



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
Office of the Commissioner


Danny TK Avula MD, MPH
Commissioner

March 29, 2024

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable Glenn Youngkin
Governor of Virginia

Members, Virginia General Assembly

FROM: Danny TK Avula MD, MPH 

SUBJECT: Annual Report on Office of New Americans

This report is submitted in compliance Item 340.F. of the 2023 Appropriation Act, which states:

F. The Department of Social Services shall provide an annual report on the activities of the Office of New Americans by December 1 of each year.

Please contact me should you have questions at (804) 726-7011.

DA:kc
Attachment

cc: The Honorable John Littell, Secretary of Health and Human Resources

Virginia Department of Social Services

Report on the Activities of the Office of New Americans 2023

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Virginia Department of Social Services
Report on Office of New Americans
2023

Executive Summary

The Office of New Americans (ONA), which consists of two program divisions (Immigrant Services and Refugee Services), was created under § 63.2-209.1 in 2020 as an office within the Department of Social Services (DSS). The ONA incorporated the existing Office of Newcomer Services into a new office specifically to assist immigrant integration within the Commonwealth on an economic, social and cultural level.

Under the authorizing code, the Office shall:

1. Implement a statewide strategy to promote the economic, linguistic, and civic integration of new Americans in the Commonwealth.
2. Work with localities to coordinate and support local efforts that align with the statewide strategy to promote the economic, linguistic, and civic integration of new Americans in the Commonwealth
3. Provide advice and assistance to new Americans regarding (i) the citizenship application process and (ii) securing employment, housing, and services for which such persons may be eligible
4. Provide advice and assistance to state agencies regarding (i) the coordination of relevant policies across state agencies responsible for education, workforce, and training programs, including professional licensure guidance, small business development, worker protection, refugee resettlement, citizenship and voter education or engagement programs, housing programs, and other related programs, and (ii) the dissemination of information to localities and immigration service organizations regarding state programs that help new Americans find and secure employment, housing, and services for which they may be eligible;
5. Educate localities and immigration service organizations on health epidemics and unlawful predatory actions, such as human trafficking, gang recruitment, and fraudulent financial and other schemes, to which communities of such persons may be especially vulnerable
6. Serve as the primary liaison with external stakeholders, particularly immigrant-serving and refugee serving organizations and businesses, on immigrant integration priorities and policies.
7. Partner with state agencies and immigrant-serving and refugee-serving organizations and businesses to identify and disseminate beneficial immigrant integration policies and practices throughout the Commonwealth
8. Manage competitive grant programs that replicate beneficial practices or test new innovations that improve the effectiveness and efficacy of immigrant integration strategies; and
9. Advise the Governor, cabinet members, and the General Assembly on strategies to improve state programs to support the economic, linguistic, and civic integration of new Americans throughout the Commonwealth.

Item 340.F. of the 2022 Appropriation Act establishes the following reporting mandate for the Department of Social Services:

F. The Department of Social Services shall provide an annual report on the activities of the Office of New Americans by December 1 of each year.

Major activities and outcomes achieved during this report period include:

- As part of a statewide strategy to promote economic, linguistic and civic integration of new Americans, the ONA is developing a strategic plan that builds on previous research regarding the needs and barriers new Americans experience when trying to integrate. This research rendered visible gaps in services and areas of Virginia without service providers and formed a foundation that ONA used to create six resource handbooks to connect people with organizations and promote integration across the Commonwealth.
- The ONA conducted extensive outreach into new American communities, in the form of health and resource fairs, educational trainings, cultural events, as well as administration of programs specifically serving youth and older refugees. This has involved working with localities across the state and creating networks of stakeholders that come together to solve problems and develop solutions.
- The ONA refugee programs have funded citizenship classes, vocational training, job placement services, and other civics training to thousands of new Americans through grants to resettlement agencies. ONA works with a coalition of nationwide groups to create career pathways guides and employment tools to help immigrants get training and certification, especially in needed fields such as education, mental health, and healthcare fields.
- The ONA has worked with various state agencies, including the departments of Education (DOE), Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS), Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), and Health (VDH) to assess needs in the immigrant and refugee communities, ensure that refugee youth's needs are met, collect and disseminate information among immigrant communities, and devise ways to help pave pathways for licensing and employment training. ONA assisted DBHDS share an opportunity for community-based organizations serving new Americans to connect with their local community services boards to receive free translation for any written materials they needed translated into other languages.
- ONA helped organize and coordinate resource fairs and other events around the Commonwealth attended by local organizations and individuals and participates in a number of state and local coalitions, including participating in the equity committee of the STRONG Accountable Care Community's equity committee. The purpose of these events is to educate and connect community-based organizations and immigrants to resources and highlight the resource handbooks referenced above. Positioning itself as the primary liaison with stakeholders in immigrant and refugee policy in Virginia, ONA created a clearinghouse in which all service providers will have the ability to keep their own listings current, find other providers, and in which individuals will be able to look for providers in their area. Additionally, the ONA created networks of stakeholders, including the

regionally-held Virginia Community Capacity Initiative as well as other informal networks who come together to discuss topics, raise issues, and solve problems that affect their work and the integration of immigrants in Virginia.

- Partnerships ONA developed with state agencies, as well as immigrant and refugee serving organizations have strengthened the office's role as subject-matter experts on policy and practice in Virginia. The state-wide needs assessment study completed in 2022 provided needed data on unmet needs, and the office has begun designing programs to meet those needs. For example, through a partnership with DBHDS in a federal grant application to provide needed mental health services to Afghan veterans and in developing regional conferences to promote trauma and prevention on mental health and language access for refugees and immigrants. ONA also works to educate and liaise with local departments of social services to ensure that refugees receive benefits they are eligible for, and shares policy guidance resources with other agencies to ensure the even flow of information about eligibility for New Americans.
- ONA continues to administer competitive grants for federal funds to agencies who provide innovative and effective refugee services. With more capacity, ONA will look forward to managing further competitive grants for non-refugee immigrant serving organizations.

The accomplishments and activities of the ONA have promoted the linguistic, civic, and economic integration of immigrant and refugee populations in the Commonwealth. This has been done in the last year against a backdrop of unprecedented arrivals of Afghan and Ukrainian newcomers, as well as in the context of a newly expanded office with minimal capacity on the Immigrant Services team. In partnership with stakeholders state-wide, including resettlement agencies, service providers, organizations large and small, university researchers, and immigrant communities themselves, we have built capacity, conducted outreach, education and research, provided direct services, administered federal funds, and promoted integration for new Americans across Virginia.

Virginia Department of Social Services
Report on Office of New Americans
2023

Powers and Duties

Article 1 (§ 63.2-209.1) of Chapter 2 of Title 63.2 establishes the Office of New Americans within the Department of Social Services and directs the Office to carry out the following responsibilities:

- 1. Implement a statewide strategy to promote the economic, linguistic, and civic integration of new Americans in the Commonwealth.*
- 2. Work with localities to coordinate and support local efforts that align with the statewide strategy to promote the economic, linguistic, and civic integration of new Americans in the Commonwealth*
- 3. Provide advice and assistance to new Americans regarding (i) the citizenship application process and (ii) securing employment, housing, and services for which such persons may be eligible*
- 4. Provide advice and assistance to state agencies regarding (i) the coordination of relevant policies across state agencies responsible for education, workforce, and training programs, including professional licensure guidance, small business development, worker protection, refugee resettlement, citizenship and voter education or engagement programs, housing programs, and other related programs, and (ii) the dissemination of information to localities and immigration service organizations regarding state programs that help new Americans find and secure employment, housing, and services for which they may be eligible;*
- 5. Educate localities and immigration service organizations on health epidemics and unlawful predatory actions, such as human trafficking, gang recruitment, and fraudulent financial and other schemes, to which communities of such persons may be especially vulnerable*
- 6. Serve as the primary liaison with external stakeholders, particularly immigrant-serving and refugee serving organizations and businesses, on immigrant integration priorities and policies.*
- 7. Partner with state agencies and immigrant-serving and refugee-serving organizations and businesses to identify and disseminate beneficial immigrant integration policies and practices throughout the Commonwealth*
- 8. Manage competitive grant programs that replicate beneficial practices or test new innovations that improve the effectiveness and efficacy of immigrant integration strategies*
- 9. Advise the Governor, cabinet members, and the General Assembly on strategies to improve state programs to support the economic, linguistic, and civic integration of new Americans throughout the Commonwealth*

Report Mandate

Item 340.F. of the 2022 Appropriation Act establishes the following duty of the Department of Social Services:

F. The Department of Social Services shall provide an annual report on the activities of the Office of New Americans by December 1 of each year.

Activities and Outcomes

The following details the activities and outcomes for each of the mandates of the Office.

Implement a statewide strategy to promote the economic, linguistic, and civic integration of New Americans in the Commonwealth.

ONA continues to develop and implement a strategic plan with targeted outcomes to promote integration of new Americans including:

- Partnering with secretariats, state agencies, and state policy leaders to identify beneficial integration policies and practices.
- Providing advice and assistance regarding the coordination of relevant policies across state agencies responsible for education, workforce, and training programs, including professional licensure guidance, small business development, worker protection, refugee resettlement, citizenship and voter education or engagement programs, housing nutrition and health programs, and other related programs for which new Americans may be eligible.
- Created and published resource handbooks in English and Spanish showing local health, education, economic, legal, and other resources available in the Commonwealth and categorized by region.
- Assessing barriers to integration and assessing needs of immigrant communities, as well as gaps in services.
- Production of a written report as well as a web-based mapping tool that provides information on Virginia's immigrant population as well as services available.
- Working with Virginia's 2-1-1 information system to develop ways of making that service more accessible for speakers of other languages, and of taking account of what providers within the 2-1-1 system offer services in languages other than English.

Work with localities to coordinate and support local efforts that align with the statewide strategy to promote the economic, linguistic, and civic integration of New Americans in the Commonwealth

- ONA conducted outreach in localities and with community based organizations and service providers large and small to build bridges between community leaders and organizations serving immigrants and refugees by sharing information about resources, educational webinars, trainings, conferences, and events daily through email, phone and other channels of communication relevant information with state and local agencies, schools, and

community based organizations and non-profit organizations serving immigrants and refugees.

- ONA continues to organize community health fairs and resource fairs which allowed immigrants and service providers to meet and support one another, as well as receive vital services such as health, legal support, and other services. ONA not only connects individuals to organizations that can help them, but we also work to connect community-based organizations to funding and resources that allow them to better serve new Americans. For example, we connected over 30 community-based organizations to VDBH to have their written materials and resources translated for free. In addition to this funding opportunity, the ONA shared information with organizations across the Commonwealth about the Citizenship and Integration Grant Program and Community and Regional Integration Network Grant (CARING) and we assist organizations who are interested in applying for these funds.
- ONA has also supported cultural activities in immigrant and refugee communities in order to celebrate the diversity of Virginia's new Americans.
- ONA has acted as an advisor for several organizations and community groups which work with immigrants to support inclusive practices and embedded approaches. The Office has also developed spaces to educate service providers and community members about cultural diversity and competency, in order to promote a welcoming environment. ONA partners with the community-based organizations to conduct virtual training on trauma informed approaches to service provision.
- Through the Virginia Refugee Student Achievement Project (VRSAP), twenty-one (21) School Liaisons across the Commonwealth provided essential support to 1,286 newly arrived, refugee-eligible children and their families as they navigated the United States education system. New school enrollments in FY23 included 701 elementary aged youth (K-5), 227 middle school youth (285), 246 high school youth (9-12) and 14 youth pursuing a GED. Fifty-six youth had not yet been assigned to a grade by the end of the Fiscal Year. School Liaisons worked closely with local school districts to encourage collaboration and capacity development for school staff and systems, including training, language access support and resource provision. School Liaisons also facilitated partnerships between community stakeholders to ensure that youth had access to the necessary supplies, technology access and tutoring and mentoring support needed to succeed in school. School Liaisons connected families to early childhood education opportunities such as Head Start and Virginia Preschool Initiative to ensure that young refugee children had access to education programs in their communities. ONA is in the process of initiating an informal partnership with Virginia's Ready Regions program to support resettlement agencies as they explore coordinated enrollment options for the state's youngest new arrivals.

- Through the Mentoring Youth in Virginia (MYVA) program, 126 youth between the ages of 15-24 were matched with trained mentors for 6 months to one year in order to work toward educational, vocational and social goals. The MYVA program promotes positive civic and social engagement for eligible youth, ensuring that youth are both valued members of and contributors to their communities. In FY23, MYVA enrollees performed community service in their local communities and continue to find ways to give back through civic and social engagement opportunities.
- In Federal Fiscal Year 2023, Virginia's Unaccompanied Refugee Minor (URM) Program provided culturally sensitive, therapeutic foster care and placement services to 71 unaccompanied refugee minors and other eligible populations of unaccompanied youth in the United States. The URM program operated in two locations in Virginia: Richmond through Commonwealth Catholic Charities and Fairfax through Lutheran Social Services. Youth receiving support through the program ranged in age from 9 to 25 years old and included six Afghan Humanitarian Parolee youth who arrived in the US as a result of the federal Operation Allies Welcome initiative. Operating in Fairfax, Virginia through Lutheran Social Services and Richmond, Virginia through Commonwealth Catholic Charities, the URM program operated in parity with the state foster care program and was subject to state licensing requirements.
- ONA is actively working to manage the planning and procurement process for the Afghan Refugee School Impact Support to Schools (ARSI S2S) initiative. Funding will support schools serving newly arrived eligible Afghan youth. ONA is in frequent communication with the statewide Title III Coordinator at the Virginia Department of Education and has surveyed six resettlement agencies regarding youth needs statewide. Similar to resettlement agencies implementing VRSAP, schools will be encouraged to prioritize summer and after-school learning, the hiring of family liaisons and multilingual paraprofessionals, and parent engagement.
- Through the Refugee Health Education and Outreach Program (RHEO) 6,266 refugees received services which included Health Orientations, Medical Case Management Services, Mental Health Orientation referrals and Refugee Health Screenings (RHS-15).
- Clients attended various workshops which assisting them in learning about the United States Health Care system and were enrolled into Medicaid.
- The Office of New Americans continues to work with various Resettlement Agencies within the Commonwealth of Virginia in partnership with local departments of social services to ensure that the clients receive the necessary resources and coverage including Medicaid and dental coverage to maintain health and wellness.
- Through the Services to Older Refugees Program (SOR), the ONA ensures that refugees aged 60 and older have access to applicable services for the aging and to provide qualifying refugees with appropriate services not currently available in the community. Refugees aged 60 and above who have been in the United States for up to 5 years are eligible for all program services. Referral services, interpreter services, citizenship and naturalization preparation services for these refugees are available beyond the five-year mark. Services to Older Refugees provides agency funding to establish and expand relationships with state and local agencies to ensure that older refugees have access to aging services and provide

older refugees appropriate services not currently available in the community. Clients enrolled into the SOR Program are referred to the DARS' No Wrong Door Program, which is a statewide network of partners that serve older adults, caregivers, individuals with disabilities, veterans, and families in need of long-term services and supports, often working with community groups which help individuals who seek support in their community by recognizing and achieving their individual needs.

- In the FY 2023, 39 new clients were enrolled into the SOR Program and 125 participants total. Workshops and services include but are not limited to:
 - Ensuring access to senior community centers, supportive services and intergenerational activities.
 - Nutritious services and meals delivered to homebound clients.
 - Transpiration, Interpretation, and translation services.
 - Citizenship and Naturalization services and workshops.
 - Assistance with applying for SSI.

Provide advice and assistance to new Americans regarding (i) the citizenship application process and (ii) securing employment, housing, and services for which such persons may be eligible

- The ONA collaborates with successful refugee resettlement agencies providing citizenship resources to determine best practices and share resources. Agencies use ONA funding to provide access to citizenship and naturalization preparation services, including language training, civics instruction in preparation for citizenship exams, application assistance for adjustment to citizenship status. Agencies may also provide assistance to elderly and disabled refugees in obtaining waivers from English and civics requirements for naturalization, as well as the provision of interpreter services for citizenship interviews.
- The ONA Refugee Employment Program (RSSEP) is the cornerstone of the refugee resettlement program and assists all adults to gain training and employment in order to become self-sufficient. The agency funds vocational training, job placement services, job retention support, and career advancement assistance for up to 5 years from the date of eligibility.
- Currently, refugee resettlement agencies in Virginia are serving 10,324 individuals with employment services.
- During FFY2023, agencies reported 3,330 total job placements, with 2469 being full time and 861 being part time.
- The average hourly wage for all full-time jobs entered by ONA clients was \$17.71.
- In addition to direct job placement and support services, ONA's employment program sub recipients are constantly developing relationships with new employers and working through their community partners to develop trainings for clients to assist them in understanding the workforce norms and culture in the USA. The result has been substantial overall job retention and positive feedback from employers, helping to strengthen the reputation of our program, partners and clients.

- Our focus for the past few years has been on gender equity in the refugee workforce and we have made significant strides in this area. The ONA set about to change both the number of refugee females who entered the workforce and increase the hourly wage of those female refugees. The ONA started overtly encouraging gender equity in 2018, negotiated workforce development goals with each resettlement agency’s contracts that tied their future awards to meeting their goals. Each year there has been an increase in full and part-time job placements with an overall increase of 31.6%. Concerning hourly wages, female wages increased from \$10.74 per hour in 2017 to \$12.47 in 2020, and \$16.94 in the current Fiscal Year.
- ONA is working with the national Office of new Americans network “Skilled Immigrant Integration Project” to better understand how to connect skilled immigrants to career pathways that match their training and skills, such as developing career navigation guides for immigrants which provides useful information about how to obtain education, prerequisites, testing and certification for high-demand career areas such as healthcare, mental health, and education.

Provide advice and assistance to state agencies regarding (i) the coordination of relevant policies across state agencies responsible for education, workforce, and training programs, including professional licensure guidance, small business development, worker protection, refugee resettlement, citizenship and voter education or engagement programs, housing programs, and other related programs, and (ii) the dissemination of information to localities and immigration service organizations regarding state programs that help new Americans find and secure employment, housing, and services for which they may be eligible

- The Emerson Collective launched the Governors Opportunity and Inclusion Fellowship in 2019 to partner with Governors committed to advancing immigrant integration and inclusion policies by supporting full-time, executive-level senior advisors focused exclusively on this issue. Virginia was one of the selected states which demonstrates a commitment to immigrant integration across policy streams and program administration, in areas such as education (adult and childhood), workforce and skills development, public safety, health care and/or civic engagement. DSS is the recipient of a Policy Specialist who works in tandem with the ONA team to promote immigrant integration.
- The ONA worked closely with VDOE to ensure that the needs of refugee-eligible youth were met across the Commonwealth. Together with VDOE, ONA hosted a Q&A with resettlement agency staff to address common challenges with school enrollment and other issues refugee families face. A FAQ was created from the call for agency staff to reference as needed. In addition, ONA mandated monthly calls that resettlement agencies are required to initiate and facilitate with school personnel. Invitees include ESL teachers, registrars, Title III Coordinators, guidance counselors, social workers, principals, school nurses, ONA staff and VDOE representatives. The purpose of the call is to foster effective and efficient communication between resettlement agencies and school personnel, problem solve unique challenges that occur with refugee families, and share information that will benefit both agency and school staff.

- The Office conducted outreach to localities and immigration service organizations across the Commonwealth in order to disseminate information about training programs, housing information, healthcare information, etc. offered through state programs, and continues to work towards coordination and information-sharing about programs for New Americans between state agencies. For example, ONA was able to connect a non-profit serving immigrants who have been victims of crime or abuse to a legal services non-profit to receive training on how to appeal if their client's application for public benefits is incorrectly denied.
- ONA participates in and provides advice and technical assistance to an internal DSS working group helping DSS staff identify and meet the needs of immigrant children and families coming into contact with the child welfare system.
- ONA distributed information at various community events about the DMV programs under which immigrants can access Driver Privilege Cards and met with DMV representatives to discuss barriers to DMV services that new Americans face, as reported from our partner community-based organizations.
- ONA has provided community education about new criteria for Medicaid eligibility that affect immigrants of various statuses.

Educate localities and immigration service organizations on health epidemics and unlawful predatory actions, such as human trafficking, gang recruitment, and fraudulent financial and other schemes, to which communities of such persons may be especially vulnerable.

- ONA partners with community-based organizations to plan and publicize health and resource fairs, and other events around the Commonwealth attended by local organizations and individuals where we share information about the rights new Americans have to programs and services and be free from discrimination and exploitation and connect people to community-based organizations that can help people who believe their rights have been violated.

Serve as the primary liaison with external stakeholders, particularly immigrant-serving and refugee serving organizations and businesses, on immigrant integration priorities and policies.

- The ONA Outreach Coordinator collects information on service providers and connects them to one another, both informally and more formally by hosting events. Additionally, ONA plans to implement a communications strategy in late 2024, which will include regular newsletters and other updates to all interested stakeholders.
- The Virginia Community Capacity Initiative (VCCI) is a forum established in each region of our service area, where we provide a venue for dialogue between the resettlement agencies and community stakeholders. These meetings are conducted at least quarterly, but sometimes more frequently if there is a need. Community members and stakeholders use this opportunity to engage the resettlement agencies to discuss gaps in services, opportunities for refugees, and challenges they may be facing in supporting refugee integration. Resettlement agencies also use these meetings to lay out their resettlement

projections and upcoming initiatives. When challenges are identified in these meetings, resettlement agencies will often conduct break-out sessions where working groups will try to solve the issues raised.

- The ONA also forms part of a nation-wide coalition of other states with similar offices, and well as a cohort of localities dedicated to Skilled Immigrant Integration. Through these partnerships, ONA is able to share best practices with other states and localities on issues in immigrant integration. Through this network, ONA attended the first annual National Immigrant Integration and Citizenship Education Conference where we learned about best practices for working with state, local, and federal partners to promote citizenship and integration efforts.

Partner with state agencies and immigrant-serving and refugee-serving organizations and businesses to identify and disseminate beneficial immigrant integration policies and practices throughout the Commonwealth.

- The ONA commissioned a state-wide study identifying barriers to integration for refugees and immigrants in Virginia. This study has been presented numerous times to state agencies and immigrant and refugee-serving organizations, and the study has also been made publicly available, with the executive summary available in seven languages.
- The ONA, in conjunction with DBHDS and other partners, designed a program and applied for federal funding to provide vital mental health support services to allied Afghan veterans for 3 years.
- The ONA serves as a liaison between the local departments of social services and resettlement agencies to ensure refugees receive and are enrolled in Medicaid, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA), or Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA) Programs for financial, medical, and nutritional assistance.
- Through the U. S. Repatriation Program, the ONA works with the Department of State, International Social Services, and local departments of social Services. The Program provides temporary assistance to U.S. citizens and their dependents who have been identified by the U.S. Department of State as having returned or been brought from a foreign country to the United States because of destitution, illness, war, threat of war, or a similar crisis, and because they are without resources immediately accessible to meet their needs under Section 1113 of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. § 1313).
- ONA works with other DSS programs to address barriers obtaining benefits and services for which they qualify. For example, ONA participates in an internal work group seeking to better serve the needs of new Americans coming into contact with the child welfare system and is working to develop a standardized training for state and local agency staff to develop a better understanding of how to ensure their office or program is meeting the needs of new Americans in their service population and also the benefits and contributions that new Americans bring to the Commonwealth.

Manage competitive grant programs that replicate beneficial practices or test new innovations that improve the effectiveness and efficacy of immigrant integration strategies.

- ONA administers competitive 100% federally funded grants for innovative and effective refugee services across the Commonwealth. ONA will post a new RFA during FFY2024 for refugee services. The new RFA will include a 5-year term.
 - As an oversight body for competitive grants, ONA ensures the performance of sub recipients is up to the standards set by the federal government and our contracts with them. The Office measures their performance on key outcome goals throughout the year and based on risk assessments, we also conduct more intensive monitoring for higher risk agencies. All agencies are subject to a mid-year review and an annual review where their performance is scrutinized, and recommendations are made in order to ensure compliance with all requirements and that outcome goals are on track to be met by the end of each fiscal year. In addition, monthly financial reviews are conducted. The Office works with local departments of social services to ensure they are up to date with all new federal and state guidelines and policies. This year, our office was audited by the State Auditor of Public Accounts, and they found our monitoring program to comply and there were no findings.

Advise the Governor, cabinet members, and the General Assembly on strategies to improve state programs to support the economic, linguistic, and civic integration of New Americans throughout the Commonwealth.

- The ONA staffs the Office of New Americans Advisory Board, made up of 18 citizen-members who are tasked with promoting integration and providing recommendations on doing so to the Governor and the General Assembly. ONA works alongside the Advisory Board to provide updates to both Board and ONA, and to discuss and promote strategies to support integration of new Americans, which both parties provide as recommendations in their respective annual reports. Attendance and engagement in the Advisory Board on the part of members is robust and enthusiastic.
- See below section on Challenges, Best Practices, and Recommendations.

Challenges, Best Practices, and Recommendations

- The ONA consists of two program divisions: Refugee Services and Immigrant Services. All refugee services for ONA are 100% federally funded, and there is adequate funding to provide the mandated refugee resettlement services. However, the Immigrant Services side of ONA operates at minimal capacity, with a staff of two people, and no funding to provide direct services or expand capacity. This presents challenges in terms of all the mandated duties of the office when it comes to promoting integration for non-refugee immigrants in the Commonwealth.
- An additional challenge for new Americans in Virginia is that eligibility for various benefits depends largely on the type of visa or status one holds, and that information about eligibility is not readily accessible and is often opaque. This, coupled with the various federal classifications given to various groups (Venezuelan, Afghan, Ukrainian, etc.), often renders it very difficult at the local level to assess eligibility for services.
- Since 2021, unprecedented numbers of arrivals of Afghans and Ukrainians to Virginia have been served by the Refugee Services team of ONA, as well as on the programs administered by this office, and for all involved in refugee resettlement in Virginia.
- ONA has implemented best practices in the form of bi-weekly meetings with all refugee service providers (VCCI) to discuss challenges and best practices as they relate to the unprecedented refugee arrivals over the last year. Additionally, the MYVA program promotes positive civic and social engagement for refugee youth and is growing in reach each year.
- The needs assessment study carried out by VCU researchers highlighted the unmet needs of Virginia's immigrants and provided sophisticated mapping of newcomers and service providers. Now that this data is available to ONA, addressing the barriers and recommendations outlined in the study is the next step. This requires increased capacity and funding for the Immigrant Services side of ONA.

Conclusion

The accomplishments and activities of the ONA supported the linguistic, civic, cultural and economic integration of New Americans in the Commonwealth. The work of the Office goes well beyond the federally mandated role of overseeing the work of Virginia's refugee resettlement program, and well beyond the state mandated roles laid out above. The Office promotes integration among refugees and immigrants across the state and works closely with agencies and organizations who serve these populations to further enhance our efforts. The Office engages in outreach in all areas of the Commonwealth, offering information and training, connecting people to services, and building bridges between people and organizations. Working hand in hand with partners devoted to serving the same populations, the ONA recognizes the barriers encountered, and contributions made to the Commonwealth's success and diversity, by communities of new Americans across Virginia.