



MARYLAND Skilled Immigrant *Task Force*



ANNUAL REPORT

FISCAL YEAR 2021

The image on the cover page is of Task Force members virtually attending a monthly meeting on January 27, 2021.

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AN OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Created in 2016, the Maryland Skilled Immigrant Task Force is a consortium of stakeholders that seek to leverage skills that foreign-trained professionals bring to the United States in order to meet local job market demand.

Skilled immigrants are those who have acquired extensive education and/or occupational experience abroad. Many come to Maryland ready to work, offering great benefits to local industry, including global skills, multilingualism, workplace diversity, and cultural knowledge.

Unfortunately, prior to securing employment in their professional fields, skilled immigrants may experience significant challenges including limited English language proficiency, costly credential evaluations of their foreign degrees, complex licensing and recertification processes, lack of professional networks, and lack of knowledge on alternative career pathways.

The Task Force consists of representatives from the Maryland Department of Human Services, the Maryland Department of Labor, community colleges, refugee resettlement agencies, American Job Centers, the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives, and other immigrant-serving organizations. A full list of Task Force organizational members can be found on pages 4 and 5.

The Task Force believes that the State of Maryland can lead the way in creating a win-win environment in which immigrants secure jobs matching their professional and educational backgrounds while helping the business community more readily meet its workforce needs.

This report covers year five of the Task Force, from July 2020 through June 2021.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Skilled Immigrant Task Force collaborates across organizations to advance workforce system accessibility and career opportunities for foreign-trained individuals in Maryland.

SKILLED IMMIGRANT DEFINITION

A work-authorized foreign-born and foreign-trained worker with at least (2) years of formal or informal education, training, or on-the-job experience that has led to special skills, training, knowledge, and/or abilities for certain types of work.

GOVERNANCE

The Task Force was co-sponsored by two state agencies: the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Department of Labor (Labor).

DHS is Maryland's primary social service provider, serving more than one million residents annually. Through its 24 local departments of social services and other social programs, DHS actively pursues opportunities to assist people in economic need, provides preventive services, and protects vulnerable children and adults. Within DHS' Family Investment Administration is the Maryland Office for Refugees and Asylees (MORA), which provides support and services to federally recognized refugees and other humanitarian immigrants including asylees, certified Victims of Trafficking, Special Immigrant Visa holders from Iraq and Afghanistan, Cuban and Haitian entrants, and certain Amerasians.

MORA has helped more than 40,000 refugees and eligible humanitarian immigrants make Maryland their home through a statewide network of public and private organizations. MORA provides transitional cash assistance, employment services, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes, vocational training, health case management, and other supportive services. MORA partners assist individuals to become independent, contributing members to the national and local economy through a number of transitional services aimed at helping individuals achieve social and economic self-sufficiency. For more information, visit MORA's website at <http://dhs.maryland.gov/maryland-office-for-refugees-and-asylees/>.

Labor is Maryland's job development agency. It supports the economic stability of the state by providing businesses, the workforce, and the consuming public with high-quality, customer-focused regulatory, employment, and training services. Divisions within Labor consist of the Office of the Commissioner of Financial Regulation, Occupational and Professional Licensing, Unemployment Insurance, Labor and Industry, the Maryland Racing Commission, and the Division of Workforce Development and Adult Learning (DWDAL).

DWDAL oversees the state's adult education programming (family literacy, GED® preparation, and English as a Second Language) and the American Job Centers (AJCs). DWDAL is responsible for implementing the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) in Maryland. WIOA was signed into law on July 22, 2014, and took effect July 1, 2015. It addresses the needs of both businesses and jobseekers and establishes a workforce system that relies on strong, cross-sector partnerships. The Maryland WIOA State Plan is available here: <http://www.labor.maryland.gov/wdplan/wdstateplan.pdf>.

MORA and DWDAL are co-leads of the Task Force, sharing responsibility for overall governance, including developing strategy, facilitating meetings, inviting partners, and overseeing workgroups.

MEMBERSHIP

The Task Force is a robust network of multi-sector stakeholders, including service providers, educators, and both the public and private sector. Fifth-year membership included representation from the following local, state, and national organizations:

- Anne Arundel Community College
- Baltimore Alliance for Careers in Healthcare
- Baltimore City Community College

- Baltimore City's Mayor's Office of Employment Development
- Baltimore City's Mayor's Office of Immigrant and Multicultural Affairs
- CASH Campaign of Maryland
- Chesapeake College
- Chesapeake Multicultural Resource Center
- Community College of Baltimore County
- Community Engagement Work Source Montgomery
- Department of Human Services (State of Maryland)
- Department of Labor (State of Maryland)
- Employ Prince George's
- Ethiopian Community Development Council
- Governor's Office of Community Initiatives (State of Maryland)
- Governor's Workforce Development Board (State of Maryland)
- Howard Community College
- Howard County Library System
- Howard County Office of Workforce Development
- International Rescue Committee
- Latino Economic Development Center
- Literacy Council of Montgomery County
- Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
- Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area
- Montgomery College
- Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services
- Montgomery County Gilchrist Immigrant Resource Center
- Montgomery County Office of Community Partnerships
- Prince George's Community College
- Prince George's County Department of Social Services
- Upwardly Global
- Welcome Back Center of Suburban Maryland (Latino Health Initiative)
- World Education Services

STRUCTURE

Due to the COVID pandemic, monthly meetings were held virtually to continue working on immigrant integration and inclusion. The Task Force played a critical role in providing comprehensive health resources for immigrant communities. Stakeholder organizations continue to build relationships, share ideas, and discuss best practices.

In addition to monthly meetings, workgroups consisting of small groups of members work on tackling specific issues. Workgroups are temporary and active for a predetermined window of time so that participants can gauge their availability based on workload at their primary organization. Deliverables and group goals are clearly outlined on a schedule that is feasible, and the groups are intentionally staffed with appropriate representation from relevant member organizations to ensure that the group can effectively accomplish its task. Workgroups are determined through group discussion during monthly Task Force meetings.

YEAR FIVE IN REVIEW

OVERVIEW

In year five, 11 meetings were held virtually. Site tours were not able to be conducted due to COVID-19.

The full member list can be found on pages 4 and 5.

In year five, many action items from year four were accomplished. New action items were created, and several workgroups were formed to work on the action items.

GOALS AND ACTION ITEMS

In order to adhere to the above mission and in accordance with the insights of Task Force members, the following three goals guided the Task Force in year five:

1. *Partnerships and Visibility*
Strengthen partnerships and increase visibility of the Task Force and of challenges facing skilled immigrants.
2. *Resource Documents and Barrier Reduction*
Develop tangible tools and resources that service providers or jobseekers can use to reduce or remove barriers to employment for skilled immigrants.
3. *Business Engagement*
Explore and conceptualize business engagement opportunities that will benefit skilled immigrants and Maryland's business community.

Each goal listed above was connected with a menu of suggested action items. Throughout the year, the Task Force chose action items on which to focus efforts, either by creating a workgroup or having DWDAL or MORA staff fulfill the task. The table below details the goals, potential action items tied to each goal, and accomplishments. Action items highlighted in red indicate progress or completion on that specific item, and those in italics indicate a workgroup was created to address that item. Further information on accomplishments can be found on page 8.

Goals	Potential Action Items	Accomplishments
<p>Goal #1: Partnerships & Visibility</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create a catalog of success stories highlighting how partnerships and resources stemming from the Task Force have increased immigrant integration into Maryland's workforce system 2. Make at least two joint presentations at conferences/convenings regarding cultural competency, language access, and/or Task Force information, partnerships, and resources 3. <i>Expand Task Force membership generally</i> 4. Continue site visits to expand connections among Task Force members and at other relevant organizations to bolster partnerships and referrals 5. Learn about best practices in other states and explore how to incorporate these in Maryland 	<p>The web page "Celebrating New Americans" was created on Labor's Office of New Americans Initiative website which houses success stories, testimonials, and videos.</p> <p>Leaders of the Task Force from DWDAL and MORA offered a joint presentation about the Task Force and MD Labor's Language Access Plan at the Maryland Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) Fall Conference.</p> <p>The Membership Expansion workgroup was formed to create a list of potential new members.</p> <p>Site visits were put on hold due to COVID-19.</p>
<p>Goal #2: Resource Documents and Barrier Reduction</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Create a Career Pathways Guide for a specific occupation based on employment data/immigrant needs and disseminate guide accordingly</i> 2. <i>Explore the possibility of hosting career or resource fairs for immigrants</i> 	<p>The Resource Guide workgroup reformatted the original Resource Guide to be more usable for immigrants and distributed to relevant organizations statewide. This guide is also available in nine foreign languages.</p> <p>The Financial Literacy Guide was revamped to include more resources and be more user-friendly. This guide is also available in 11 foreign languages.</p> <p>The Career Pathways Guide workgroup was formed to publish a guide and explored occupations/industries for it.</p> <p>The Resources & Job Fair workgroup was formed to host a Job Resource and Hiring Fair for New Americans.</p>

<p>Goal #3: Business Engagement</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Create a short video by interviewing employers' experiences of hiring skilled immigrants (why hire immigrants, success stories, etc)</i> 2. <i>Honor employers(s) championing the hiring of immigrant talent in Maryland</i> 	<p>The Task Force received presentations on Labor's approach to workforce development.</p> <p>The Business Engagement workgroup developed plans for interviewing skilled immigrants, workforce partners, and employers to create a highlight video.</p> <p>The International Talent workgroup finalized and disseminated a document highlighting the benefits of hiring New Americans.</p>
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ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Many of the accomplishments of the Task Force's fifth year were related to specific action items tied to the three goals. A further discussion of these accomplishments can be found below.

Partnerships and Visibility

"Celebrating New Americans" was created on Labor's New Americans web page which houses success stories, testimonials, videos from New Americans and workforce staff, as well as fact sheets about New Americans. This web page celebrates New Americans' contributions across Maryland during ethnic and cultural awareness months such as African-American History Month (February), Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month (May), and Hispanic Heritage Month (Sept. 15-Oct. 15).

New Americans - Workforce Development and Adult Learning

NEW AMERICANS





Jobs

Jobs



Skilled Immigrant Task Force

Skilled Immigrant Task Force



Education/Classes

Education/Classes



Resources for Staff

Resources for Staff



Celebrating New Americans

Celebrating New Americans

Leaders of the Skilled Immigrant Task Force from DWDAL and MORA co-presented on the Task Force's accomplishments and activities and Language Access Plan at the Maryland TESOL's 40th Annual Fall Conference virtually held from November 6 – November 7, 2020. The event hosted 251 registrants from 12 states and two countries.

The Task Force was also invested in the idea of expanding Task Force membership to organizations not currently represented. The Membership Expansion workgroup was created to look through the current organizational member list and to brainstorm what other partners might be an asset to the Task Force.

Site visits were put on hold due to COVID-19.

Resource Documents and Barrier Reduction

The Resource Guide workgroup revised the existing [Resource Guide](#) designed for staff into a more usable and reader-friendly version that could be used by immigrants. In year five, DWDAL staff worked to finalize, publicize and disseminate [the Resource Guide for New American Job Seekers](#) to partners. This guide lists nationwide organizations and services/programs provided to New American jobseekers. Nationwide and local resources with descriptions, phone numbers, and links are provided. This guide is also available in [Arabic](#), [Chinese](#), [Dari](#), [French](#), [Korean](#), [Pashto](#), [Spanish](#), [Swahili](#), and [Vietnamese](#).

In year two of the Task Force, a workgroup convened to create a Financial Education and Services guide. In that year, the workgroup created a brochure detailing various resources related to loans, taxes, fraud, and financial education providers located throughout the state. Initially, it was envisioned that this workgroup would only need two months to focus on a brief update of the guide, to include checking links and contact information to confirm accuracy. Instead, the workgroup decided that a more substantive overhaul of the guide was needed, to include additional resources, a glossary of key words, less text to ensure readability, particularly for Limited English Proficient individuals, and general reformatting. After finalizing the changes to be made, the graphics team at DHS worked on the updated guide, which was shared with Task Force members for additional feedback. In year five, [the Financial Literacy Guide](#) was published and disseminated to partners. This guide lists a variety of financial education providers throughout Maryland as well as information about common financial questions, covering topics such as loans, taxes, unemployment, and frauds. This guide is also available in [Amharic](#), [Chinese](#), [Dari](#), [French](#), [Korean](#), [Pashto](#), [Spanish](#), [Swahili](#), [Tagalog](#), [Tigrinya](#), and [Vietnamese](#).

The Career Pathways Guide workgroup formed to publish a guide and explored occupations/industries for it. The workgroup decided on creating a guide for health care. This action item will continue into year six of the Task Force.

The fourth action item within this goal focused on barrier reduction. Given the challenges skilled immigrants often face, Task Force members were interested in exploring the idea of hosting career or resource fairs. The Resources and Job Fair workgroup was formed and aims to host a "Job Resource and Hiring Fair for New Americans". This event is for New Americans in Maryland, including immigrants, refugees and asylees. This will be a two-part event. Part 1 event is a Pre-Event Webinar on August 25, 2021 that will feature information on résumé and cover letter writing, interviewing, and credentialing. Part 2 event is a Hiring Fair on September 15, 2021 that will have a panel of employers. A survey was conducted by the workgroup to identify and reduce challenges in seeking and securing

employment opportunities for immigrants living in Maryland. DWDAL's Office of Workforce Information and Performance (OWIP) identified over 3,000 individuals in the MWE that had limited English proficiency (via self-attestation or identification by staff). The survey was sent out through GovDelivery to these individuals, as well as the Task Force and DWDAL's Office of Adult Education & Literacy Services for wider distribution. From the survey analysis report, the workgroup determined that the majority of respondents lived in the following counties: Montgomery, Prince George's, Howard and Anne Arundel. The top industries of interest through the survey were: Education, Healthcare and Social Services, IT & Cybersecurity, Financial Services, Government Services, Professional, Scientific & Technical Services, Non-profit, and Construction & Real Estate. This action item will continue into year six of the Task Force.

Business Engagement

When creating the action items for this goal in year four, Task Force members decided that it would be important to more fully understand the various business engagement strategies used at Labor. Through a series of presentations at monthly Task Force meetings, members were given information about Adult Education and Literacy Services and Maryland Apprenticeship and Training Program.

The International Talent workgroup finalized and disseminated [International Talent One-Pager](#) to highlight the benefits of hiring foreign-trained professionals for businesses and employers. It also included local organizations serving New Americans and fast facts on New Americans in Maryland.

The Business Engagement workgroup developed plans for interviewing skilled immigrants, workforce partners, and employers to create a highlight video. The workgroup also worked on honoring the year of employer(s) championing the hiring of immigrant talent in Maryland. This action item will continue into year six of the Task Force.

RELATED ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In addition to the accomplishments directly related to the goals of the Task Force in year five, the Task Force and its work were promoted in several publications including the Maryland TESOL's Winter 2021 Newsletter and [Benchmarks of Success Monthly Newsletter, Issue 23, February 2021](#).



DWDAL and MORA staff participated in the Office of New Americans State Network meetings, led by World Education Services (WES) Global Talent Bridge and New American Economy.

LOOKING AHEAD TO YEAR SIX

Several projects that began in year five will continue to year six, including the creation of a career pathways guide in healthcare and hosting a job resource and hiring fair. In year six, the Task Force will form a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) work group to continue the Business Engagement workgroup's effort to define DEI within the scope of the Task Force's work.

In addition, Maryland will continue its work with the Office of New Americans State Network and the Skilled Immigrant Integration Program (SIIP) Alumni Network to stay informed of best practices in other states. The Task Force will collaborate with the Governor's Office of Immigrant Affairs statutorily required by Senate Bill 85, which passed in the 2021 legislative session, once it is established.