers and U.S. businesses.

Meanwhile, linguistic integration by immigrants can have similar economic benefits for both immigrants and native workers alike. Improving the English language skills of immigrants can boost their productivity, increasing the range and quality of jobs to which they have access and closing the earnings gap between immigrants and the U.S.-born. A 2004 study by Hoyt Bleakley and Aimee Chin, using data from the 1990 Census, finds that among adults who had immigrated to the United States as children, greater fluency in English is associated with higher earnings later in life.⁴⁴

A similar 2010 study by the same authors, using data from the 2000 Census, finds that immigrants with higher levels of English proficiency are more likely to achieve greater educational attainment and to earn higher wages.⁴⁵ The same 2010 study also finds that immigrants with greater English language skills are more likely to be socially integrated in their broader communities in terms of both interpersonal relationships and their choice of residence.⁴⁶ Lowering these linguistic barriers through policies encouraging greater linguistic integration will pay economic dividends for both immigrant populations and U.S. society as a whole.

Opportunities for Immigrant and Refugee Integration

While all American cities and regions share a common goal of growing and retaining their workforce, their needs and specific contexts vary widely. Cities like Detroit, which face a cycle of depopulation and persistent economic challenges, are seeking opportunities to increase immigration as a strategy to revitalize communities and generate economic growth.⁴⁷ Alternatively, tech clusters like Silicon Valley and global metropolitan areas like Los Angeles are magnets for native- and foreign-born workers alike, with immigrant entrepreneurs engineering significant and cutting-edge technologies.⁴⁸ Spread across the middle of this spectrum are reemerging manufacturing centers; rural areas with pressing workforce needs; gateway cities experiencing substantial population turnover; and satellite towns, and suburbs providing new destinations for immigrant communities.⁴⁹ Growing immigrant populations are helping to fuel the success of these American communities and offer several important opportunities.

- **Immigrants and refugees add to the rich diversity of our country.** The United States is a country of immigrants, where people from all around the world come to build a better life. As was the case with historic waves of immigration, recent

immigrants and refugees enrich and contribute to American society through their culture, language, and experience. New Americans bring fresh perspectives and help ensure that our country remains a dynamic global leader.

- **Immigrants and refugees can help us meet labor force needs as the Baby Boom generation reaches retirement age.** The U.S. Census Bureau predicts that, by 2030, the working age (18–64) population will drop to approximately 57 percent of the total population.⁵⁰ At the same time, the vast majority (78 percent) of immigrants are of working age.⁵¹ Foreign-born workers and their children are expected to account for a significant percentage of the net growth in the labor force.⁵² Helping immigrants and refugees fully realize their potential is a key factor to our economic growth.
- **Increasing numbers of lawful permanent residents (LPRs) are naturalizing.** Over the past decade, more than 700,000 individuals, on average, have chosen to naturalize each year.⁵³ This latest cohort of new citizens is becoming more civically engaged and seeking out opportunities to give back to their new hometowns, which is energizing their receiving communities. With approximately two-thirds (8.8 million) of the LPR population estimated to be eligible to naturalize, the potential contributions of these future citizens is tremendous.⁵⁴

Maximizing the assets of the growing foreign-born population in the United States presents a variety of mutually beneficial opportunities to meet receiving communities' needs and integrate immigrants and refugees. Strategic integration initiatives can increase job creation, fuel growth, foster innovation and entrepreneurship, generate increased revenue, and create vibrant culturally rich communities. However, these benefits are not guaranteed. Receiving communities must engage with newcomers and together develop goals to ensure success for all residents.

Challenges to Immigrant and Refugee Integration

Over the past decade, the number of receiving communities proactively seeking to integrate immigrants and refugees has grown significantly. Several state and local offices of New Americans or Immigrant Affairs have been created or reenergized. Mayors are forming partnerships with the local business community to encourage the recruitment and retention of immigrant businesses and workers. Foreign entrepreneurs are starting businesses that not only create jobs, but often revitalize neighborhoods and attract more diversity to aging downtowns and small communities alike. Educational institutions and workforce training systems are working to sharpen the skills and training of newcomers seeking to increase their earning potential and to provide for their families. Local communities are using public libraries, schools, and other local information hubs to provide information about the naturalization process.

Despite these efforts, newcomers and receiving communities continue to face challenges to successful integration and to building welcoming communities. Through engagement

with stakeholders, the Task Force identified common challenges faced by receiving communities:

- **Limited capacity and funding for immigrant and refugee integration and welcoming communities activities.** While there is significant interest, state and local governments and service providers identified the lack of capacity and funding as one of the primary barriers to creating new and strengthening existing integration programs and welcoming communities initiatives.
- **Limited awareness about refugees and limited understanding about the U.S.’s role in refugee resettlement.** Refugees are a unique subset within the broader immigrant population who tend to be less well-known across mainstream networks and communities. Yet they are an important part of this nation’s fabric, and contribute positively to the communities in which they live. Increasing awareness about refugees and facilitating linkages between the resettlement network and mainstream networks can help address challenges to integration.
- **Limited access to successful integration models.** Integration and receiving community leaders have begun to organize and convene forums to share best practices, most prominently through the annual National Immigrant Integration Conference.⁵⁵ In 2014, the Obama Administration also held the first-ever White House Convening on Immigrant and Refugee Integration and issued a [fact sheet](#), *Strengthening Communities by Welcoming All Residents: The Federal Role in Immigrant & Refugee Integration*.⁵⁶ Still, there are limited mechanisms to identify and share successful evidence-based models of economic, linguistic, and civic integration that are already working in other communities.

In order to ensure successful integration, the Task Force seeks to support and increase the capacity of receiving communities to build welcoming communities. Ultimately, these efforts will require a multifaceted and cross-sector strategy that leverages existing efforts by key stakeholders, all working in partnership with receiving communities.

The Task Force on New Americans

On November 21, 2014, President Obama created the White House Task Force on New Americans (“Task Force”) as part of a series of executive actions to fix our broken immigration system. The goal of the Task Force is to develop a federal immigrant and refugee integration strategy that allows individuals to live up to their fullest potential and brings immigrants and refugees and receiving communities together to strengthen communities. The President directed the Task Force to deliver this plan within 120 days. As a part of its efforts, the Task Force embarked on a robust engagement effort to gather input and ideas from a cross-section of stakeholders.

Given the diversity and creativity of local integration initiatives, Task Force Co-Chairs Cecilia Muñoz, Director of the White House Domestic Policy Council, and León Rodríguez, USCIS Director, issued a national [Call for Ideas](#). This request generated close

to 350 public submissions from immigrant and refugee resettlement advocates and service providers, faith-based and community-based organizations, intergovernmental stakeholders such as local mayors, and many others across the country. In addition, the Task Force hosted three national listening sessions, with more than 1,000 participants, to seek stakeholder feedback on best practices and strategies for successfully integrating immigrants and refugees as well as building welcoming receiving communities.

Finally, Task Force members proactively reached out to existing stakeholder networks to learn about the integration challenges and opportunities in particular agency policies, programs, and initiatives. Highlights of agency stakeholder engagement include:

- Site visits: DOL, ED, SBA, and CNCS conducted site visits to organizations working with new Americans and interacted with individuals, leaders, and community members to gain insights into their experiences.
- Stakeholder listening sessions and roundtables: DOL, ED, and HHS hosted listening sessions and roundtables with stakeholders including labor unions, worker centers, faith-based organizations, immigrant advocates, and community-based organizations.
- Virtual town halls and webinars: In order to engage stakeholders who were unable to attend in-person sessions, agencies also hosted webinars that provided the public with an opportunity to ask questions and offer feedback.

In addition to public feedback, Task Force members conducted an assessment of their agency's efforts to develop, implement, and monitor targeted immigrant integration initiatives to further the civic, economic, and linguistic integration of new Americans. These engagement opportunities and internal assessments contributed greatly to the development of the Task Force's integration strategy and plan for action.

III. Building Welcoming Communities

Integration is not something immigrants and refugees can achieve in isolation; welcoming environments are necessary to ensure successful outcomes that benefit local communities as well as our nation. For effective integration, we need a comprehensive national and local effort that draws on the strengths and capacity of all sectors of society and all levels of government — a “whole of society” approach. Within this approach, there is a strong need for the federal government to promote a policy framework that enhances state and local integration efforts. Because integration happens primarily at the local level, this whole of society approach must also capitalize on the flexibility, responsiveness, and creativity of our communities and local partners. Potential partners include municipal and state governments, schools, public libraries, businesses and nonprofits, civic organizations, community-based organizations, immigrant- and refugee-serving organizations, faith communities, and foundations, to name a few. The most critical element of a whole of society approach is the American people, and their continued willingness to extend a neighborly welcome to immigrants and refugees.

Integration as a Two-Way Process

Discussions on immigrant integration often focus on what immigrants can do to acclimate or “fit in” to their new environment — become fluent in English, navigate the job market, and generally adapt to the culture of their adopted home. Acknowledged less often is the important role of receiving communities. Communities play a vital role in welcoming immigrants by celebrating and valuing their diverse linguistic and cultural assets, connecting new residents to long-time residents, and building support networks to assist in integration and community cohesion. Like any relationship, the relationship between immigrants and their communities must be a two-way process with shared opportunities and responsibilities.

Engaging Receiving Communities

The Task Force takes inspiration from the [Welcoming Communities Movement](#), which engages receiving communities and creates welcoming environments for all community members. This movement is focused on building 21st century communities that attract and retain global talent and investment.

Examples of federal and nonprofit initiatives to engage receiving communities include:

- Within DHS, USCIS administers the [Citizenship and Integration Grant Program](#), which supports and promotes engagement with immigrant receiving communities. When USCIS reviews grant applications, it considers the extent to which a program supports engagement with the receiving community as a factor in selecting award recipients. Grant Program award recipients have shown exceptional promise in their efforts to engage local immigrant populations as well as the communities receiving them. Some [examples of grant recipient efforts](#)

designed to involve local communities include a storytelling program — led by immigrants at a public library — that focuses on educating long-term residents on the immigrant community; a partnership with a local police department to help the immigrant community establish neighborhood crime watch programs; and a civics program utilizing local high school students as volunteer tutors.

- The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) [partners](#) with USCIS to distribute information, educational materials, and training resources on immigration and citizenship to libraries. With nearly 9,000 public libraries and more than 17,000 library branches and bookmobiles in the 50 states and the District of Columbia,⁵⁷ libraries serve as local, accessible, and trusted spaces for immigrants to find information. According to IMLS, more than 55 percent of new Americans use the public library at least once a week.⁵⁸ Through this partnership, USCIS and IMLS seek to ensure that librarians have the necessary tools to refer their customers to accurate and reliable sources of information on immigration-related topics.
- With funding from ED, World Education, Inc. leads efforts to build the capacity of local multi-stakeholder networks to support the integration of immigrants and refugees through the [Network for Integrating New Americans \(NINA\)](#) initiative. NINA's goals are to improve immigrants' access to effective and innovative English language programs; support immigrants on the path to citizenship; and support immigrants' career development through training and education. NINA pilot sites are located in five communities. Each NINA community is unique and is building its own plan for success. In Boise, the Neighbors United Network, a coalition of over 20 government agencies, educational institutions, community groups, and faith leaders identified economic integration as a key area of focus. They are pursuing this goal by launching a new workforce development initiative, [Global Talent Idaho](#), which is helping skilled immigrants find jobs related to their former careers, experience, and education.
- [Welcoming America](#) — a national network of organizations that promote mutual respect and cooperation between foreign-born and native-born Americans — is also engaging with receiving communities across the country. Welcoming America is working with more than a dozen economic development initiatives to create a new network – the [WE Global Network](#) – to focus on economic integration. Welcoming America is also working with dozens of communities through its [Welcoming Cities and Counties](#) initiative.
- The [National Partnership on New Americans \(NPNA\)](#) – a national partnership of the largest regional immigrant rights organizations largely located in traditional immigrant receiving states – is providing support to local communities seeking to integrate and empower immigrants and refugees to build welcoming communities. Since 2009, NPNA has brought together stakeholders at the National Immigrant Integration Conference to share best practices and build partnerships.

Engaging Immigrants and Refugees

Equally important is a concerted effort to engage immigrants and refugees directly in integration initiatives. Several government agencies and programs serve to build trust with immigrant and refugee communities and to provide support, education, and ongoing dialogue.

- The DHS [Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties \(CRCL\)](#) is charged with ensuring that the agency protects individual liberty, fairness, and equality under the law in carrying out its responsibilities. Crucial to this effort is engaging directly with affected communities, including immigrants and refugees. CRCL holds quarterly community roundtable meetings in 16 cities to bring together community leaders and federal, state, and local government officials.
- USCIS also regularly engages with immigrants and stakeholders on a wide range of immigration topics. The agency conducts multilingual engagements, hosted in USCIS field offices, public libraries, municipal facilities, and spaces provided by community partners. Since 2012, USCIS has hosted engagements in Spanish, Creole, Arabic, Vietnamese, Mandarin, Cantonese, and Korean. From January 1, 2012, to July 30, 2014, more than 12,000 individuals participated in these multilingual engagements. USCIS also has a [Multilingual Resource Center](#), which offers immigrants and refugees information in 23 languages.
- Because new American workers are often more vulnerable to exploitation by unscrupulous employers due to language and cultural barriers, DOL engages them directly through partnerships with various federal partners. For example, DOL works with the White House Initiative on Asian American Pacific Islanders (WHIAAPI) to offer [train-the-trainer activities](#) in targeted sectors, such as nail salons, that employ large numbers of Asian American workers. The DOL Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) conducts [outreach and provides education](#) for vulnerable populations to educate workers about their workplace rights and applicable nondiscrimination provisions of laws enforced by OFCCP.
- [CNCS](#), through its national service programs, places national service participants in nonprofit, faith-based, and other community organizations, and public agencies to create programs that bring low-income individuals and communities out of poverty, including new Americans, and address critical unmet needs. For example, some AmeriCorps VISTA members serve as Refugee Job Developers. Their responsibilities include identifying and partnering with local employers willing to hire newly arrived refugees with limited English skills; researching credentialing and career opportunities for refugees who hold professional degrees; and creating curricula for employment readiness classes for refugees.
- The HHS Office of Community Services' ([OCS](#)) Community Services Block Grant ([CSBG](#)) program supports a nationwide local network — primarily of

nonprofit Community Action Agencies ([CAAs](#)) — offering a wide range of services aimed at strengthening both urban and rural communities, including citizenship education, job development and placement, housing assistance, English learning and adult basic education, health services, and community economic development projects. In [partnership](#), OCS and ORR seek to further promote refugee stakeholder engagement in community needs assessments, and strengthen technical assistance, outreach, and collaboration between the CSBG and resettlement networks to help advance refugee community integration.

Ensuring Language Access and Equal Access

Some new Americans lack proficiency in the English language when they first arrive in this country. Even those who are fluent in the English language may find their skills faltering in unfamiliar or intimidating situations, such as in courtroom proceedings, when receiving a healthcare diagnosis, during encounters with law enforcement agents, or in contacts with local, state, or federal government. As various levels of government engage with new Americans, it is important that they provide meaningful access to programs and services, consistent with our nation’s civil rights laws, which prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin. A government agency that denies limited English proficient (LEP) individuals meaningful access to federally funded programs and activities would be in violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin in programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance. Additionally, Executive Order 13166, [Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency](#), requires federal agencies to ensure that LEP individuals have meaningful access to the federal government’s own programs. DOJ enforces these language access obligations and coordinates implementation of Executive Order 13166.

Other examples of the federal government’s activities include:

- DOJ’s [Interagency Working Group on Limited English Proficiency](#) works to ensure that federal agencies are enforcing Title VI consistently and effectively with respect to LEP individuals. Working Group members share promising practices, create and help to implement tools or other forms of technical assistance, identify common enforcement issues, and exchange ideas for ensuring high-quality and cost-effective language assistance services. For example, in April 2015, DOJ, the Social Security Administration, DHS, and the Department of the Treasury are releasing a video vignette training series and toolkit to inform federal employees about language access best practices — e.g., how to determine if an individual is LEP, how to determine the individual’s language, and how to interact with an LEP individual using telephonic and other interpretation methods.
- Practices that deny LEP persons meaningful access to state courts may not only violate federal law but also undermine the fair, efficient, and accurate administration of justice. To address these concerns, DOJ launched a Courts Language Access Initiative, with a multipronged approach of enforcement,

technical assistance, and capacity building to ensure full language access in state court proceedings and operations nationwide. As part of this Initiative, DOJ issued a [letter](#) to state court administrators and state court chief justices in August 2010 reminding them of the longstanding obligation of federally funded state court systems to provide LEP individuals with meaningful access to the court process.

- The General Services Administration maintains a [Multilingual Digital Group](#) of federal, state, and local government web content managers who are working to expand and improve digital content in languages other than English. The Multilingual Digital Group’s primary goal is to meet the growing demand for government information and services in multiple languages and to share ideas, challenges, and best practices for managing multilingual content.
- HHS has developed enhanced “National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services in Health and Health Care” standards ([National CLAS Standards](#)) that provide a blueprint for agencies and healthcare organizations to provide effective and respectful quality care and services that are responsive to diverse cultural practices, preferred languages, health literacy levels, and other communication needs.
- In HHS, ORR’s [refugee health](#) resources aim to ensure refugees’ access to critical mainstream health resources and promote health literacy and information by awarding refugee health [grants](#), as well as providing culturally and linguistically appropriate materials and videos on [health insurance](#), [emergency preparedness](#), refugee women’s health, and [emotional wellness](#).

State and Local Initiatives That Are Institutionalizing Welcoming Efforts

There are many ways in which state and local governments across the country are demonstrating their commitment to immigrant integration — some have created formal institutions such as Offices for New Americans and Immigrant Affairs; others have published proclamations or resolutions declaring themselves to be welcoming communities; and others are developing and pursuing integration plans. In fact, the White House has recognized local models and leaders as [Champions of Change](#). Below are examples of promising trends for building welcoming communities under way in communities across the country.

Offices for New Americans and Immigrant Affairs

Several states and cities have established offices to coordinate and lead integration efforts. While each office is unique in scope and size, they generally share similar missions of bringing together foreign-born and native-born individuals. Illinois, Massachusetts, New York, and Michigan are examples of states with offices dedicated to immigrant integration.⁵⁹

Established in 2010, the Illinois [Office of New Americans Policy and Advocacy](#) has increased the number of Welcoming Centers from two to five.⁶⁰ To aid the growing numbers of immigrants who live outside of the Chicago area, the Governor's Office used a Welcoming Center "Mobile Unit" to hold service fairs or "Welcoming Days." This effort ensure that approximately 11,000 new Americans received access to services and programs in 2012.⁶¹ The Office also increased the number of service providers from 11 to 25 state agencies, and made more information available online and in multiple languages.⁶²

In 2013, New York State established an [Office for New Americans \(ONA\)](#) and has created a network of 27 neighborhood-based Opportunity Centers where integration activities are encouraged. As part of its efforts to leverage new Americans professional skills, ONA, the Cooper Union, and the Bnai Zion Foundation developed an innovative public-private partnership with the Retraining Program for Immigrant Engineers to offer free professional courses and job placement assistance for high-skilled new Americans for the fall 2014 semester.⁶³ Eligible immigrants are able to enroll in introductory and technology courses designed to update participants' engineering, computer programming, and business skills.⁶⁴

The [Michigan Office for New Americans](#) was established in 2014 to "help grow Michigan's economy" and provides information on integration opportunities, such as where to find citizenship and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, information on professional licensing and business startups, and general government resources.

In addition to statewide offices, many cities have created similar institutions. The City of Boston, Massachusetts, established the [Mayor's Office of New Bostonians](#) in 1998. This office "acts as a catalyst for providing opportunity, access and equality for immigrants, and highlights the contributions and the essential role that immigrants have played and continue to play in making Boston the world class city that it is."⁶⁵

The City of Chicago, Illinois, developed a comprehensive "New Americans Plan" in 2012 that includes strategies to ensure that the City's diverse immigrant population is empowered. The [City's Office of New Americans](#) leads initiatives to improve services and engage immigrant communities through collaboration with local community organizations, academic institutions, government partners, and the private sector.

Los Angeles, California, has long been a gateway for newcomers. The [Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs](#) leads initiatives to promote immigrant integration in the city and coordinates outreach and legislative advocacy around immigration issues. The Office also provides support to immigrant entrepreneurs and works with local community-based organizations to hold workshops and information sessions on citizenship and other immigration programs.⁶⁶

The New York City Mayor's [Office of Immigrant Affairs \(MOIA\)](#) provides a variety of services to the city's diverse immigrant population. Through the show "We Are New York," MOIA coordinates free conversation groups to help adult immigrants learn

English.⁶⁷ MOIA has also worked to increase access and awareness of citizenship through [NY Citizenship in Schools](#). This program provides naturalization information, assistance, and financing options to the parents of students in the city's public schools who are interested and eligible to apply for citizenship.⁶⁸

Campaigns and Resolutions to Highlight Contributions of Immigrants and Refugees

Another way municipal governments are demonstrating their commitment to immigrant integration is by passing resolutions that recognize the importance of building welcoming cities, honoring our nation's heritage as a nation of immigrants and refugees.

- Since 2000, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has joined with communities to commemorate World Refugee Day on June 20. National organizations like the International Rescue Committee host [events](#) with their affiliates, including film screenings, soccer tournaments, and community dialogues.
- Through the [Welcoming Cities and Counties Initiative](#), cities and counties are passing proclamations or resolutions declaring their community to be a welcoming community as a first step to institutionalizing welcoming efforts through the adoption of policies and practices that fit the unique local context.
- In June 2014, [Welcome.us](#), a nonprofit dedicated to celebrating a United States that is fueled by an immigrant tradition, launched Immigrant Heritage Month. Through this effort, individuals and communities across the country told the story of their immigrant heritage.

Actionable and Comprehensive Welcoming Plans

Some communities are going further and creating strategic immigrant integration plans. These welcoming plans take the desire to be a welcoming community one step further by establishing specific and strategic actions for becoming immigrant-friendly communities.

An example of this work is taking place in the City of Dayton, Ohio. After the creation of the [Welcome Dayton Plan](#)— which included engaging receiving communities — Dayton Public Schools established a Welcoming Center to help immigrant children with academic performance and socialization. In fact, Dayton has seen revitalized neighborhoods and business corridors, along with a significant increase in the number of immigrants settling in the city, which has helped offset over 20 years of rapid population decline. Now, local population and tax revenue decline has all but halted, and business districts and neighborhoods that were previously half empty are now thriving due to the arrival of new immigrants.

The City of High Point, North Carolina, has implemented a welcoming plan for new Americans and the greater receiving community. High Point developed a 16-point strategic integration plan as part of its Building Integrated Communities (BIC) project, an

initiative of the Latino Migration Project at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. This comprehensive plan for immigrant integration focuses on access to services and information, cultural competency, and civic leadership and activation while incorporating performance indicators for measuring and evaluating the impact of each focus area. The City of High Point is credited with creating “one of the first citywide comprehensive integration plans in the South.”⁶⁹

Another example of a community that has established a welcoming plan is the City of Baltimore, Maryland. In September 2014, the city published [*The Role of Immigrants in Growing Baltimore: Recommendations to Retain and Attract New Americans*](#).⁷⁰ This plan highlights the contributions of Baltimore’s immigrant population and identifies short- and long-term actions to support integration. To develop these recommendations, the Mayor’s office conducted extensive discussions with high-level representatives from 10 city agencies and stakeholders from community-based organizations, foundations, and private partners.

Federal Strategic Goals

Recognizing that integration is a two-way process that occurs primarily at the local level, the federal government strives to support initiatives that bring together new Americans and receiving communities. Through three specific and targeted goals, the Administration will continue to promote the development of welcoming communities across the country:

- *Goal 1: Build community capacity to welcome and engage immigrants and refugees.* Local communities are increasingly cognizant of the importance of immigrant and refugee integration and the need to bring all residents together to develop local integration plans. Several federal agencies have sought to bolster these community planning efforts by providing technical assistance to receiving communities and encouraging current grantees to engage in welcoming work. Task Force members will continue to promote the welcoming communities approach and build capacity for receiving communities with an interest in it.
- *Goal 2: Increase opportunities for communities to utilize federal funding streams to develop and implement local integration plans.* While there are no major federal funding streams dedicated exclusively to integration, several programs support civic, economic, and linguistic integration. Federal agencies will explore mechanisms to clarify federal funding streams that can be used to support integration activities, including welcoming community planning efforts.
- *Goal 3: Use the “convening power” of the federal government to celebrate new Americans, highlight state and local integration strategies, and encourage welcoming communities’ initiatives.* Over the past six years, the White House and other Task Force members have held several events and roundtables, including naturalization ceremonies, to celebrate inspiring new Americans and welcoming communities. The Administration will continue to use its convening power to lift up the efforts to build welcoming communities.

Recommended Actions

- 1. Building Welcoming Communities.** This spring, the Task Force will launch a challenge to encourage local governments to develop and implement local immigrant and refugee integration strategies. Working with Task Force members, the Administration will provide technical assistance and other opportunities to participating communities that put them on the path to building welcoming communities.
- 2. Toolkit for Local Communities on Federal Efforts to Support Welcoming Communities and Integration Efforts.** While many communities have the will to engage in the hard work of building welcoming communities, many do not have the resources to develop integration plans and implement recommended actions. The Task Force will develop a toolkit to guide these communities in their welcoming efforts and to share information on federal funding streams and initiatives that promote integration and welcoming communities' efforts.
- 3. Second Annual White House Convening on Immigrant and Refugee Integration.** In July 2014, the Obama Administration hosted the first-ever White House Convening on Immigrant and Refugee Integration, bringing together more than 170 leaders to share best practices and provide information on federal initiatives. Building on this effort, the White House will host a second annual convening to provide technical assistance and share best practices with "Building Welcoming Communities" challenge participants. The Task Force will also consider hosting regional summits to encourage state, regional, and local planning.
- 4. New Americans Corps to Build Local Capacity.** Local communities are on the front lines of building welcoming communities. National service members, such as AmeriCorps VISTA members, could serve a critical role in municipal governments as they identify local needs; expand multisector networks; and develop and implement local integration plans. CNCS will establish a new corps of AmeriCorps VISTA members to increase capacity and foster immigrant and refugee integration.
- 5. Build Strategies and Better Practices to Enhance Integration of Refugees.** Though efforts are in place to engage refugees and assist with their integration, more work must be done to develop relationships and better practices for engagement with local communities. For example, the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) will enhance refugee engagement and develop strategies around integration by ensuring discussions on refugee integration at local quarterly stakeholder meetings and creating and disseminating welcome letters to refugees encouraging local community engagement upon their arrival. PRM will also collaborate with ORR during this process.
- 6. Emphasize Existing Funding Opportunities to Assist New Americans and Welcoming Communities.** For example, the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program at HUD provides annual grants to over 1,200 units of local

government and states in order to fund public facilities to improve communities, ensure decent affordable housing, provide services to community members, and create jobs through the expansion and retention of businesses. HUD will highlight how localities can use CDBG funding to implement activities in an effort to more intentionally and meaningfully engage with new Americans.

- 7. Connect the Promise Zone Initiative with Welcoming Communities Efforts.** The President named the [first five Promise Zones](#) in 2014 and will designate an additional 15 Promise Zones by the end of calendar year 2016. In these Promise Zones, the federal government is partnering with local leaders to help them access the resources and expertise they need to create jobs, increase economic activity, improve educational opportunities, and reduce violent crime. Many current Promise Zone communities are already engaged in welcoming communities work, but more can be done to give them the tools to successfully integrate immigrants and refugees. The third-round Promise Zone competition will commence in 2015. HUD will solicit public comment on the proposed selection process, criteria, and submissions for the final round of the Promise Zones initiative. During the public comment period, HUD will solicit feedback on how to increase resident engagement, including the engagement of current residents with new Americans, as part of the next Promise Zone Solicitation. HUD will also work with the Task Force to encourage written comments from integration stakeholders.
- 8. Ensure Federal, State, and Local Government Programs Uphold Civil Rights Obligations.** DOJ will continue its efforts to investigate the extent to which — despite existing federal guidance — new American families still face language barriers when obtaining services or enrolling in programs. For example, immigrants, refugees, and children of immigrants can encounter language barriers or experience other forms of discrimination when enrolling in school. As a result, earlier this year, ED and DOJ released joint guidance reminding states, school districts, and schools of their obligations under federal law to ensure that English learner students have equal access to a high-quality education and the opportunity to achieve their full academic potential. Other agencies will engage in similar proactive efforts to ensure equal access to federally funded programs and activities. For example, HUD plans to launch a two-year pilot to improve the agency’s communication with ELs.
- 9. Increase Low-Cost Legal Services Capacity for Immigrants and Refugees.** Many immigrants and refugees face barriers to accessing affordable immigration-related legal services. In recognition of the need to increase local capacity to provide low-cost immigration legal services, DOJ will issue new rules to clarify the process for becoming a recognized and accredited legal service provider. It is essential that communities learn about these changes that will allow more organizations to assist individuals. DOJ will work with other Task Force members, including DHS and HHS, and receiving communities to publicize the proposed changes and launch a public campaign on the final guidelines. DOJ will also work with national, state, and local bar associations, law schools, and others to share information and encourage communities to become accredited.

10. Combat Notario Fraud. The Federal Partners Working Group — a consortium of agencies including DOJ, DHS, and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) — engages in intradepartmental and interagency efforts to protect immigrants and the immigration process from the Unauthorized Practice of Immigration Law (UPIL) and immigration scams. Federal partners will continue to provide education to the public on how to identify signs of UPIL or “notario fraud,” how to find authorized practitioners that can provide legal advice, and how to detect and report immigration scams. Public education efforts will include presentations at community events, dissemination of educational materials in 14 languages, and capacity-building efforts targeting immigrant-serving organizations. Federal partners will also continue to support and encourage law enforcement efforts at the federal, state, and local levels to combat UPIL and hold unauthorized practitioners accountable.

11. Promote Productive Engagement between New Americans and Law Enforcement. DOJ’s Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) awards grants to local law enforcement agencies so that they may better hire and train individuals and develop strategies that advance community policing. Through the COPS program, local law enforcement can develop a better understanding of their local communities, work to build relationships, and best address issues of importance to community members. COPS will develop best practices for training officers on cultural sensitivity and building trust with and educating immigrants and refugees about community policing. DOJ’s Civil Rights Division, Special Litigation Section, also will continue to develop best practices for advancing community policing through its settlement agreements with state and local law enforcement agencies, and through its compliance monitoring of those agreements.

IV. Strengthening Existing Pathways to Naturalization and Promoting Civic Engagement

We are a nation bound not by race, ethnicity, national origin, or religion, but by the shared values that unite all Americans: freedom, liberty, and equality. The decision to become a naturalized citizen of the United States positively contributes to all levels of American society and affords robust rights and protections. Equally important, citizenship is essential to maximize civic integration.

The Importance of Citizenship and Naturalization

The benefits of naturalization extend beyond individual immigrants, refugees, and their communities to our country as a whole. As a nation grounded in the fundamental value that all people are created equal, our promise of citizenship allows people of all backgrounds, whether native- or foreign-born, to have an equal stake in the future of our nation. We are a stronger, more unified nation when we share in the rights and responsibilities upon which our country was founded.

The decision to become a naturalized citizen brings tangible and intangible benefits to each new American, as well as to the rest of the country. Naturalized citizens can vote in federal, state, and local elections; run for public office; and apply for federal employment opportunities reserved for citizens. A number of studies have shown that citizenship leads to higher earning potential and is associated with a boost in wages of 5 percent or more.⁷¹

Communities also benefit when immigrants naturalize. The naturalization process and test are designed to ensure that new citizens have the foundation to participate in civic institutions — skills such as the ability to read, write, and speak English, and a demonstrated understanding of U.S. history and government. These skills, combined with a greater sense of belonging and equality that citizenship confers, empower many naturalized citizens to become civically engaged at the local level. Additionally, citizenship can signal permanency in a community and allows individuals to set down roots with certainty of their future in the United States. Research indicates that naturalized citizens are more than twice as likely as noncitizens to own a home.⁷² Diverse, engaged, and invested populations create vibrant communities.

At every level of American society, citizenship reminds us that we are a nation of opportunity and equality — a culture steeped in a history of immigration, integration, diversity, and cultural pluralism.

Recognizing Potential Barriers to Naturalization

Currently, there are approximately 8.8 million LPRs living in the United States who are eligible to apply for citizenship.⁷³ While naturalization is an important and solemn commitment that some immigrants may not be ready for, others may not know the many benefits of citizenship or may want to apply but do not do so for a variety of reasons.

Common reasons that immigrants cite for not applying for naturalization include lack of understanding about the naturalization process, inability to pay the application fee, lack of time to prepare for the naturalization process and test, concern about meeting English language requirement, and a real or perceived inability to pass the naturalization test.⁷⁴ For older individuals, taking a naturalization test can seem daunting; that's why the Administration continues to support legislative proposals to ease testing requirements for certain LPRs who are elderly. Access to trusted services in local communities and proximity to USCIS facilities also may impact the decision to naturalize. The federal government actively seeks to address barriers to naturalization through several programs and initiatives.

Within DHS, USCIS promotes citizenship and civic integration. In particular, the USCIS Office of Citizenship is tasked with providing immigrants and refugees with opportunities and tools to become citizens, building community capacity to prepare immigrants for citizenship, and promoting dialogue and collaboration on civic integration and citizenship and raising awareness of its importance to society. Examples of these initiatives include:

- USCIS has developed several web-based tools, such as the [Citizenship Resource Center](#) and [Preparing for the Oath: U.S. History and Civics for Citizenship](#), that provide interactive learning activities to prepare for the naturalization test. Since 2010, almost 3.9 million unique visitors have used the Citizenship Resource Center.
- USCIS administers the [Citizenship and Integration Grant Program](#). Grant recipients include public school systems, public libraries, community- and faith-based groups, adult education organizations, and literacy organizations. Since 2009, USCIS has awarded approximately \$43 million through 222 grants in 35 states and the District of Columbia. USCIS highlights promising practices of its grant recipients on the Citizenship Resource Center website.
- USCIS builds local partnerships to help educate immigrants about the naturalization process. USCIS's current partners include the City of Los Angeles, California; the City of Chicago, Illinois; and the Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County, Tennessee. USCIS also provides information and resources for other interested state and [local governments](#).
- USCIS collaborates with the IMLS to host naturalization ceremonies and naturalization information sessions in public libraries across the country, conduct national webinars for librarians, and establish [citizenship corners](#).
- USCIS offers free training seminars for adult educators, volunteers, and teachers. These seminars are designed to enhance the skills needed to teach U.S. history, civics, and the naturalization process to immigrant students.

Celebrating Our Newest Citizens

USCIS celebrates the importance of citizenship, the achievements of new Americans, and the outstanding contributions of immigrants by holding special naturalization ceremonies at historic landmarks, providing practical information to new citizens about the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, and recognizing Outstanding Americans by Choice.

Because it is important that our newest citizens have critical information they need to embark on this important chapter of their American experience, USCIS provides its U.S. Citizenship Welcome Packet to all individuals who take the *Oath of Allegiance* at administrative ceremonies. This packet contains [practical tips](#) on applying for a U.S. passport, updating Social Security records, registering to vote, and getting involved in their local community.

Through the [Outstanding Americans by Choice Initiative](#), USCIS recognizes the significant contributions and achievements of naturalized citizens. More than 100 men and women have been recognized to date, including Dr. Madeleine K. Albright, former Secretary of State; Elie Wiesel, author and Nobel Peace Prize winner; Franklin Chang Diaz, former NASA astronaut; José Andrés, chef and restaurateur; and Indra K. Nooyi, chairman and chief executive officer of PepsiCo. In collaboration with the National Park Service, USCIS has enhanced the stature of naturalization ceremonies since 2006. This partnership serves as a vehicle to connect America's newest citizens to their national parks.

Encouraging Civic Engagement and National Service

Individuals who volunteer or serve in programs like AmeriCorps or Senior Corps contribute to solving difficult problems, connect with others in their community, and contribute to the spirit of civic engagement that is integral to the American identity. In addition, volunteers and national service participants gain hard and soft skills that can help them obtain future employment or achieve educational goals. For example, according to a [recent CNCS report](#), volunteers have a 27 percent higher likelihood of finding a job after being out of work than non-volunteers, and volunteers without a high school diploma have a 51 percent higher likelihood of finding employment.

Several government agencies and programs promote service opportunities to engage with immigrants and refugees. For example, CNCS funds Senior Corps programs, in Boston and Minneapolis/St. Paul, which are engaging older immigrants as “foster grandparents” to mentor immigrant youth who may be struggling with the transition to the U.S. educational system.

Within HHS, the ORR administers the [Ethnic Community Self-Help program](#), which supports ethnic community-based organizations in providing refugee populations with critical services to assist them in becoming integrated members of American society. For refugees, their active participation in resettlement is empowering and plays an important role in the integration of the entire refugee community.⁷⁵ Self-Help grantees include, for

example, the [Bhutanese Community of New Hampshire](#), which offers bilingual American history and civics classes, and the [Somali Bantu Community of Greater Houston](#), which provides business mentorship as well as citizenship and ESL classes.

Local governments are also recognizing the potential of new Americans as volunteers and active participants in their city's civic life. In 2012, the City of Nashville launched a free program called [MyCity Academy](#) that empowers new Americans to understand and participate in Nashville's government. Over the course of seven months, MyCity participants meet with leaders from Metro departments and tour Metro facilities. In doing so, they gain a better understanding of how the local government works and learn how to resolve issues and obtain information. Upon graduation, MyCity participants are able to help their communities understand and access government services.

Every day, new Americans are seeking out opportunities to give back to their receiving communities by engaging in national service and volunteerism activities. Some are volunteering in their churches, or others with fluency in English and other languages are providing interpreter services to other immigrants. Scholastique Koolimo, an AmeriCorps member serving at the Latin American Youth Center in Washington, DC, eloquently summed up her reason for serving by saying: "I am a refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo, now a U.S. citizen that grew up in Maryland. The reason I am doing AmeriCorps is because I want to give back to underprivileged youth, and because I am a first-generation college student in my family. Being an immigrant, I know what it is to be considered a minority in the everyday struggle. Even though we didn't have the most, I have still made the best of the situation. I am willing to lend a hand so that our students can also achieve their goals and dreams, and further their education."

Federal Strategic Goals

Given the critical role that citizenship plays in immigrant integration, and the inherent value that citizenship brings to immigrants, their families, communities, and our nation, the federal government is committed to strengthening existing pathways to citizenship. Through four goals, the Administration will implement strategies designed to reduce barriers to citizenship and will foster shared ownership in the nation's future by promoting service and volunteer opportunities for new Americans.

- *Goal 1: Welcome new immigrants and promote citizenship.* Task Force members, in partnership with USCIS, will expand efforts to celebrate the importance of citizenship, the achievements of new Americans, and the outstanding contributions of immigrants by holding special naturalization ceremonies at historic landmarks, and practical information to new citizens about the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.
- *Goal 2: Ensure greater accessibility to the naturalization process.* Though existing services help address the barriers to naturalization, more can be done to ensure that these efforts reach community members locally. The Task Force will

work to ensure the naturalization process is financially and substantively accessible for new Americans who wish to become citizens.

- *Goal 3: Enhance citizenship resources and information for qualified individuals.* In order to promote even greater awareness, USCIS will develop the next generation of resources and materials to reach increasing numbers of qualified LPRs.
- *Goal 4: Expand opportunities for new Americans to serve and become more civically engaged in their receiving communities.* Civic engagement varies greatly from nation to nation, so many individuals may not be aware of its importance or how they can effect change at the local, state, and federal levels. The Task Force will expand efforts to encourage new Americans to serve and volunteer in their communities.

Recommended Actions

- 1. Expand Citizenship Preparation Programs in Communities.** Since 2009, the Administration has provided competitive grant opportunities for communities to offer high-quality citizenship preparation services. In April 2015, USCIS announced the availability of up to \$10 million in [competitive grant funding](#) for citizenship preparation programs in communities across the country. The Administration will continue to request appropriated funding for this program as outlined in the President’s fiscal year 2016 request and in prior years.
- 2. Presidential Ambassadors to Promote Citizenship and Naturalization.** Modeled after the [Presidential Ambassadors for Global Entrepreneurship \(PAGE\)](#), this first-of-its-kind collaboration between prominent new Americans and the Obama Administration will harness these Ambassadors’ inspirational stories to promote naturalization, bolster integration initiatives, and increase awareness of the new Americans’ contributions.
- 3. Launch a Citizenship Public Awareness Campaign.** In spring 2015, DHS will launch a national, multilingual media campaign to raise awareness about the rights, responsibilities, and importance of U.S. citizenship and the tools available to permanent residents to prepare for the naturalization process. DHS will work with Task Force members, communities, and key stakeholders to promote this campaign. This effort will also integrate the stories of new Americans, including Outstanding Americans by Choice and new Presidential Ambassadors, into USCIS web-based tools.
- 4. Assess the Potential for Partial or Graduated Fee Waivers.** The naturalization fee is often cited as a barrier to naturalization. However, USCIS provides fee waivers to individuals who demonstrate an inability to pay fees. In 2010, USCIS created a fee waiver form to standardize the process. Stakeholders have encouraged USCIS to examine options to make naturalization more affordable.

As part of its current biennial fee study, USCIS is evaluating the feasibility of an expanded fee waiver process that includes a graduated fee based on income. USCIS will also make information about the existing fee waiver process more accessible through partnerships with Task Force members and stakeholders.

- 5. Allow Naturalization Applicants to Pay Application Fees with Credit Cards.** Many permanent residents who are eligible for citizenship may find it more convenient to pay naturalization fees using their credit cards, yet currently there is no process available to pay in this manner. In fall 2015, USCIS will implement a process for naturalization applicants to pay fee using a credit card.
- 6. Assess the Feasibility of Increasing USCIS Mobile Services.** In communities with significant numbers of immigrants who are not located near a USCIS office, barriers exist to completing the naturalization and other immigration processes. USCIS will identify potentially underserved populations and assess the feasibility of providing mobile services in these areas. Services could include biometrics collection, interviews for applications or petitions, informational appointments, and general presentations on immigration benefit programs. USCIS will also collaborate with Task Force members that have a footprint in rural areas, such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), to use their facilities to conduct these services.
- 7. Online Naturalization Preparation and Application Filing Tools.** USCIS will develop new online tools to offer in-context help as eligible permanent residents complete their naturalization applications electronically, provide opportunities to take a practice civics exam, and offer information resources about the rights, responsibilities, and benefits of citizenship. USCIS will also integrate resources, such as information about ESL and civics education providers, into the electronic filing experience for those seeking assistance preparing for naturalization.
- 8. Identify Opportunities to Inform LPRs of Their Potential Eligibility for Naturalization.** USCIS will explore opportunities to raise awareness about citizenship among permanent residents who may be eligible to apply for naturalization. For example, USCIS will leverage its existing case status and e-filing tools to notify LPRs seeking to renew or replace a permanent residence card about potential eligibility for naturalization.
- 9. Provide Access to Critical Information for New Citizens.** Each year, USCIS naturalizes approximately 700,000 new citizens. Working with Task Force members, USCIS will expand both the services and information provided to new citizens at naturalization ceremonies. For example, USCIS will provide information from DOL on training opportunities and worker rights and from CNCS on volunteer service opportunities. USCIS will also offer the Department of State (State) opportunities to provide onsite passport application services where feasible.

- 10. Expand Citizenship Outreach Partnerships.** Over the past five years, USCIS has increased efforts to coordinate with cities and public libraries to provide information about citizenship in local communities. In 2015, USCIS will double the number of formal [letters of agreement](#) with local governments and seek out additional opportunities to expand these local partnerships, particularly in places with welcoming efforts underway. In addition, the Task Force will identify opportunities to collaborate with the private sector to promote the importance of citizenship and provide information on the naturalization process.
- 11. Provide Individuals with Settlement Resources before They Arrive, or upon Arrival, in the United States.** State and DHS will identify opportunities to provide approved immigrant visa applicants and beneficiaries of an approved immigrant visa petition with information on critical settlement resources, including available English language learning opportunities.
- 12. Encourage New Americans to Volunteer/Serve.** Research suggests that the benefits to those who engage in volunteerism include improved health and psychological functioning, as well as a stronger sense of community and social well-being.⁷⁶ To increase these benefits among immigrants and their receiving communities, CNCS, in partnership with Task Force members, will seek to engage more immigrants and refugees in volunteer opportunities. In September 2015, CNCS and the Task Force will promote opportunities for new Americans to volunteer and serve, and highlight stories of successful new Americans who are volunteering or serving during annual Citizenship Week activities.
- 13. Launch a Refugee AmeriCorps Program.** In partnership with ORR, CNCS will work toward implementing a Refugee AmeriCorps program to assist with the integration of refugee populations being resettled into the United States. CNCS will also encourage grantees to recruit former refugees as AmeriCorps members who will ensure that services are delivered in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner.

V. Supporting Skill Development, Fostering Entrepreneurship and Small Business Growth, and Protecting New American Workers

New Americans contribute significantly to our economy at the local, state, and federal levels. As previously noted, the share of immigrants and refugees (and their children) in the U.S. labor force is growing and immigrants are starting new businesses that provide opportunities for all workers. Through the efforts of several Task Force members, the Obama Administration is promoting the economic integration of immigrants and refugees. These efforts involve ensuring that receiving communities' workforce systems are equipped with resources and tools to bolster skill development, empowering immigrants and refugees by providing the tools to build and grow sustainable small businesses and unlock the doors to homeownership, and working with employers and immigrant workers so that they understand their workplace responsibilities and rights.

Strengthening and Protecting the New American Workforce

Today, foreign-born workers account for nearly 17 percent of the U.S. workforce and continue to be an increasing component of the labor force.⁷⁷ Foreign-born workers have higher labor force participation rates than native-born workers and contribute to a variety of sectors, ranging from service occupations to management, professional, and related occupations.⁷⁸ As the Baby Boom generation begins to retire, immigrants and refugees — the vast majority (78 percent) of whom are working age⁷⁹ — will account for a significant percentage of the net growth in the labor force.⁸⁰ Like native-born Americans, new Americans aspire to obtain economic security for themselves and their families. Economic security provides new Americans self-sufficiency and the ability to give back to their communities' economy and growth.

New Americans may also face significant risks of exploitation, particularly in low-wage occupations. These workers are most often employed in industries such as construction, agriculture, healthcare, hotel and motel, garment manufacturing, and restaurants where labor violations are most prevalent.⁸¹ English Learners (ELs) may also find it difficult to exercise rights or may lack access to basic information about rights in their primary language. Since the beginning of 2009, DOL's Wage and Hour Division (WHD) investigations have resulted in more than \$1.5 billion in back wages for more than 1,300,000 workers, including new Americans, in more than 181,000 cases nationwide. In FY 2014, [WHD investigations](#) resulted in more than \$240,000,000 in back wages and helped over 270,000 workers.

The Obama Administration is committed to helping these immigrants and refugees fully realize their potential, which helps them move up the economic ladder and is critical to our continued economic progress as a nation. We are also committed to safeguarding the rights of all vulnerable workers, including new Americans. Examples of federal government activities include:

- DOL’s Employment and Training Administration (ETA) works with state and local workforce agencies and American Job Centers to provide responsive employment and support services. While ETA services are broadly available, ETA partners with immigrant-serving organizations to provide these services in their programming. For example, ETA recently awarded grants for [training dislocated workers](#) to enable six states to expand partnerships with community organizations to help foreign-trained immigrants and others acquire the necessary certifications, licenses, and English language skills to pursue their professions in the United States. Also, HHS’s ORR training and technical assistance partner, [Higher](#), focuses on employment and self-sufficiency, providing workforce solutions across the United States while supporting career entry and advancement for resettled refugees and other new Americans.
- ETA also issues guidance to the workforce system on [eligibility and service provision](#). In addition, DOL has issued guidance and provided technical assistance to the workforce system to improve services to ELs and LEP clients. ETA and other DOL agencies provide multilingual materials and resources for job seekers and program administrators. For example, the Toll Free Help Line, 1-877-USA JOBS, provides a full range of basic information about workforce program services in over 180 languages.
- DOL is also engaging federal partners in its efforts to provide new Americans with information about worker rights and protections. For example, DOL and DOJ have worked collaboratively to host six listening sessions across the country to hear and to be responsive to Asian American workers’ labor concerns.
- HHS provides a national, toll-free, multilingual [24-hour hotline](#) (1-888-373-7888) that provides callers with crisis intervention, tip reporting, comprehensive services, and [anti-trafficking](#) resources and referrals, including information on workplace rights and connection to resources for persons experiencing forced labor and other forms of exploitation. Further, the HHS [Rescue & Restore Campaign](#) provides multilingual awareness materials and resources free of charge.
- Additionally, DOJ’s Office of Special Counsel for Immigration-Related Unfair Employment Practices ([OSC](#)) enforces a law that protects U.S. citizens and other work-authorized individuals. In 2014, OSC and ORR partnered to issue [new guidance](#) to provide information on the employment eligibility of refugees and asylees to prevent discrimination in workplaces.

Immigrant and Refugee Small Businesses and Entrepreneurs

America is a nation of immigrants and a nation of entrepreneurs, and the Obama Administration is committed to honoring the legacy of innovation and competitiveness that has helped make our country great. In addition, small businesses have long played an integral role in the American immigrant experience. Immigrant entrepreneurs are a significant and growing part of the U.S. economy, creating jobs and spurring economic

growth.⁸² According to the latest estimates, immigrant small business owners employed 4.7 million people and generated \$776 billion in receipts.⁸³ Additionally, 30 percent of small business growth, from 1990 to 2010, was fueled by new businesses started by immigrants and refugees.⁸⁴

Immigrants and refugees are contributing to job growth at the local level. One study that monitored more than 500 cities over a seven-year period (2005–11) found that an influx of immigrants led to employment growth and a decline in the unemployment rate.⁸⁵ Immigrant- and refugee-owned businesses also use their business networks within their home countries to grow their businesses. According to SBA, approximately 7.1 percent of immigrant- and refugee-owned businesses were exporters compared to just 4.4 percent of businesses owned by native-born individuals.⁸⁶

Immigrants started more than 25 percent of all businesses in seven of eight sectors of the economy that the U.S. government expects to grow the fastest over the next decade.⁸⁷ By supporting new Americans' entrepreneurial pursuits, we can increase overall economic growth. In May 2012, SBA's Office of Advocacy released a research study to analyze immigrant small business owners' access to financial capital.⁸⁸ The study found that immigrants have high business formation rates and create successful businesses that hire immigrant and U.S. citizen employees and export goods and services. However, one of the barriers to opening a business is lack of access to financial capital.

Throughout SBA's 68 district offices and network of resource partners, immigrant entrepreneurs are accessing free or low-cost quality training, counseling, and technical assistance.

- SBA provides financial assistance through guaranteed loans made by area lenders, and other programs and services to help immigrant-owned small businesses start, grow, and succeed.
- SBA is providing business advising, mentoring, and training to immigrant entrepreneurs in targeted languages with a focus on cultural competency. SBA's [Women's Business Centers \(WBCs\)](#) are meeting the needs of aspiring immigrant entrepreneurs across America each day. For instance, the WBC in Berkeley, California, is working with migrant farmworkers and immigrants to help them start new businesses. In Maryland, the local WBC is working with immigrants to help them establish childcare businesses. In Los Angeles, the Asian Pacific Islander Small Business Program provides counseling in English, Japanese, Tagalog, Korean, Mandarin, and Spanish.
- SBA's resource partners understand the challenges many immigrant entrepreneurs face. It's [Small Business Development Centers \(SBDCs\)](#) and [SCORE Association "Counselors to America's Small Business"](#) are providing experienced counselors who offer entrepreneurs free consulting and business advice. For example, in Florida the [SBDC at the University of North Florida](#) has helped a woman establish her own law firm, despite never having run or owned a business.

- SBA is helping immigrant entrepreneurs access capital to start and grow their businesses through its [Microloan program](#). The average SBA microloan is about \$13,000. Funds are designated by intermediary lenders, which are nonprofit, community-based organizations with experience in lending as well as management and technical assistance that administer the program. In New York City, the [Business Center for New Americans](#) is funding businesses like SS African Foods, a family owned and operated wholesale business selling imported African specialty foods. SS African Foods was awarded its first microloan in 2006.
- SBA is helping businesses in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) fields get off the ground and grow through the [Small Business Innovation Research \(SBIR\)](#) program. STEM-degreed professionals are a vast majority of applicants and awardees, including many foreign-born entrepreneurs. For example, with SBIR funding, Sorin Grama, co-founder of Promethean Power Systems (and a Romanian immigrant), developed a thermal energy battery that enables commercial refrigeration systems to become economically viable, which in turn has amazing applications in parts of the world where the power grid is unreliable. Energy shortages threaten the growth of emerging economies where businesses often receive only five to six hours of electricity per day. As one example, in India's massive dairy industry, the vast majority of milk spoils within just a few hours because of inadequate access to refrigeration technology. Promethean's modular thermal energy battery can be used as a backup to the unreliable power grid, while in the rest of the world it can be used to reduce the energy consumption of power-hungry refrigeration appliances.
- ORR's [Microenterprise Development Program](#) helps refugees develop, expand, or maintain their own businesses and enhances the integration of refugees into the mainstream economy. During the past 20 years, refugees have created approximately 10,000 businesses that have led to more than 11,000 new jobs (many to other refugees), and over 24,000 refugees have gained new entrepreneurial skills and knowledge. ORR also funds a [Home-Based Child Care Program](#), which provides business opportunities to refugees who are interested in becoming licensed childcare service providers.

Financial Access, Affordable Housing, and Home Ownership

Building capital and nurturing individual and family assets and well-being provides new Americans a way to establish long-term financial stability, thereby bolstering immigrant integration as well as driving economic growth in neighborhoods and local communities. From saving for retirement and higher education to better understanding credit card, student loan, and mortgage debt, personal financial decisions directly affect families and children, and our nation's economy. To make the most informed decisions about the use and management of money, families — including new American families — need the

knowledge, skills, and access to tools to manage their finances effectively for long-term well-being.

In the wake of the financial crisis, the Obama Administration worked with Congress to pass the [Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act](#) into law. The most far-reaching Wall Street reform in history, Dodd-Frank is helping to prevent the excessive risk-taking that led to the financial crisis while providing common-sense protections for American families. The law also established the [Consumer Financial Protection Bureau](#), which is responsible for ensuring markets for consumer financial products and services work for Americans — whether they are applying for a mortgage, choosing among credit cards, or using any number of other consumer financial products.

Among the most important financial decisions many families make is whether to rent or purchase a home. Home ownership has often been associated with the American Dream and is an important step for new Americans. For example, even in the recent economic climate, foreign-born homeownership increased by more than 310,000. Yet many immigrant and ethnic populations continue to face challenges, and even discrimination, in rental, sales, and borrowing for home loans. That discrimination affects the neighborhoods where those families have the opportunity to live — and thus their choices when it comes to schooling, transportation, and employment. The following are examples of federal government efforts in this area:

- Through programs like [Choice Neighborhoods](#), HUD enables communities to revitalize struggling neighborhoods with distressed public housing or HUD-assisted housing. The program is funding inclusive, community-driven planning processes in 63 neighborhoods and implementation of community plans in 12 neighborhoods. These plans benefit not only the neighborhood but the existing residents who come from diverse backgrounds, including new Americans. For example, in Seattle, an inclusive neighborhood revitalization is under way, where community meetings are held with translation services in multiple languages.
- In HHS, ORR’s [Individual Development Accounts Program \(IDA\)](#) is designed to help match refugees’ own savings from their employment to save for important investments, such as small business development, purchasing a home, and postsecondary education, and has a [current funding opportunity announcement for this fiscal year](#). In addition, the OCS [Assets for Independence Program \(AFI\)](#), which supports individual development accounts and promoting [financial capability](#) for low-income individuals, is incentivizing collaborations with refugee-serving organizations in their current [funding opportunity announcement](#).

Federal Strategic Goals

Recognizing that economic integration yields numerous benefits to new Americans and the larger economy, the Obama Administration will implement strategies designed to foster a future in which all new American workers are secure in their rights and are able to fully contribute to the economies of their local communities and the nation.

- *Goal 1: Collaborate with employers, educational institutions, and other stakeholders to enhance skill development, career pathways, and integration into the workforce system.* Task Force members will form partnerships with various institutions and sectors with a stake in strengthening our workforce to improve economic integration outcomes for immigrants and refugees and spur economic growth.
- *Goal 2: Facilitate credentialing for new Americans as part of our overall efforts on credentialing to strengthen the workforce.* A failure to recognize and acknowledge foreign educational achievements and certifications of immigrants and refugees means that many talented individuals are not realizing their full potential. Task Force members will work with the private sector, workforce systems, and credentialing bodies to encourage streamlined credentialing processes for skilled immigrants and refugees.
- *Goal 3: Expand outreach to new Americans to ensure that workers understand their rights and that employers are fulfilling their responsibilities.* Ensuring an awareness of rights both enhances protections for new Americans and promotes successful engagement in education and employment opportunities. Task Force members, including SBA, DOL, and USCIS, will provide accessible information about worker rights and employer responsibilities to new Americans and receiving communities.
- *Goal 4: Support small businesses and entrepreneurship among immigrants and refugees.* Immigrant and refugee entrepreneurs are a significant and growing part of the U.S. economy; they create jobs and contribute significantly to the economy, employing millions of people and generating billions of dollars each year. The Task Force will promote opportunities for new Americans and others to create and grow their businesses.
- *Goal 5: Increase accessibility to affordable housing and homeownership.* Building capital and nurturing individual and family assets and well-being provides new Americans a way to establish long-term financial stability, thereby bolstering immigrant integration as well as driving economic growth in neighborhoods and local communities.

Recommended Actions

1. **Expand Economic Integration Efforts through WIOA Implementation.** DOL, ED, and HHS will collaborate on guidance and technical assistance, encourage engagement of human services agencies, and build relationships with immigrant groups around the rollout and implementation of WIOA through online communications and webinars for welcoming groups, worker centers, and immigrant- and refugee-serving organizations. These efforts will highlight best practices for engagement in the workforce and education systems that are

reaching out to and serving foreign-trained dislocated workers through state and community partnerships programs.

- 2. Enhance Outreach and Guidance to the Workforce System.** DOL will connect the workforce system with resources and promising practices for working with immigrants and new Americans. Specifically, ETA will issue a Training and Employment Notice (TEN) to the workforce system that focuses on promising practices and partnership models, including uses of resources for ESL, accelerated learning for those individuals who have previous skills and training, and competency-based training to incorporate existing expertise.
- 3. Strengthen New Americans' Connections with American Job Centers.** DOL and ED will host roundtables to discuss promising models like the [Welcome Back Center Initiative](#), a national model with program sites in nine states that help foreign-trained healthcare professional obtain licenses to continue their careers in the United States. DOL will also reaffirm that individuals who are authorized to work in the United States are eligible for services under WIOA.
- 4. Increase Grant Opportunities to Support Innovative Training Models that Assist New Americans.** As part of the White House's [Tech Hire initiative](#), DOL recently announced that it will launch a \$100 million grant initiative in the fall of 2015 to support innovative approaches to training for tech and other in-demand fields for individuals with barriers to employment, including, among others, ELs and LEP workers.
- 5. Issue Guidance to the Workforce System on Citizenship Nondiscrimination.** DOL's Civil Rights Center, in partnership with DOJ, will issue guidance for the workforce system on citizenship nondiscrimination. There are nearly 2,500 American Job Centers around the country that serve individuals with career opportunities, skills and training, and unemployment benefits. This DOL guidance will ensure that all eligible workers being served at these centers are not subject to discrimination on the basis of their citizenship status.
- 6. Enhance Employer Knowledge of Their Rights and Responsibilities.** SBA, DOL, and DOJ will collaborate to provide employer training on employee rights, employer responsibilities, and pathways to citizenship. Small businesses often do not have access to the information necessary to assist with compliance of government regulation relative to large firms; easy-to-access online resources are one way of overcoming this disparity. Given that small firms as a whole have a greater share of immigrant employees than large firms, these resources will be particularly beneficial in ensuring that new Americans have workplaces that are governed by all the protections allowed under U.S. law.
- 7. Promote Best Practices for New Americans' Credential Attainment.** DOL, ED, and HHS will build awareness and capacity within the workforce system around promising credential attainment models for new Americans. Specifically,

these agencies will collaborate to release a *Career Pathways and Credentials Toolkit*. This toolkit will provide information for states, localities, and workforce partners on how to develop and expand high-functioning career pathways and credentialing systems and programs.

- 8. Bolster Outreach to Immigrants and Refugees to Promote Awareness of Labor Protections and Rights.** DOL, in partnership with the Task Force members, will provide information about worker rights and protections to new Americans, including to newly naturalized American citizens at USCIS-conducted naturalization ceremonies and to refugees interfacing with ORR-funded refugee-serving organizations. DOL will also conduct outreach to immigrant- and refugee-serving organizations on DOL funding opportunities for worker protection and safety education. For example, following its spring 2015 grant solicitation, DOL will conduct outreach on the Susan Harwood Training Grant Program, which funds education and safety and health training to new American workers.
- 9. Develop Training Courses and Outreach Materials Tailored to New Americans to Promote Small Business Development.** Learning about the numerous federal resources available to entrepreneurs can be overwhelming for new Americans. To address these challenges, SBA will pilot new “101” classes in targeted cities with concentrations of immigrants and refugees, in collaboration with local partners. SBA will also create a new *Small Business Smart* toolkit to help underserved immigrant and refugee entrepreneurs understand business and financial fundamentals to assist them in becoming lender-ready. This toolkit, which will be available in Spanish and English, will be distributed through partnerships with local immigrant- and refugee-serving organizations, chambers of commerce, community banks, and SBA networks, among others.
- 10. Launch “Made It in America” Campaign to Amplify New American Entrepreneur Success Stories.** To promote success stories and motivate individuals to take advantage of SBA tools and resources, SBA will launch a new campaign, “Made It in America,” to highlight notable new American entrepreneurs who have used SBA as a small business resource.
- 11. Promote Immigrant Entrepreneurship through the President’s Ambassadors for Global Entrepreneurship (PAGE).** PAGE’s mission is to inspire and promote entrepreneurship in the United States and abroad. Entrepreneurs and startups around the country and globally have expressed strong support for integration efforts so that immigrant entrepreneurs can flourish. The Department of Commerce (Commerce) will seek out opportunities for PAGE Ambassadors, especially those who are immigrants or children of immigrants, to promote entrepreneurship around the country to other new Americans.
- 12. Launch Business Sunday Events in Partnership with New Americans and Receiving Communities.** A collaboration between Commerce and SBA,

[Business Sunday](#) is a program focused on promoting local economic growth and job creation by connecting congregations and communities with the valuable business development resources offered by the federal government. In the coming months, Commerce, SBA, and partner organizations will build Business Sunday events in communities with large immigrant entrepreneur communities.

- 13. Provide Meaningful Access to Housing Programs for New Americans in Multiple Languages.** HUD will launch “HUD Speaks,” a two-year pilot to improve communication with and enhance efforts to serve ELs and LEP individuals. As a part of these efforts, HUD will develop interactive tools that provide information on HUD programs in multiple languages, redesign “I Speak” cards for staff, and distribute posters to spread awareness and provide meaningful access to HUD programs and services.

- 14. Reduce Barriers to Quality Housing and Enhance Opportunities for Home Ownership for New Americans.** Approximately 16 percent of all first-time homebuyers nationally are foreign-born. HUD’s Office of Housing Counseling (OHC) will expand awareness of its housing counseling program to new Americans using stakeholder forums and other tools. HUD will also explore the use of alternative credit score models and credit history for purposes of loan decisions in order to help new Americans with limited credit history access mortgages in an affordable manner.

- 15. Ameliorate Refugee Resettlement Financial Barriers.** Although highly resilient and resourceful, refugees and other resettlement-eligible populations may experience unique challenges during their transition to the U.S. Refugee resettlement is intended to occur in close cooperation and consultation with federal, state and local entities, and requires government and community-wide engagement. In order to enhance the U.S. resettlement experience and facilitate economic and broader community integration, Task Force members will explore potential mechanisms to mitigate financial, housing, transportation, and other barriers many refugees may face in their first few years.

VI. Expanding Opportunities for Linguistic Integration and Education

English language acquisition is vitally important for new Americans to integrate successfully into their communities. Though some new Americans come to the United States fluent in English, many do not. Understanding and communicating in English has a significant impact on the ability of an immigrant or refugee to find a job, advance in a career, and become civically active in his or her community. Therefore, one of the most effective ways to help non-English-speaking immigrants and refugees integrate into American society is to support their acquisition of English language skills while also valuing and recognizing the importance of maintaining native language proficiency to preserve culture and intergenerational communication.

The federal government strives to ensure that English learners (ELs) in the United States have access to high-quality English language instruction programs through educational institutions, community-based and faith-based organizations, the workplace, and digital platforms, so they can ultimately advance their educational and career goals. There is a mounting body of research and evidence that suggests ELs have better long-term educational outcomes when they participate in high-quality education programs that support bi-literacy and dual-language learning.⁸⁹ Today, a world-class education means learning to speak, read, and write in multiple languages. Education programs should also capitalize on the rich linguistic resources that immigrants and refugees bring to the educational environment.

Assessing and Addressing Linguistic Integration Needs

New Americans are a diverse population who speak a wide array of languages and have varying English language needs. In general, new Americans who have lived in the United States longer and who have higher levels of education are more likely to speak English proficiently.⁹⁰ Though most children who are ELs speak Spanish as their primary language, more than half a million ELs ages 5 to 14 speak languages other than Spanish at home.⁹¹ Confidently and effectively speaking English is an important element of integration that can allow individuals to pursue their goals, prosper academically and economically, and engage more fully at their communities.

Schools must ensure that EL students can participate meaningfully and equally in educational programs and enable parents to participate in their children's education, consistent with federal law and the Supreme Court decision in *Lau v. Nichols*.⁹² Opportunities across the continuum of education must be not only available but readily accessible to new Americans. At all levels, institutions must provide language access to enable new Americans to take advantage of their services, and access the systems created to protect and better our communities.

Yet there is an increasing need for linguistic integration services and education programs targeted to new Americans and their families. According to the most recent data, there are more than 840,000 immigrant children in the United States and more than 4.6 million

ELs. ELs are the fastest-growing major student population in the K–12 population.⁹³ In the 2011–12 school year, 9.1 percent of public school students participated in EL programs.⁹⁴

At the K–12 level, ELs have lagged behind their non-EL peers, though achievement over the past two decades has also increased across all students and subgroups of students, including ELs. For example, the achievement gap in eighth grade reading between ELs and non-ELs has remained about the same since 1998.⁹⁵ ELs are also much less likely to graduate from high school, though EL graduation rates are rising. In 2012–13, 61 percent of ELs graduated — up from 59 percent in 2011–12 — compared to 81 percent of all students.⁹⁶ However, there is evidence to suggest that even after accounting for other student and school variables, the longer a student is designated as an EL, the more likely he or she is to drop out of school.⁹⁷

Given the link between children’s language skills and their parents’ English proficiency, we must pursue a two-generation approach to support new American families’ linguistic integration and education.⁹⁸ For example, children of immigrant mothers tend to have larger English vocabularies when their mothers are more proficient in English.⁹⁹ This distinction persists into adulthood. Children of new Americans often need linguistic supports to attain fluency in English.

Early Learners

Approximately one in four children from birth to age 5 have immigrant parents.¹⁰⁰ We know that early learning programs can have tremendous benefits for children, families, and greater society. Recent evidence also shows that these benefits are particularly significant for children in new American families.¹⁰¹ Children of new Americans, however, are less likely to participate in early learning education than children of native-born parents,¹⁰² putting our youngest new Americans at a disadvantage before they even enter school.¹⁰³ This divide occurs in part because new American children are more likely to be from low-income families.¹⁰⁴ Additionally, some new American parents face language and other structural barriers when they attempt to enroll their children in early education, and many do not know that programs are available to their children.¹⁰⁵ While efforts to expand early learning education for children from low-income families will likely benefit new Americans, interventions must also target their unique obstacles.

The President has set a goal of providing access to high-quality preschool to all 4-year old children from low- and moderate-income families. He has also proposed guaranteeing access to high-quality infant and toddler care for all low- and moderate-income families with children under the age of 4 and expanding the quality of Head Start, including expanding to full-day. The Administration also supports a dedicated funding stream for high-quality preschool in a reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act and has proposed increased funding for services to infants, toddlers, and preschool children with disabilities under Parts C and B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Additional examples of federal government efforts in this area include:

- In December 2014, the President brought together philanthropy, business, and state and community leaders to increase investments in public-private partnerships that are expanding early education in communities across the country. Together with [Early Head Start - Child Care Partnerships](#) and [Preschool Development Grants](#) federal awards, this amounts to a collective investment of over \$1 billion in the education and development of America's youngest learners. Initiatives such as [Bridging the Word Gap](#) and [My Brother's Keeper](#) work to ensure more children, including children of immigrant families, enter kindergarten ready to succeed.
- ED and HHS jointly administer the [Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge](#) grants in 20 states to develop or improve their state early learning systems for children from birth to age 5, including children from immigrant families. These systems work to enhance family engagement, standards, health, and learning outcomes, and provide outreach to parents on finding quality early learning programs. ED and HHS also oversee 18 states, working in over 200 communities to expand high-quality preschool opportunities.
- ORR and the HHS Office of Child Care ([OCC](#)) released a joint [Information Memorandum](#) offering strong encouragement to partner at state, regional, and local levels to increase refugee families' access to high-quality child care. In addition, ORR, OCC, and the HHS [Office of Head Start](#) (OHS) developed a [resource document](#) and joint webinar on linking refugee resettlement and early childhood networks to further facilitate collaboration. Both OCC and OHS provide supports for many immigrant children and families.

K–12 Learners

Children who arrive in the United States from other countries represent a variety of educational and linguistic backgrounds, and a variety of experiences from their home countries. To support these children, it is important to understand and take into consideration their distinct backgrounds in order to further develop their linguistic and academic abilities. Some immigrant and refugee children will have had limited or interrupted formal education due to any number of factors. Some have experienced trauma or stress in their home country and in their transition to the United States. These factors are associated with poor academic experience. Districts and schools should have systems in place to support the social and emotional needs of immigrant and refugee children as part of their efforts to support their academic success.

Research shows that ELs, much like other students, are most likely to succeed when they have effective teachers, instruction tailored to their individual needs, and structures in schools that intentionally and deliberately support them.¹⁰⁶ Too often, ELs receive only limited instruction targeted to their needs, by teachers who are unprepared to teach them.¹⁰⁷ As a group, ELs are incredibly diverse, including long-term ELs and new Americans, among others, and schools and educators need more support and resources

for how to address the unique needs of this diverse population. All children in the United States are entitled to equal access to a public elementary and secondary school education, regardless of their or their parents' actual or perceived national origin, citizenship, or immigration status.

Efforts by the federal government include the following:

- ED funds programs for preschool, elementary, and secondary education that offer resources and support services for the integration of immigrant children, youth, and adults, including through the Title III, Part A of ESEA. LEAs may use the Title III formula grant funds for family literacy services, parent outreach, and training for parents of EL children, in order to help parents become active participants in their children's education and to help the children improve academically. Under Title III, states are already required to hold districts accountable for meeting targets for English language proficiency and progress toward proficiency. States must also provide additional funding to LEAs that have experienced significant increases in the number or percentage of immigrant children and youth, in order to help their districts build capacity and meet the unique needs of this population.
- HHS' ORR assists refugee students through the [Refugee School Impact Program](#), which provides student and parent orientations, tutoring, after-school programs, parent/teacher conferences, interpretation assistance, and information on navigating the school system.
- Through the [National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition & Language Instruction Educational Programs](#) (NCELA), ED collects, coordinates, and conveys a broad range of research and resources in support of an inclusive approach to high-quality education for ELs. To fulfill its mission, NCELA supports high-quality networking among state-level administrators. In addition to State education agency (SEA) coordinators, NCELA serves other stakeholders involved in EL education, including teachers and other practitioners, parents, university faculty, administrators, and federal policymakers.
- Under the [National Professional Development Program](#), ED provides grants for eligible entities to implement professional development activities intended to improve instruction for ELs. Grants awarded under this program may be used to develop pre-service teacher preparation or in-service professional development programs for education professionals to be certified, licensed, or endorsed in providing instruction for ELs.
- ED's [Office for Civil Rights \(OCR\)](#) and DOJ share enforcement responsibility under Title VI to ensure that [EL students](#) meaningfully participate in public schools' educational programs and that public schools are taking affirmative steps to help EL students with language barriers through effective language development programs that enable students to fully and meaningfully participate in public schools' educational programs. In January 2015, ED and DOJ released

[joint guidance](#) reminding states, school districts and schools of their obligations under federal law to ensure that EL students have equal access to a high-quality education and the opportunity to achieve their full academic potential. This is the first time that a single piece of guidance has addressed the array of federal laws that govern schools' obligations to ELs. In addition, DOJ and ED have increased coordination to ensure that students, including language minority students, are not discriminated against based on national origin, among other protected classes. To ensure linguistic access, ED and DOJ have made the guidance available in Spanish, Simplified and Traditional Chinese, Vietnamese, and Tagalog. The accompanying fact sheets for students and their Limited English Proficient Parents are available in Spanish, Simplified and Traditional Chinese, Cambodian, Hmong, Korean, Laotian, Russian, Tagalog, and Vietnamese. Additionally, to accompany this recently released joint guidance regarding English learners, ED's Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) created a [toolkit](#) for teachers and school leaders to implement appropriate practices.

- In May 2014, ED and DOJ rereleased a [joint guidance](#) letter describing the obligations of states and school districts under federal law to provide all children — regardless of immigration status — with equal access to public education at the elementary and secondary levels. To ensure linguistic access, ED and DOJ have made the guidance, and the accompanying fact sheets and questions and answers, available in [Spanish](#), [Arabic](#), [Chinese](#), [Korean](#), [Tagalog](#), and [Vietnamese](#).
- The [Civil Rights Data Collection](#) (CRDC) now makes available a summary of key civil rights data indicators for EL students in every school or district from the 2011-12 collection directly from the main school and district [landing pages](#). The CRDC collects on a biennial basis education access and equity data including access to college- and career-readiness courses, teacher equity, school expenditures, retention, access to pre-K programs, athletics, restraint and seclusion, bullying and harassment, and discipline disaggregated by race/ethnicity, sex, English proficiency, and disability.

Adult Learners

Adult education can help students, including immigrants and refugees, improve literacy, mathematics, or English language skills, and prepare for work or enrollment in postsecondary or career and technical education programs. Additionally, federally funded English literacy and civics programs have long promoted civic integration through civic education and English language development, helping immigrants and ELs acquire the necessary English language skills, and related cultural knowledge to meaningfully participate in and fully contribute to their communities. Most new Americans are eager to learn English and many already have some English proficiency. Even for those who are English proficient, the confidence and comfort that come from enhanced linguistic services can dramatically improve the integration of new Americans.

Over 12 million foreign-born Americans reporting that they speak English “not well” or “not at all,”¹⁰⁸ and over 60 percent of adult English learners lack high school degrees.¹⁰⁹

ESL programs are oversubscribed across the nation. In 2011, 732,345 adults participated in state-administered ESL programs.¹¹⁰ While the recently reauthorized WIOA increases investments in Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education programs and prioritizes serving ELs and other individuals facing the greatest barriers to employment, the current adult education system does not have the capacity to accommodate the millions of learners expected to need services. At the same time, we need more rigorous research on effective ESL instruction. Examples of federal government efforts in this area include:

- In communities around the country, ED supports [adult education and family literacy programs](#) specifically tailored to assist adults and families in getting the basic skills and English proficiency they need to be productive workers, family members, and citizens. These programs provide instruction below the postsecondary level to adults who are 16 years of age or older and are not enrolled or required to be enrolled in secondary school under state law. Federal funding also supports civics education programs for new immigrants who are learning English.
- For instructors of adult ELs, ED administers grants and contracts that support adult ESL teachers and programs, such as the National Adult English Language Learning Professional Development Network ([ELL-U](#)), the Literacy Information and Communications System ([LINCS](#)) Adult English Language Learners Resource Collection, and the Adult Education and Immigrant Integration Initiative. These investments have created a state-of-the-art, high-tech national network that disseminates teacher training resources of demonstrated quality and effectiveness to improve instruction.
- Additionally, ED, HHS, and DOL have issued a [joint memorandum](#) to promote the use of career pathways to help adults, including new Americans, acquire marketable skills, industry-recognized credentials, and health and social services.
- In February 2015, ED's Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) released a report, [Making Skills Everyone's Business: A Call to Transform Adult Learning in the United States](#). The report offers suggestions for how to establish convenient, effective, high-quality learning opportunities for youth and adults seeking to improve their literacy and numeracy skills.
- ED is conducting research on the demographic characteristics, educational attainment, and employment outcomes of ELs ages 14–18 and 19–21. This research is intended to inform federal, state and local investments in educational interventions for the growing number of older ELs who, due to a host of reasons, are unable to complete high school within the traditional time frame and are discharged or drop out before graduation.
- DOL has been expanding employer partnerships through work-based learning approaches, such as Registered Apprenticeship and On-the-Job Training (OJT). [These programs](#) allow ELs to acquire skills and training that can lead to more

career opportunities. They also provide an avenue for employers to build a qualified workforce. For example, the state of New Hampshire's [OJT program](#), expanded with grants from DOL, has helped meet the needs of employers seeking to hire and train workers who speak languages other than English.

Postsecondary Education

Postsecondary interventions and support structures, as well as programs and policies that address structural barriers, can empower more new Americans to access and succeed in higher education. In 2011, only 14 percent of adult ELs had college degrees, compared to 30 percent of English-proficient adults.¹¹¹ While about one-third of all immigrants have college degrees, they are disproportionately likely to be underemployed, for a variety of reasons.¹¹² Many foreign-trained new Americans encounter complicated obstacles as they seek recognition or recertification of their credentials.¹¹³ Refugees are considered eligible noncitizens and are thus eligible for Title IV federal student aid. Examples of federal government efforts in this area include:

- The White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics created the *¡Gradúate! Financial Aid Guide to Success* to help students and families navigate the college application process. The guide, available in both [English](#) and [Spanish](#), provides recommended steps for the college enrollment process, helpful tips on filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, and key financial aid resources available to better support Hispanics, including noncitizen students, in their efforts to access a postsecondary education.
- ED's Office of Federal Student Aid released this [fact sheet](#) that provides key information for refugees and asylees, including information about eligibility for Title IV federal student aid.

Federal Strategic Goals

The Obama Administration will implement strategies to advance four key goals to enhance language acquisition while also valuing and recognizing the importance of maintaining native language proficiency to preserve culture and intergenerational communication and expand economic opportunities.

- *Goal 1: Ensure all new Americans can access high-quality language instruction.* Linguistic integration is a foundation for new Americans' integration as active community members. Task Force members will seek to ensure that all new Americans have access to high-quality language instruction, through programs such as dual-language or ESL instruction, so new Americans can develop fluency and literacy in English while maintaining and developing their native language. They will also explore the role that advances in learning science and technology can play in developing solutions that are effective, engaging, affordable, and widely available.

- *Goal 2: Ensure that new Americans have meaningful access to high-quality early learning from birth to kindergarten.* Today, new American children are less likely than their peers to receive the tremendous benefits provided by high-quality early learning programs. Task Force members will take steps to ensure new American families can access these programs.
- *Goal 3: Raise the EL high school graduation rate so it is equivalent to the overall national graduation rate.* In the 2012–13 school year, approximately 61 percent of ELs graduated high school, up from 59 percent in 2011–12 and 57 percent in 2010–11. In comparison, the national graduation rate was 81 percent in 2012–13. A high school education is an essential step to economic and educational opportunity. The Task Force will support efforts to increase graduation rates for all students, including new Americans, so they have the same opportunities to succeed as other Americans.
- *Goal 4: Improve new Americans’ access to postsecondary education and training.* New Americans and their families encounter many obstacles that prevent them from accessing higher education and leveraging their existing skills and credentials. In 2011, 14 percent of adult ELs — 3 million — had a college degree, compared to 30 percent of non-EL adults. The President has set the national goal that by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world. The Task Force will seek to support new Americans, including those who are ELs, in achieving postsecondary education, which is critical to attaining this goal.

Recommended Actions

1. **Create and Disseminate Resources to Provide New American Families with Accessible Information on the Importance of High-Quality Early Learning.** ED and HHS will create a parent toolkit to provide families, including new American families, with information about the importance of early learning, strategies to support their children, and resources on how to find high-quality early learning opportunities for their children. ED and HHS will also collaborate to expand the dissemination of existing Head Start materials from the HHS Administration for Children and Families’ (ACF’s) [National Center on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness](#).
2. **Explore Ways to Improve the Effectiveness of Federal Education Programs for ELs, Including New Americans.** ED will seek out opportunities to highlight effective, evidence-based interventions for ELs and new Americans, for use in federal programs, such as the existing program for immigrant children under Title III. Highlighted interventions should include professional development and preparation for educators, including support for fostering cultural competency. ED will ensure that highlighted interventions focus on high-quality language instruction tailored to the diversity of ELs, based on local and state-level data, and provide guidance to states and districts on promising practices for meeting the

unique needs of ELs and new Americans. As part of this effort, ED will continue to provide guidance and highlight best practices for identifying and serving ELs with disabilities.

- 3. Provide Technical Assistance and Disseminate Evidence-Based Practices to Ensure That the Language Needs of ELs Are Being Supported Locally.** States and districts should examine the existing and emergent needs of ELs in their schools and determine how best to prepare and support teachers, paraprofessionals, and school leaders to meet those needs. ED will support state and local efforts through the provision of technical assistance and the dissemination of evidence-based practices in this area, including through the NCELA. Any needs that teachers or principals have for professional development to improve their effectiveness in this area could be supported through existing state and local funds or allowable use of funds provided to the states through Title II, Part A or Title III, Part A of ESEA.
- 4. Develop Guidance for Schools, Districts, and States for Promoting Inclusive School Climates, Cultural Responsiveness, and Wraparound Supports for Immigrant and Refugee Children and Youth.** ED and HHS will collaborate to develop guidance for educators, social workers, and other school professionals on the unique strengths and needs of immigrant and refugee youth, including those with interrupted formal education. ED should also highlight counseling, professional development, and other resources necessary to support ELs academically and socioeconomically, and connect schools with these resources.
- 5. Amplify and Disseminate Guidance and [Toolkits](#) for Teachers, Administrators, School Leaders, and School Systems on Integration.** ED will disseminate and amplify information about promising practices for the positive integration of immigrant and refugee children and adult learners in schools, including prevention of and appropriate responses to discriminatory harassment. ED will also continue to expand access to programs of world languages as part of its higher education programs.
- 6. Encourage Employers, Educational Systems, State and Local Governments, and Other Career-Building Institutions to Increase Access to ESL Courses.** Federal agencies, such as Commerce and SBA, will provide information and tools to employers about increasing access to ESL courses, education services, and other training programs for frontline immigrant and refugee workers. Volunteer-based models could increase availability at a comparatively low cost. ED programs will explore, in appropriate grant programs that serve ELs, an emphasis on using volunteers to provide services. ED, in partnership with other Task Force members, will also explore opportunities to pilot and support innovative models of providing ESL instruction.
- 7. Highlight Effective Institutional Programs, Community Models, and State Policies that Enhance Opportunities for New Americans.** ED will highlight

effective institutional programs, community models, and state policies that serve young people who are new Americans. For example, Café College, in San Antonio, Texas, offers community-based college and career advising opportunities to new Americans and their children.

- 8. Identify Education Grant Programs with Untapped Potential to Support New Americans, Including Programs that Employ Place-Based Strategies.**
ED, as well as other Task Force members, will take issues confronting new Americans into consideration when developing education grant programs, or when awarding grants for programs under which new Americans are eligible to receive services.
- 9. Explore Research that Evaluate Effective EL Instruction and Interventions.**
ED will explore ways that ED, SEAs, and LEAs should collect and analyze more information on EL participation and outcomes in education programs from early learning to adult education, to understand how to best address access issues and improve student outcomes and, if necessary, could request more funding from Congress.

VII. Continuing the Task Force's Efforts

While some countries have one central coordinating immigrant integration agency, the responsibility for developing a national immigrant and refugee integration strategy in the United States falls on several federal departments and agencies, including the departments and agencies that were charged with developing this strategic action plan. The Task Force's report represents an important step in aligning agency strategies and approaches in support of overarching goals.

As a part of its internal assessment process, the Task Force identified 58 current immigrant integration programs administered by 10 federal agencies that are Task Force members. Of these integration programs, 33 primarily emphasize civic integration, 16 primarily focus on linguistic integration, and 9 focus on economic integration. While programs supporting economic integration are fewer in number, they tend to be funded on a larger scale than comparable civic- or linguistic-focused programs. By contrast, linguistically focused programs are more numerous but account for a smaller amount of funding.

There are numerous ways to strengthen and coordinate the federal government's approach to integration. Comments submitted by stakeholders who participated in the Task Force's public engagements suggested areas in which the need for a particular service exceeds the level of service provided, particularly in the areas of English language instruction, workforce development, and civic inclusion. These are key areas in which the Task Force's energy has been focused to date. Stakeholder comments also offered recommendations in policy areas that are not the primary focus of the existing Task Force members, such as improving financial literacy and capability. The Task Force recognizes that it must also tackle these issues as well, and will collaborate with federal departments and agencies that are not formally part of the Task Force in the future.

It will also be important to continue stakeholder. Indeed, the success of new Americans is tied to the success of the greater community, and the Task Force's continued work will engage other sectors in developing new efforts and expanding existing ones. Further areas of targeted engagement will include outreach with researchers who study immigrant and refugee integration to develop a research agenda that leverages academia to answer key integration questions, evaluate and refine programs and initiatives, support the development of metrics to measure success, and identify effective programs.

As we consider trends, U.S. Census Bureau data offer a window into the rich mosaic of our nation's foreign-born population. From the decennial Census to the annual American Community Survey and population projections, and monthly Current Population Survey, U.S. Census Bureau data quantify the size of the foreign-born population and capture the rich demographic diversity of our immigrants across communities of all sizes. Maintaining the existing American Community Survey and investing now in research and development for a modern, cost-efficient 2020 census are essential to helping all communities measure, understand, and serve their immigrant and refugee populations.

Additionally, because new Americans are the nation's future workforce, entrepreneurs, and innovators, the private and philanthropic sectors must play a robust and expanded role in meeting the integration needs of immigrants and refugees, and building strong, cohesive communities. The Administration recognized private sector efforts and honored nine Champions of Change that are [Promoting Citizenship in the Workplace](#). An example of these efforts include the [Cities for Citizenship](#) initiative, a partnership between 11 major cities, Citi Community Development and Microfinance, which aims to increase citizenship among eligible LPRs to forge more inclusive and economically robust cities. Additionally, the Greater Miami and the Beaches Hotel Association, in partnership with the National Immigration Forum's New American Workforce, is hosting citizenship workshops for hotel employees. The Task Force will continue seek opportunities to convene leaders in the private, philanthropic, and public sectors.

The Obama Administration is also committed to strengthening the underlying federal infrastructure to meet the needs of and capitalize on the momentum created by proactive integration and welcoming efforts in receiving communities. Ultimately, the Task Force seeks to institutionalize its work to ensure coordination among agencies and maximize the impact of their efforts. The Task Force's initial process for developing the federal strategy has already increased cross-agency collaboration. Several agencies held joint-stakeholder sessions on cross-cutting areas and developed joint recommendations. For example, CNCS and HHS's ORR will be collaborating to create national service opportunities for former refugees to help the next generation of refugees, and SBA and Commerce will be teaming up with DOL to provide small businesses with more information on their responsibilities to workers.

Task Force will continue to convene to enhance information-sharing efforts and cross-cutting efforts, in areas like adult education and workforce training, that bolster the integration of new Americans. To further these efforts, the Task Force will create interagency working groups that focus on several issue areas, including Education, Training & Workforce; Promoting Naturalization; and Financial Literacy. The Task Force will also submit a one-year progress report to the President later this year.

VIII. Closing

Every day, communities around the country are recognizing that welcoming immigrants makes them more vibrant places for all residents. When new Americans have access to English language classes, civics instruction, job skills training, and tools to become successful entrepreneurs, integration becomes an engine for innovation. With a strategy that welcomes immigrants and refugees, towns and cities become epicenters of growth in their regional economy. Additionally, strong civic participation by new Americans supports a healthy democracy.

President Obama established this Task Force to ensure that the federal government's integration efforts enhance and support the important integration work taking place at the community level. Over the past several months, the Task Force has identified a number of areas of opportunity where the federal government can use its convening power, improve coordination of interagency efforts to integrate new Americans, and lead by example. This initial report outlines a strategic plan and recommended actions to bolster current integration efforts. This report is only the beginning.

Creating this national strategy has been an all-hands-on-deck effort that has brought together individuals, communities, civic and faith leaders, philanthropy, and the private sector to identify innovative solutions to integrating immigrants and refugees in communities across the country. The Obama Administration intends to do its part, and we encourage other key stakeholders to join us in this effort.

While we seek to create greater opportunities and remove barriers to immigrant and refugee integration, integration efforts may also be enhanced through legislative reform and further modernization of our immigration laws. This Administration remains committed to working with Congress to enact a common-sense, comprehensive solution to our broken immigration system, similar to the bipartisan legislation that passed the Senate in 2013.

We must remain dedicated to advancing the basic principles upon which the United States was founded, and to establishing the equality and dignity of all people, including immigrants and refugees.

IX. Appendix A: Glossary of Key Terms

The terms below are described solely for purposes of this report, and not to provide a technical or legal definition for any other context (including for programs and initiatives described in the report).

- **Civic Integration:** When all community members belong, are secure in their rights and responsibilities, exercise their liberties, and share ownership in the community and our nation's future.
- **Dual-Language Education:** Also called two-way immersion or two-way bilingual immersion, it enhances the linguistic, cognitive, and cross-cultural skills of both EL and native English-speaking pupils while engaging LEP parents in their children's schooling.¹¹⁴
- **Economic Integration:** When both employers and immigrant workers understand their workplace rights and responsibilities, and workers have the resources to excel, embark on career pathways, and obtain economic self-sufficiency.
- **English as a Second Language (ESL):** ESL refers to the teaching of English to students with different native or home languages using specially designed programs and techniques. ESL is an English-only instructional model, and most programs attempt to develop English skills and academic knowledge simultaneously. It is also known as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), English as an Additional Language (EAL), and English as a Foreign Language (EFL).¹¹⁵
- **English Learners (ELs):** Individuals who do not speak English as their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English.¹¹⁶
- **Foreign-Born:** Foreign-born refers to people who are not U.S. citizens at birth.
- **Immigrants:** Foreign-born persons who obtain lawful permanent resident status in the United States.¹¹⁷
- **Linguistic Integration:** When English learners have access to effective English language instruction to support their acquisition of English language skills while also valuing and recognizing the importance of maintaining native language proficiency to preserve culture and intergenerational communication and expand economic opportunities.
- **Native-Born:** Native-born refers to people born in the United States, including Puerto Rico, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, as well as those born in a foreign country who have at least one parent who is a U.S. citizen and who meet other criteria specified by law to acquire U.S. citizenship at birth.¹¹⁸

- **New Americans:** An all-encompassing term that includes foreign-born individuals (and their children and families) who seek to become fully integrated into their new community in the United States.
- **Receiving Community:** Any community, including a city, country, or state, where new Americans have made their homes. It includes longer-term residents, but also local governments, business leaders, educational institutions, faith communities, and others with a stake in building strong, united, and welcoming communities.
- **Welcoming Community:** A community that strives to strengthen meaningful contact between immigrants and refugees and native-born residents, ensures inclusiveness, provides opportunity, and creates an overall positive environment for all.

X. Appendix B: List of Task Force Events and Engagements

The Task Force on New Americans is committed to working with all sectors of society, including community-based organizations, businesses, faith leaders, as well as state and local governments, to identify and gather information on successful integration efforts and best practices, and to strategize on how to replicate and expand these efforts. To this end, the Task Force has gathered input and ideas from various stakeholders and individuals.

In January 2015, Task Force Co-Chairs Cecilia Muñoz and León Rodríguez issued a [“Call for Ideas.”](#) inviting stakeholders and members of the public to submit suggestions to help shape a federal integration strategy. In less than four weeks, the Task Force received approximately 350 responses to this request. Additionally, Task Force members have conducted multiple in-person meetings and engagements, as listed below:

January 15: USCIS Director León Rodríguez delivered keynote remarks to a group of government, business, and civil society leaders from immigrant gateway cities around the country. This event was hosted by the Americas Society/Council of the Americas in New York.

January 21: Representatives from the White House Domestic Policy Council and USCIS met with representatives from Welcoming America regarding the work of the Task Force on New Americans. Welcoming America is a national, grassroots-driven collaborative fostering mutual respect and cooperation between foreign-born and native-born Americans.

January 22: Representatives from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) met with representatives from Welcoming America regarding the work of the Task Force on New Americans and immigrant entrepreneurship.

January 27: The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) hosted a listening session with stakeholders from the refugee community, including the voluntary agencies that are central to the resettlement process.

January 27: Representatives from SBA met with representatives from the National Asian American Coalition regarding micro-lending to immigrant communities.

January 29: USCIS and Task Force members hosted the first of three Task Force national listening sessions to discuss the role of receiving communities in immigrant and refugee integration. Approximately 577 individuals participated.

January 29: Secretary Thomas Perez of the Department of Labor (DOL) held a roundtable listening session with stakeholders in Tucson, Arizona, to discuss the Task Force on New Americans, in coordination with Chicanos Por La Causa, SEIU Arizona, and YWCA Tucson.

January 30: SBA highlighted an immigrant small business as part of its “Made It in America” engagement series.

February 2: The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) met with the Office of the Mayor of Beaverton, Oregon, to discuss the city’s efforts to integrate new Americans and ways that national service programs can contribute.

February 3: USCIS and Task Force members hosted the second of three Task Force national listening sessions to discuss federal strategies to support the economic and linguistic integration of new Americans. Approximately 440 individuals participated.

February 5: USCIS and Task Force members hosted the third of three Task Force national listening sessions to discuss federal strategies to support the civic integration of new Americans. Approximately 380 individuals participated.

February 6: SBA posted a [blog](#) titled *Immigrant Entrepreneurs Help Fuel Record Growth Streak*.

February 11–13: The State of Florida held its biennial Refugee Services Consultations in Jacksonville, during which federal and community partners came together to discuss refugee integration. Representatives from several HHS offices participated, including Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), the Office for Civil Rights, and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Additionally, representatives from USCIS and DOL participated.

February 11: Secretary of Labor Tom Perez held a roundtable listening session with stakeholders in Durham, North Carolina, to discuss the Task Force on New Americans, in coordination with El Centro Hispano.

February 12: The White House Domestic Policy Council and USCIS met with members of the Naturalization Working Group — a coalition of organizations concerned with immigration policy and services as they relate to immigrants attempting to become American citizens.

February 18: The White House Domestic Policy Council, USCIS, and HHS met with representatives of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and Refugee Council USA to discuss refugee integration.

February 20: The White House Domestic Policy Council, USCIS, DOL, and Commerce (including Secretary Pritzker) held a conference call with the New American Workforce initiative to discuss steps businesses are taking to help their citizenship-eligible immigrant workers gain citizenship.

February 23: DOL, SBA, and the Department of Education (ED) held an in-person listening session with stakeholders to discuss the Task Force on New Americans to discuss ways these agencies could use their resources to assist with integration.

February 24: CNCS met with the Office of the Mayor of Boise, Idaho, to discuss the city's efforts to integrate new Americans and ways that national service programs can contribute.

February 25: The White House Domestic Policy Council, DHS, and USCIS participated in a dialogue with YMCA representatives titled, "Welcoming All: Immigrant Integration across Sectors." This engagement offered the opportunity to discuss and highlight the importance of a cross-sector approach to immigrant integration and the work of the Task Force on New Americans.

February 25: Representatives from USCIS, CNCS, HHS, SBA, ED, DOL, and Department of Justice (DOJ) met with representatives from the YMCA to discuss Task Force efforts.

March 4: USCIS Director León Rodríguez met with representatives from the Congressional Asian Pacific Americans Caucus to discuss the Task Force on New Americans and additional ways in which the caucus may work with USCIS to assist with outreach and implementation efforts.

March 10: HHS held a national listening session on immigrant and refugee integration. Approximately 270 individuals participated.

March 12: HHS's ORR posted a [blog](#) titled *Creating New Connections and New Opportunities to Advance Refugee Integration*.

March 17: DOL, ED, and SBA held a conference call listening session with stakeholders to discuss the Task Force on New Americans to discuss ways these agencies could use their resources to assist with integration.

March 19: CNCS met with the office of the county executive for Montgomery County, Maryland, to discuss the county's efforts to integrate new Americans and ways that national service programs can contribute.

March 26: CNCS met with the office of the mayor of Los Angeles, California, to discuss the city's efforts to integrate new Americans and ways that national service programs can contribute.

March 27: HHS' ACF posted a [blog](#) titled *Planning for Refugee and Immigrant Integration across ACF*.



President Barack Obama answers questions during a town hall on immigration at Casa Azafrán community center in Nashville, Tennessee. December 9, 2014. (Official White House Photo by Pete Souza)

ENDNOTES

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