



# Baltimore RISE

## A Case Study in Advancing Local Workforce Development Efforts for New Americans



A report from Higher and the Baltimore Mayor's Office for Immigrant and Multicultural Affairs, funded by the State of Maryland Department of Human Resources Office for Refugees and Asylees.



Higher is a program of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) and is funded by the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement under grant number 90RB0045 to provide technical assistance to refugee employment programs at all nine national resettlement agencies.



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Lutheran Immigration  
and Refugee Service

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the summer of 2015, Baltimore City's Mayor's Office of Immigrant and Multicultural Affairs (MIMA) and the Maryland Office for Refugees and Asylees (MORA) began conversations about the unmet workforce needs of skilled refugees and immigrants.

Together, they began exploring ways they could effectively leverage their resources in combination with resources from their local workforce development area to address these needs and promote the economic self-sufficiency of refugees and immigrants.

Made possible by the Office of Refugee Resettlement's Targeted Assistance Grant (TAG), MIMA adapted their strategy from the last eight years of awarding the grant to a refugee resettlement agency by instead sharing the funding among three partners: the Mayor's Office for Employment Development (MOED), Baltimore City Community College (BCCC) and the refugee employment technical assistance provider Higher/LIRS.

The vision for the Baltimore RISE program was to provide career laddering opportunities for medium to high skilled refugees, increasing their access to workforce development services and stimulating their overall economic integration.

Partnering with the federal workforce development system was strategic in light of the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014, a recent leadership change at MOED and the existing wealth of workforce development resources available through the American Job Center (AJC) system (United States' Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration, n.d.)

The multitude of economic hardships faced by refugees and immigrants, in addition to limited resources and supports to facilitate the community's ability to move beyond survival jobs and begin long-term wealth-building, determined the overwhelming interest in this program. Furthermore, these realities necessitate the report's overarching recommendation that more must be done on the part of local government, elected officials, adult education, advocacy and refugee and immigrant-serving organizations to collaborate, innovate, and develop programs and resources based on thorough assessments of and inclusive engagement with the refugee and immigrant community.

As demonstrated in this report, a pilot career-laddering program comprised of adult education, local workforce

development areas and refugee and immigrant-serving organizations provides all partners involved with a unique opportunity to leverage public and private resources to effectively engage underserved communities and promote the economic well-being of families for decades to come. It is the recommendation of the Baltimore RISE program partners that jurisdictions work to initiate such partnerships, and that the time frame and funding stream allow for the multidisciplinary team and divergent organizations to align priorities and expectations, innovate and make "mid-flight" adjustments.

Despite the challenges and work that remains to be done for refugees and immigrants to be successfully integrated into mainstream workforce systems, the Baltimore RISE program demonstrates that collaboration among local government, educational institutions, local workforce areas and the non-profit community is possible. When there is a commitment to work together, to complement each other's strengths, and to make adjustments that lead to equitable access for marginalized populations, economic opportunity will abound, not only for refugees and immigrants, but for all.

## INTRODUCTION

In 2013, Baltimore City, under the leadership of Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, established the New Americans Task Force. Chaired by then Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) Vice President for Programs Michael Mitchell, the New Americans Task Force developed a sustainable plan to support and retain immigrants. This plan, titled *The Role of Immigrants in Growing Baltimore*, included recommendations for economic growth and community wellbeing. In the area of Workforce Development it was recommended that the city leverage existing resources provided by the Mayor's Office of Employment Development (MOED) to provide greater access to vocational training and employment services for refugees and immigrants (Bishop, L., Rodriguez-Lima, C. and Wachter, J., September 2014).

In 2015, this recommendation became a reality when the City of Baltimore was awarded a Targeted Assistance (formula) Grant (TAG) from the Office for Refugee Resettlement (ORR) and the Maryland Office for Refugees and Asylees (MORA), and chose to locate post-resettlement employment services for refugees<sup>1</sup> within a local American Job Center (AJC) rather than at a local resettlement agency.

There were two primary reasons why this decision was made: first, AJCs serve as a conduit to federally funded

vocational training opportunities so it was the goal for this partnership to increase awareness and utilization among the refugee community about these career laddering resources. Secondly, housing a refugee employment program at the AJC was seen as the first step towards accomplishing the broader goal of making Baltimore AJCs more accessible to all immigrants who call Baltimore home—approximately 47,000 people, or 7.6%, of the city’s population (United States Census Bureau-American Fact Finder, 2014).

This innovative approach to refugee employment services represented a significant shift towards aligning workforce development services for refugees with the mainstream workforce system. Led by the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant and Multicultural Affairs (MIMA), the Baltimore RISE (Refugee Integration, Skills Training, and Employment) program was conceived as a short-term vocational training and job placement program for skilled refugees that would also provide an opportunity for a local AJC to begin adapting its services for immigrants in general.

This report seeks to provide a case study of the pilot year for this innovative program and will outline the structure of the RISE program, the challenges that were encountered, best practices that were discovered and, finally, recommendations for this or similar programs to consider in the future.

### BACKGROUND

U.S. refugee resettlement and accompanying employment services put great emphasis on rapid self-sufficiency through early employment. Due to resource limitations, employment services that support career advancement beyond help with finding an initial “survival job” are often unavailable or lack adequate funding to fully support attainment of additional skills and credentials required for successful career progression.

As a result, refugees beyond the resettlement period, asylees, Special Immigrant Visa holders (SIVs), and secondary migrants (who were initially resettled in another state) are often disconnected and unaware of opportunities to further their careers.

Recognizing that many refugees experience barriers to career advancement beyond initial survival jobs, MORA began exploring the possibility of partnering with the mainstream workforce development system as a way to complement the services that refugees receive when they first arrive in the country.

The U.S. Department of Labor-funded workforce development system offers an abundance of resources, career training programs and specialized staff. The 2014 Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA), the first new federal workforce legislation in more than a decade, strongly emphasizes providing services to job seekers with barriers to employment, including immigrants who may have foreign credentials or still be in the process of learning English (United States’ Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration, n.d.).

The Baltimore RISE program was designed to provide a career-laddering training and employment program specifically for refugees while also capitalizing on the federal WIOA legislation to encourage the local workforce area to improve access to services for all all immigrants.

### BALTIMORE RISE PROGRAM STRUCTURE & OPERATIONS

The mission of the Baltimore RISE program in its pilot year was to “Provide direct services that result in economic self-sufficiency and reduced welfare dependency for refugees through career development and job placements in the Baltimore Metropolitan Region.”

All RISE program partners listed below worked together on a comprehensive program design process which included making decisions about program outreach, eligibility criteria, processes for referrals and intake, and vocational training programs to be offered.

During its first year, the Baltimore RISE program had two main goals: 1.) To provide skills training and job placement services for skilled refugees in Baltimore growth industries, and 2.) To increase the capacity of the Eastside American Job Center<sup>2</sup> (EAJC) to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate services to the refugee and immigrant community, including those with limited English proficiency (LEP).

### Program Partners

**The Baltimore Mayor’s Office for Immigrant and Multicultural Affairs (MIMA)** provided overarching program management, financial oversight and coordination for the Baltimore RISE program. MIMA contracted with the following sub-grantees:

**Baltimore Mayor’s Office for Employment Development (MOED):** MOED operates Baltimore City’s American Job Centers (AJCs). MOED is the largest workforce development entity within Baltimore City and

offers an extensive array of tailored services, targeted trainings and unique employment opportunities based on their strong relationships with growing and emerging industries and large employers given their role in the execution of city contracts.

**Baltimore City Community College (BCCC):** BCCC has a long history of providing English language and vocational training to refugees and immigrants in Baltimore, as well as a strong track record of partnering with local refugee resettlement and workforce development agencies.

**Higher/Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS):** Higher is a program of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS). Headquartered in Baltimore, LIRS is the third largest of the nine national resettlement agencies. Higher, funded by the Office for Refugee Resettlement (ORR), provides national technical assistance to all refugee resettlement employment programs.

BCCC and MOED partnered to conduct outreach and enroll clients in the program. BCCC was responsible for designing and delivering the vocational training courses, while MOED was responsible for providing employment case management, job readiness and job placement, as well as connect higher skilled clients to mainstream vocational training opportunities. Working as a local partner, but drawing on its national expertise in refugee employment, Higher/LIRS' role was to provide technical assistance (TA) to MIMA, BCCC and MOED as they designed and implemented the program.

## Program Eligibility and Key Deliverables

In considering program eligibility requirements, the Baltimore RISE program partners had to strike a careful balance between the clear desire and need for vocational training that many refugees express with clear eligibility standards that ensured participants would have the English and literacy skills necessary to succeed in these training courses. As such, key eligibility criteria included that the client have at least low-intermediate English proficiency, which was determined by the CASAS listening test. RISE program partners also took care not to duplicate services being offered by resettlement agencies and designed the program to be a next step for clients after they had received initial employment support services through their resettlement agency. Additional criteria, determined by the funding stream, dictated that services be limited to one year.

The key deliverables for the Baltimore RISE program were as follows:

### Key Program Deliverables

Program Enrollments	140 clients
Vocational training completions	112 clients
Employment placements	115 clients
Full-time placements	92 clients
Full-time placements with health benefits	74 clients
Average hourly wage	\$10.50

## Vocational Training at Baltimore City Community College & MOED's Vendors

Baltimore RISE connected eligible refugees to training for jobs in high growth industries, enabling them to earn industry-recognized certifications that increased their opportunity to earn higher starting wages.

Most of the vocational training took place at BCCC, who also provided contextualized English courses alongside the content courses. The EAJC worked with BCCC to connect RISE participants to the appropriate career training at BCCC or other approved vendors.

The trainings were offered by BCCC during the first year of the Baltimore RISE program were Patient Transport, Certified Maintenance, Advanced Forklift, Warehouse Inventory Control Specialist (WICS), Introduction to Health Care Careers (IHCC) and TABE<sup>3</sup> Preparation. Trainings conducted by other MOED-approved vendors and made possible by MOED included IT courses offered through Maryland Tech Connection and Anne Arundel Workforce Development Corporation and Cyber Security, Accounting and Bookkeeping at Towson University.

## Employment Services at Eastside American Job Center (EAJC)

The EAJC was responsible for providing job readiness and job placement services for the Baltimore RISE program. These services were conducted primarily by two MOED staff members who were funded by the TAG grant and hired by MOED specifically for the Baltimore RISE program: a Career Navigator (CN) and a Business Services Representative (BSR).

In addition to having previous work experience providing educational and employment services to refugees and immigrants, both the CN and the BSR came from an immigrant background, which gave them a unique ability to connect with refugee job seekers and educate their mainstream peers at the EAJC.

Job readiness services included a Job Readiness class, resume/interview workshops, and eLearning modules, specifically PLATO, which focused on literacy and math skills.

Job placement services included access to local job postings, recruitment events (job fairs), and individualized employment case management and job development focused on helping participants obtain employment related to their training.

### Capacity Building Efforts

Higher/LIRS supported all RISE program partners by providing a national perspective on strategies and best practices for refugee employment. In addition to participating in the program design phase, Higher/LIRS's ongoing TA included developing an initial outreach strategy, facilitating customized training workshops, and providing consultation and coaching to EAJC management and staff as they worked to create a welcoming environment and provide services that would meet the unique needs of refugee and immigrant job seekers.

### Professional Development Workshops

Training workshops were a key activity and strategy utilized by Higher/LIRS during FY16 to facilitate collaboration, innovation and system adjustment for refugee stakeholders throughout Maryland and among the RISE partners. During a two day workshop for Maryland's refugee workforce service providers, prominent topics included WIOA and how to increase refugees' access to mainstream services, as well as career laddering opportunities, job readiness activities and employer engagement strategies. The staff of MOED/EAJC deepened their learning through four trainings conducted by Higher/LIRS on the following topics:

- Best practices in providing employment services to refugee job seekers
- Cross-cultural communication strategies
- Working with job seekers with limited English proficiency and utilizing telephonic interpretation resources available through MIMA

- Legal status and documentation of refugees
- Job development strategies for refugees, and
- Managing expectations of refugee job seekers

### Ongoing Technical Assistance

One of the key strategies effectively utilized by Higher/LIRS to facilitate the success of the program and support the capacity building efforts of MOED was their provision of ongoing technical assistance. From the inception of the program when the first group of refugees began to be served by MOED, Higher's support was instrumental in addressing these issues and areas of further training and adjustments at the EAJC:

- Engaging cross-cultural audiences and measuring group comprehension during service provision
- Strategizing about effective outreach to refugee communities to market services
- Developing a job readiness curriculum for refugees
- Implementing effective job development and retention strategies
- Working with Low English Proficiency (LEP) clients
- Supporting frontline staff to use the Language Line for LEP clients and addressing any confusion or hesitancy
- Advising MOED management on development of strategies to address initial challenges experienced by frontline staff, including staff uncertainty and apprehension regarding serving cross-cultural clients with varying language abilities

One activity that was utilized by Higher/LIRS to better understand the flow of services within the EAJC and build relationships with staff was a two-day period of observation and shadowing of MOED staff. Higher/LIRS then provided MOED management with a list of recommendations for technical assistance based on this observation and their interactions. Recommendations included:

- Review existing case studies highlighting models for serving refugees at AJCs, including ORR/ACF's *Models of Collaboration between Workforce Investment and Refugee Resettlement Stakeholders* and Higher's previously published *Collaboration*

Case Studies (United States Department of Health and Human Services, August 2014; Donaghey, L.; February 7, 2016)

- Provide a customized workshop for Business Service Representatives (BSRs) on 'Job Development Strategies for Refugees' to address the concern that refugees with limited English and/or computer skills are not employable
- Develop an attractive brochure that BSRs can use to market refugees to employers
- Work with Higher/LIRS to align 21st Century Job Readiness Standards developed by the Baltimore Workforce Investment Board with refugee job readiness best practices
- Take steps to make the entrance and waiting room more welcoming and inclusive for refugees and immigrants
- Interview refugee job seekers about their experience at EAJC to let them inform appropriate adjustments
- Create regular opportunities for frontline staff to interact with Higher's Workforce Engagement Coordinator about their experiences serving refugee job seekers

Higher/LIRS and MOED were able to implement two of their seven recommendations, including the development of a brochure and customized workshop on 'Job Development Strategies for Refugees' during the program year. It is the anticipation that through the recommendations presented in this paper and the existing commitment of leadership at MOED, ongoing conversations and partnerships will lead to the achievement of many of Higher/LIRS' specific recommendations.

### BALTIMORE RISE PROGRAM OUTCOMES

In its pilot year, the Baltimore RISE program succeeded in enrolling 142 participants. While the program exceeded its enrollment goal by two clients, it struggled to accomplish its vocational training completion and employment placement goals. At the close of FY 16, the program had connected 117 refugees to vocational training, 75 of which successfully graduated, representing a 37-person shortfall of its goal of 112 graduations. As for employment, 53 participants obtained employment during FY 16, a 62-person shortfall of the target goal of 115 employment placements.

The reasons for this shortfall began with a two-month delay in program start-up due to the late hiring and onboarding of RISE staff. Training programs did not then begin until January 2016 due to this late start and the logistics required for BCCC to design and administer courses. Subsequently, the first graduates of the training programs were not ready for employment placement until the spring of 2016. In addition to these programmatic details, there was a significant learning curve for MIMA, BCCC and Higher/LIRS, who were unfamiliar with mainstream workforce systems, to learn the processes and procedures of an American Job Center and for MOED staff to advance their understanding of refugee populations and refugee employment best practices.

Even with these challenges, there were several positive indicators of future program success:

- The higher than expected number of enrollments demonstrates that the need and interest exists within the refugee community for this type of program.
- Within the limited time frame for employment placements, 53 participants entered employment and approximately 94% entered full-time employment. Approximately 87% were eligible for health benefits through their employer.
- Average wages for those entering employment was \$11.47 per hour, \$0.97 higher than the pre-established target of \$10.50 per hour.
- All program participants who graduated from training programs earned an industry-recognized certification, which is one of the best ways to increase initial wages or get a raise.

To see more detailed tables of the program's vocational training and employment goals and accomplishments, please refer to Appendix A and B.

### Success Stories

Beyond metrics, there is no doubt that the Baltimore RISE program made a positive impact on the upward mobility of many of its participants. Below are three examples using pseudonyms to protect client privacy.

**Burundian refugee increases hourly wage from \$9 per hour to more than \$13 per hour by obtaining forklift license.** Originally from Burundi, Claude completed high school and had started college before fleeing his country as a refugee. He arrived in Baltimore in June 2015, and

found employment at a warehouse, where he made \$9 per hour. Claude kept this job for almost one year and a half before enrolling in the Baltimore RISE program with the hopes of receiving training that would increase his income, allowing him to better provide for his family. He enrolled in Advanced Forklift training, where he received 22 hours of training (10 hours of contextualized ESL at BCCC and 12 hours of safety instruction and driving practice). Claude was an excellent driver and worked closely with MOED's BSR to find employment as a Forklift Operator at a distribution center in Aberdeen, MD where he now works full time making \$13.05 per hour.

**After working several temporary and part-time jobs, Eritrean refugee finally finds full-time employment after completing Certified Maintenance Employee Training.** Aklilu arrived in the US in August 2012 as a refugee from Eritrea. He has worked many jobs, ranging from part-time security officer positions, to temporary warehouse work, and part-time driving jobs. He enrolled in the Baltimore RISE program with the hope that the training would lead to a full-time job, as the security officer job he had was only part-time with no opportunity to transition to full-time. Aklilu enrolled in the Certified Maintenance Employee training and received the American Hotel and Lodging Educational Institute's Certified Maintenance Employee certificate. He is now working full time in Maintenance at a renowned hotel making \$12.00 per hour.

**Former Nurse from the DRC re-enters her field as a CNA/GNA.** Sarah, a former Nurse from the Democratic Republic of Congo completed the Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) training at BCCC in FY15, receiving her CNA license, but she did not pass the Geriatric Nursing Assistant (GNA) exam. In FY16, Sarah enrolled in the Baltimore RISE program, re-took the GNA exam and passed. She is now working full-time as a GNA at a post-acute care center making \$11.50 per hour.

### Improved Access for Refugees and Immigrants at Eastside American Job Center

In addition to the training and job placement services offered through the Baltimore RISE program at the EAJC, the center also made significant strides in improving general access to services for refugee and immigrant job seekers:

- EAJC and other MOED leadership and staff now have a basic level of competency regarding refugee populations—who they are, where they are coming from, what legal statuses/documentation they possess, and how to begin providing customer-

centered service for this population throughout Baltimore's local workforce development area.

- EAJC staff is now more prepared to interact with job seekers who do not speak English fluently. Staff received training and resource materials on using telephonic interpretation services available for free in Baltimore through MIMA.
- EAJC staff and organizations, such as the International Rescue Committee and World Relief, have begun building collaborative relationships based on increased mutual understanding.
- EAJC Career Navigators and Business Service Representatives gained experience and confidence in serving refugees, in part through providing services to some refugee job seekers who did not qualify for the RISE program and were added to their caseloads.
- Refugee and immigrant job seekers are now eligible for dislocated worker status, which allows them to access previously unavailable training resources. This came about through RISE project partners engaging with the State of Maryland's Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation (DLLR) to clarify that the country where the dislocation occurred is not an eligibility consideration.

### ONGOING CHALLENGES

The Baltimore RISE program was a concerted effort by diverse workforce development stakeholders to forge new career pathways for refugees and immigrants. The program created an unprecedented opportunity for increased collaboration and improved access to mainstream workforce development resources, resulting in greater economic well-being for refugees and immigrants in Baltimore. That being said, significant barriers to refugee and immigrant access to mainstream workforce development resources remain:

- **A lack of awareness of local workforce development resources on the part of refugee and immigrant serving organizations.** Many refugee resettlement agencies or immigrant serving organizations only operate within the non-profit services sphere and are not aware of the resources that are available for their clients within the mainstream workforce development system or how to go about forging the relationships and partnerships needed to access these resources.

- **A lack of trust and confidence in mainstream workforce services on the part of refugee and immigrant service organizations or on the part of refugees or immigrants themselves.** Some organizations and individuals who are aware of mainstream workforce development resources have had challenging experiences accessing the agency's self-service programs, compounded by the staff's limited cultural competence. As a result, clients may not come back and the agency may then experience challenges in reaching this population due to the importance of trust and word of mouth in many underserved communities, especially refugee and immigrant communities.
  - **The largely self-service approach of most AJCs is a hindrance to refugees and immigrants and refugees' ability to access services.** A vast amount of tools and resources are provided for job seekers within the mainstream workforce development system, but job seekers are often expected to fill out a lot of paperwork, use online job search systems, take computer assessments, and attend job fairs in order to market themselves to employers. For the majority of job seekers, these self-service elements are used as a screen to determine level of commitment and to improve the efficiency of AJCs by empowering job seekers to do what they can for themselves. Many refugees and immigrants, however, simply do not have the ability to guide themselves through the process. Most often this is due to a lack of familiarity with U.S. norms for accessing public benefits and services or lack of English and/or computer literacy. This is not an indication of a lack of motivation, but rather the reality of the linguistic and culture limitations of many refugees and immigrants.
  - **Many AJC frontline staff have limited experience communicating with cross-cultural clients.** Many mainstream workforce development staff have limited experience interacting with and providing services to job seekers from other cultures who may have limited English skills. Because of this lack of familiarity and experience, many staff are initially unsure about how to serve these populations. The limited experience can cause apprehension among AJC staff as they attempt to serve refugees and immigrants, especially those with limited English proficiency (LEP) who may require the use of an interpreter.
  - **Many AJC Business Service Representatives (BSRs) have not had the opportunity to receive training in providing employment services to refugees/immigrants and are not familiar with strategies for marketing these populations to employers.** When refugees and immigrants, who are in the midst of adjusting to a new culture and learning a new language, are added to the general caseloads of AJC staff, they will very rarely look like the most competitive candidates for any given job, and therefore may be on the unemployed case load list for extended amounts of time. This creates a frustrating situation for AJC staff who are unsure if these candidates are truly employable and for the refugee/immigrant job seekers who, in most cases, desperately need a job. Additionally, the typical model used by most AJCs for marketing and connecting job seekers to employers (providing employers with a general packet of information regarding AJC services and scheduling "recruitment job fairs") does not build awareness among employers of the value that refugees and immigrants bring or address the unique needs of refugee and immigrant job seekers.
  - **English language literacy and test-taking skills are a significant barrier for refugees and immigrants to successfully access mainstream workforce resources.** Careful calibration of the level of English required for RISE program eligibility was verified with a CASAS<sup>4</sup> test. The selected level was enough to navigate service processes and program meetings. However, in many cases, it was not enough to pass the TABE<sup>5</sup> test at the specified level to qualify for many certificate-based training programs. An unanticipated TABE preparation course was added to the RISE curriculum. This type of bridge or on-ramp training, in addition to concurrent tutoring to reinforce what is being learned in the vocational courses, is often required for refugees and immigrants to successfully achieve career pathway progression.
- These challenges are significant, but are certainly not insurmountable if there is a commitment on the part of local workforce development areas to do whatever is necessary to ensure that refugees and immigrants have the same access to workforce development resources and services as all native-born job seekers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Baltimore RISE partners have identified several recommendations for local areas seeking to improve workforce development opportunities for refugees and immigrants. These recommendations were informed by the observations of Baltimore RISE partners during the pilot year of the Baltimore RISE program, the refugee employment-specific expertise of Higher/LIRS, and by additional technical expertise provided by Amanda Bergson-Shilcock, Senior Policy Analyst at the National Skills Coalition (A. Bergson-Shilcock, personal communication, July 14, 2016).<sup>6</sup>

### Overarching Framework

- Collaboration, multi-sector partnerships and regional strategies that address the needs of refugees and immigrants and other communities with employment barriers have the ability to change the trajectory of many underserved and vulnerable communities. Local government, workforce development areas, educational institutions and non-profits need to better address these needs through informal partnership and/or collaboration catalyzed by grant funding.
- Innovative and responsive programs need to prioritize and allocate funding and time for gathering input from the immigrant community and ethnic community leaders, in addition to refugee and immigrant-serving organizations, to ensure community buy-in and the appropriate programmatic goals, partners and resources are in place.
- The cohesiveness of the program's partners and team members is a significant factor in determining the overall success of the program. Administrators should facilitate the development of the team by allocating time and resources to understand each team's professional culture, procedures and norms and then determine collective expectations and norms.
- Engaging government officials at all levels can determine your program and jurisdiction's connection to guidance and resources and additionally facilitate access to vital technical assistance, partnerships or publicity in the future. For example, Maryland's Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulations (DLLR) was instrumental in clarifying procedural guidance confirming that refugees could qualify for WIOA

dislocated worker funded opportunities. MIMA, through their involvement in Welcoming America's [Welcoming Cities and Counties](#) program and the [Networks for Integrating New Americans Initiative](#), funded by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education, was able to access the technical assistance of the State of Idaho and [Global Talent Idaho](#), providing DLLR with a precedent to factor into their own revisions (Kallenbach, S. and Nash, A, 2016, p. 24).

### Recommendations for local government and workforce areas

- Fund pilot programs or subcontract with non-profit partners specializing in serving individuals with employment barriers, including refugees and immigrants who in many cases fit WIOA's "priority of service" criteria of being a "low-income individual" and/or being "basic skills deficient." Additionally, ensure the competitive award process is inclusive of education and workforce development providers serving diverse populations. (Cielinski, A. and Socolow, D., April 2015)

### CASE STUDIES

For examples of refugee and immigrant-serving organizations who effectively lobbied for and received Title 1 funding from their workforce development area, see the [the Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians](#) in Philadelphia, PA and [Neighborhood Centers](#) in Houston, TX. Look at the [Lancaster County Refugee Coalition](#) in Pennsylvania for how they have partnered with their AJC and local workforce board to adjust services for refugees and immigrants.

- Partner with technical assistance providers to provide the necessary supports for improving workforce systems for refugees and immigrants, including experts within refugee and immigrant workforce development, and implementing organizational change in a highly bureaucratic and regulated system.

- Consider alternatives to the TABE test, such as CASAS, to mitigate the cultural barriers imposed by the TABE test on refugee and immigrant clients. If TABE testing is mandated by the state, provide TABE preparation courses to help refugees and immigrants access trainings.
- Better use data and existing networks to analyze assets, gaps, funding and partnership opportunities to improve services for refugees and immigrants and engage with the community about input and successes. This analysis could be a system-wide SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis. A “community dashboard” could also be an effective way to close the feedback loop and further engage the community about progress.
- Assess what unique adult education and career pathways programs can be developed for refugees and immigrants, as well as what adjustments are required so that refugees and immigrants can take advantage of existing programs, including Pre-Apprenticeships, Registered Apprenticeships, On-the-job Training and short-term certification programs.
- Engage and support appropriate state offices in efforts to remove unnecessary barriers for career relicensing for high skilled refugees, such as those with backgrounds in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) professions.

Did you know that in 2014, the ratio of STEM job openings to unemployed STEM workers in Maryland was 10.1 to 1? During that same year, immigrants represented 24.4 percent of all STEM workers in the state despite representing 14.8 percent of the total population. More remains to be done to retain foreign-born U.S. educated STEM workers and facilitate advanced-level retraining and credentialing as everytime a state retains 100 foreign-born U.S. educated STEM workers, 262 more jobs are created for U.S. born workers in the following seven years ([Partnership for a New American Economy, 2016](#)).

### Recommendations for AJCs

- Consistent with the aforementioned case studies, AJCs should seriously consider specific strategies to provide specialized services to refugees and immigrants including forming population-specific units within the AJC, embedding community partners within the AJC, and/or contracting with off-site community organizations to provide specialized services to these populations.

#### Read a [case study about co-location in Arlington, Virginia from Higher.](#)

<http://www.higheradvantage.org/workforce-collaboration-case-study-ccmrs/>

- To abide by the standards of WIOA, AJCs will need to implement supportive structures to compensate for barriers related to language, literacy, lack of computer skills, and lack of familiarity with navigating available social services in order to provide equitable access to these populations. Recommendations include, but are not limited to:
  - o Develop, implement and monitor the effectiveness of an agency-wide language access plan in providing language access resources to Low English Proficiency (LEP) clients. Baltimore City’s language access program provides an example of a model for beginning the process of implementing such a plan. Providing one-on-one assistance (with interpretation if necessary) should become standard practice to ensure equal access. This is especially true during intake and assessment and whenever computer-based resources are involved.
  - o It is important that AJC staff understand that refugees and immigrants are new to the US and likely will need additional guidance in navigating the AJC system and developing realistic expectations for the outcomes of their participation. They will need clear information (translated in writing or interpreted in person) about what specific assistance to expect, which staff members are assigned to work with them, what training or job search assistance is available and what choices are required of them, and what typical timelines look like from enrollment to employment.

- As the U.S. continues to become increasingly diverse and the definition within WIOA for priority of service includes many refugees and immigrants, AJCs must invest in training and technical assistance to equip staff with the knowledge and resources they need to serve clients from diverse backgrounds. The list of workshops provided by Higher/LIRS for MOED on page 4 are a good starting point.
- Further leverage the proven methods of the Consultative Selling<sup>7</sup> approach to job development, currently used by many AJC staff to secure employment for other populations with barriers as well as refugee and immigrant professionals across the country, to implement standard processes and procedures for BSRs to market refugees and immigrants to employers.
- AJCs should conduct outreach to WIOA “priority of service” populations, including refugees and immigrants, in order to ensure that a simple lack of awareness does not become a barrier to providing services to those that need them most.

### Recommendations for Community Colleges or Vocational Training Vendors

- Vocational training programs designed for refugees and immigrants should be chosen carefully to adequately balance the the career and economic goals of the population with the needs and realities of local employers.
- Contextualized English courses, TABE/CASAS preparation courses, and other forms of “bridge” courses should be provided alongside content courses in order to facilitate the population’s access to career-ladder opportunities and trainings and support their retention.

For an in-depth, independent report on the first 18 months of New York and Mayor de Blasio’s sweeping new workforce strategy, Career Pathways and 12 strategies for addressing the challenges of a complicated funding landscape, making effective referrals and building capacity, see the Center for an Urban Future’s July 2016 report: [Building the Workforce of the Future](#).

- Provide additional support and tutoring for students who continue to struggle with English, literacy, and test-taking skills, despite meeting the initial English/literacy standards. Of the 14 students who failed to graduate with an industry certification from the vocational training courses, seven or 50%, failed because they did not successfully pass final certification exams. In some cases, these students failed multiple times.
- Assess the barriers (including examples such as financial challenges, work schedules, transportation and childcare) of the community when creating vocational training programs and develop partnerships and resources to ensure clients have all the necessary resources available to complete the course.

### Recommendations for Refugee and Immigrant Serving Organizations

- To supplement federal resources dedicated to early employment for refugees and promote the long-term success of their clients, refugee resettlement agencies should cultivate partnerships with local workforce development areas, AJCS, community colleges and other vocational training providers and solidify opportunities to target funding together.
- Become familiar with WIOA and the opportunities for any targeted populations. Refugee youth are a particularly good fit for WIOA-funded youth programs WIOA requires a minimum of 75 percent of State and Local youth funding to be used for out-of-school youth (ages 16-24), and also provides services for in-school youth

(ages 14-21). A high percentage of newly arrived refugees are between the age 16-24, and many lack a high school diploma. Refugee youth who are in school would also qualify for certain programs as many are low-income and English language learners (U.S. Department of Labor, and Training Administration, n.d.)

- Track and summarize local, regional and statewide data about the demographics, backgrounds and needs of skilled refugees to present to local workforce development areas and state government and promote system adjustments and additional programs that meet the needs of this typically “underemployed” population. By receiving a “Made in America” credential, higher skilled refugees will be able to re-enter their previous field of expertise or capitalize on their high levels of English to obtain training in a new career and progress down the path to economic self-sufficiency (Bergson-Shilcock, A. and Witte, J., 2015).
- Advocate to your elected officials for occupational licensing reforms, such as the bill in Minnesota that addresses barriers to practice and supports pathways to licensure for refugee and immigrant physicians and funds a collaborative urban educator program to recruit, retain and certify refugee and immigrant teachers. (Minnesota Department of Health, 2016).
- Consistent with an emerging best practice around the country, assign a staff member or volunteer to serve as a liaison between the refugee/immigrant program and mainstream workforce development partners in order to learn the system and cultivate strategic relationships. Be willing to learn the language and culture of the mainstream system, understand the barriers and challenges facing the system, leaders and frontline staff and develop a few collective, achievable and measurable goals to measure your efforts and successes.

## CONCLUSION

There is growing recognition that refugees and immigrants are an asset to our communities and our economy, and that creating opportunities for these new Americans is an investment that brings huge returns. With the increased emphasis within WIOA on populations with employment barriers, such as those with limited English proficiency and cultural barriers, a renewed focus on job training programs such as apprenticeships, and a commitment from local governments to integrate foreign born populations, the time is right to engage local workforce development partners in collaborative efforts that will lead to increased economic opportunity for refugees and immigrants.

As the Baltimore RISE program illustrates, intentional collaboration among local government and workforce development stakeholders, refugee and immigrant advocates, and educational institutions is the platform to ensuring that refugees and immigrants can access the training and employment opportunities to which they aspire.

## ENDNOTES

- 1] For the purpose of this paper, the term refugees to refer to all populations eligible for refugee benefits, including employment services. These populations include: Asylees, Cuban/Haitian entrants, Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders, Amerasians, and victims of human trafficking. For more information, see Office of Refugee Resettlement's definition of eligible populations. Retrieved from: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/office-of-refugee-resettlement>.
- 2] Known locally as the Eastside Career One-Stop Center.
- 3] TABE tests are widely utilized throughout the mainstream workforce system to measure English language proficiency. Minimum scores are a prerequisite for eligibility for certificate training programs. The tests present cultural assumption barriers and are widely criticized by immigrant serving agencies, but adult education and workforce providers are concerned that no similar test can offer them the assurance needed that the client is adequately prepared and equipped for the course.
- 4] For more information on the CASAS test, see <https://www.casas.org/product-overviews/assessments>
- 5] For more information on the TABE test, see <http://www/ctb/com/ctb.com/control/productFamilyViewAction?productFamilyId=608&p=products>
- 6] For resources produced by the National Skills Coalition, see WIOA 101: What Community-Based Organizations Need to Know about the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act at <http://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/WIOA-101-workshop-for-NCLR-May-2016-FINAL.pdf> and Realizing Innovation and Opportunity in WIOA: A Playbook for Creating Effective State Plans at <http://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/webinars/realizing-innovation-and-opportunity-in-wioa-a-playbook-for-creating-effective-state-plans>
- 7] Businessdictionary.com defines Consultative Selling as "Personal selling in which a salesperson plays the role of a consultant. He or she first assists the buyer in identifying his or her needs, and then suggesting products that satisfy those needs." Retrieved from <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/consultative-selling.html>.

ANNEX I  
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APPENDIX A:  
VOCATIONAL TRAINING OUTCOMES

Training Course	Provider	Enrollments	Completions	Industry Certifications
Patient Transport	BCCC	10	10	Blood borne/Airborne Pathogens; CPR
Advanced Forklift (2 courses)	BCCC	35	29	OSHA Safety Forklift License; Advanced Forklift Certificate
Certified Maintenance Employee (CME)	BCCC	18	12	CME Certificate from the American Hotel & Lodging Educ. Institute
Warehouse Inventory Control Specialist	BCCC	11	8	OSHA Safety Forklift License
Introduction to Healthcare Careers	BCCC	13	11	CPR; First Aid; Blood borne/Airborne Pathogens
Accounting and Bookkeeping*	Towson University	5	5	N/A
Cyber Security*	Towson University	5	0**	A+ Certificate, Network + Certification, and Security +
Medical Coding and Billing*	Towson University	2	0**	AHIMA exams
Information Technology*	MTC /Anne Arundel Workforce	9	0**	Depends on training enrollment
Total Enrollments & Completions		117	75	

**Notes:** \*The partnership with MOED facilitated access to these trainings. \*\*Completion numbers not available at close of FY16 as courses were still in progress. Also, 23 students completed a TABE preparation course at BCCC and 24-accessed computer-based reading and math training in the PLATO computer lab at the EAJC.

APPENDIX B:  
EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

Employment Deliverable	Target	Achieved as of 9/30/16
Employment Caseload	140	142
Individuals Enter Employment	115	53 (46%)
Full-time	92 (80%)	50 (54%)
Part-time	23 (20%)	3 (13%)
90 Day Retention	98 (85%)	31/53 (58%)
Average Hourly Wage	\$10.50	\$11.47
Health Benefits (FT only)	74 (80%)	46 (62%)

## APPENDIX C RESOURCES FOR CONTINUED LEARNING

### Customer-Centered Design for Workforce Systems

- Institute of Design at Stanford's *An Introduction to Design Thinking PROCESS GUIDE*.
- Workforce GPS Innovation and Opportunity Network Community of Practice's resource "[Customer Centered Service Delivery Design Initiative](#)."
- Pennsylvania Workforce Development Association's [Recognition for their Customer-Centered Design Efforts by the United States Department of Labor](#).

### Data on Economy, Workforce and Immigrants

- Urban Institute's report "[Immigration and the Changing Landscape for Local Service Delivery](#)."
- The Pew Charitable Trusts' data visualization "[Immigrant Employment by State and Industry](#)."
- New American Economy's series of reports, searchable by state, "[The Contributions of New Americans](#)."
- American Immigration Council's series of fact sheets, searchable by state, "[New Americans](#)."
- The Migration Policy Institute's series of fact sheets, searchable by state, "[Immigrants and WIOA Services: Comparison of Sociodemographic Characteristics of Native-and Foreign-Born Adults in the United State](#)."

### Models of Collaboration in Workforce

- ORR/ACF's report *Models of Collaboration between Workforce Investment and Refugee resettlement Stakeholders*.
- Higher's "[Workforce Collaboration Case Study](#)." blog series
- World Education's report *Workforce Collaborations Build a System of Supports for Immigrants*.
- The Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians' report *Shared Prosperity: How the Integration of Immigrant Workers Creates Economic Benefit for All Pennsylvanians*.
- Institute for Work & the Economy report *Don't Forget the Ones Left Behind: How Career Centers Can Better Serve Job Seekers Lacking in Basic Skills and High School Credentials*.

### Immigrants and Workforce Development

- Center for an Urban Future's report *A City of Immigrant Workers: Building a Workforce Strategy to Support all New Yorkers*.
- National Skills Coalition's report *Upskilling the New American Workforce*.
- Higher's "[Workforce Resource](#)." blog series
- Urban Institute's report *Engaging Employers in Immigrant Integration*.
- Imprint's report *Steps to Success: Integrating Immigrant Professionals in the United States*.



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