New Portlanders Speak

Recommendations of the Immigrant and Refugee Task Force

Convened by Mayor Tom Potter

Prepared for the City of Portland

December 2007

Executive Summary

Immigrants and refugees are a growing segment of Portland's population, representing 13 percent of those who live within the city's boundaries. Although immigrants and refugees use Portland's schools, parks, libraries, and emergency and social services, they face obstacles to participating in civic and public life. These obstacles include linguistic and cultural barriers; fear; immediate needs for food, housing, and health care; employment issues; a lack of awareness or understanding of available resources; fragmentation of service providers; and Portland's legacy of discrimination. All of these factors keep immigrants and refugees from being full partners in the life of the city.

In a resolution last autumn, the Portland City Council expressed its commitment to include immigrants and refugees in civic and public life. As a result of that commitment, a 20-person task force formed in March 2007 to investigate barriers to immigrant and refugees' inclusion in civic life and to identify ways to address those barriers. The task force consisted of 15 Portland community leaders born in Africa, Asia, Central America, South America, and Europe, along with representatives from the City's Office of Neighborhood Involvement, Bureau of Parks and Recreation, Bureau of Housing and Community Development, Portland Development Commission, and the Portland Police Bureau.

The Immigrant and Refugee Task Force developed four recommendations that the City could implement to increase immigrants and refugees' participation in civic life and decision making:

- 1. Create an office of immigrant and refugee affairs, with a multi-ethnic staff, that would serve as a bridge and facilitator between the immigrant and refugee community and City government. Such an office could work on emerging and ongoing issues that affect immigrants and refugees, be a focal point for activities that would increase immigrant and refugee civic engagement, offer technical assistance to the City in situations involving immigrants and refugees, and educate the general public about immigrants and refugees. As envisioned by the task force, the office would have responsibilities related to services and support, civic engagement, internal and external outreach, and public education.
- 2. Establish a multicultural community center that can house a variety of immigrant and refugee organizations, has space for large meetings and community gatherings, and offers opportunities for people of different ethnicities to mingle. Immigrant and refugee community organizations have a very practical need for both office space and large facilities where they can gather for culturally specific events, education, and programming. Establishing a facility for organizations representing immigrants, refugees, and non-immigrant people of color would create opportunities for cross-cultural communication, interaction, and problem-solving. In addition, such a center could provide enriching events and exhibits for the wider Portland community.

- 3. Provide additional resources for immigrant and refugee organizations to train or support their constituents in civic engagement. Newcomers from other countries do not necessarily know how to express themselves politically in the United States, advocate for their communities, or work with local government to bring about positive change. The City is just beginning to fund community-based training in leadership and civic engagement. It is important to continue these efforts so that the immigrants and refugees can make their voices heard, just as other citizens can.
- 4. Conduct a professional evaluation to (1) assess the City's current Human Resources (HR) policies and practices, and (2) recommend changes that would result in the recruitment, hiring, and retention of multilingual and multicultural staff to serve Portland's fast-growing immigrant and refugee communities. Establishing a City workforce that better reflects Portland's demographics can only improve access to City services. A professional evaluation of HR policies and practices would assist the City in identifying and eliminating unnecessary barriers to the employment of immigrants and refugees and encourage the establishment of cohesive, citywide policies for diversifying the workforce.

By and large, the task force's recommendations have less to do with the provision of specific services than with establishing formal structures and opportunities for immigrants and refugees to develop their leadership skills and participate in decision making in local government. It also is important to note that immigrant and refugee communities want not just to take, but to give. Although they need and want services from City government, Portland's immigrant and refugee leaders are eager to offer their own skills, experience, insight, and effort—to collaborate with City government to improve communication and understanding among the city's diverse residents and truly make Portland the open, welcoming, and accessible town it often is described as.

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Background

Immigrants and refugees are a growing segment of Portland's population.

Portland's Immigrant Population

Portland's population is changing. More and more, the Rose City is becoming a city of immigrants—people who are coming to the United States in search of personal safety, political and religious freedom, economic opportunity, and social stability.

According to U.S. Census figures from 2000, immigrants represent 13 percent of Portland's population, which is slightly more than the national average. In the tri-county region, 36 percent of immigrants were born in Latin America, 35 percent come from Asia, and 20 percent come from Europe, including Ukraine and other countries of the former Soviet Union. People from Africa, Canada, the Middle East, and other areas round out the local immigrant population. Altogether, in 2000 there were nearly 69,000 foreign-born people living in Portland and 171,500 in the tri-county area.¹

Perhaps more striking than the number of immigrants in Portland is that more than half of them arrived after 1990, and almost one-third of them since 1995. This is important because recent arrivals are more likely than established immigrants to have limited English skills, lower levels of education, and less experience with institutional structures. They also typically earn less than immigrants who are longer-term residents. In addition, immigrants in the Portland metropolitan area are twice as likely to live below the poverty level than native-born residents.²

The Immigrant and Refugee Task Force

In October 2006, the Portland City Council passed a resolution affirming its commitment to include immigrants and refugees in civic and public life. The resolution called for establishment of a short-term task force of immigrant and refugee community members, City representatives, and other stakeholders to investigate barriers experienced by Portland's growing immigrant and refugee population, and to then identify possible solutions. This report presents the results of that task force, which met monthly from March through December of 2007.

The task force members and their countries of origin or City affiliations are as follows:

- Dr. Entisar Azouz (Libya)
- Dr. Bruce Bliatout (Laos)
- Abdul Fofanah (Sierra Leone)
- Kayse Jama (Somalia)

¹ A Profile of the Foreign-Born in the Portland, Oregon, Tri-County Area, by Katherine Lotspeich, Michael Fix, Dan Perez-Lopez, and Jason Ost. October 2003. Prepared by the Urban Institute for the Building the New American Community Project.

² Ibid.

- Maria Lisa Johnson (Venezuela and Peru)
- Victoria Libov (Ukraine)
- Richard Louie (United States)
- Dr. Shirish Patel (Zambia)
- Alice Perry (United States)
- Pam Phan (Vietnam)
- Lee Po Cha (Laos)
- Romeo Sosa (Guatemala)
- Kilong Ung (Cambodia)
- David Wynde (Great Britain)
- Rahel Yared (Ethiopia)
- Amalia Alarcon, Office of Neighborhood Involvement
- Max Behrens, Bureau of Parks and Recreation
- John Cardenas, Portland Development Commission
- Patrick Gihring, Bureau of Housing and Community Development
- Lieutenant Robert Heimbach, Portland Police Bureau

The Immigrant and Refugee Task Force was staffed by Carmen Rubio and April Velasquez, from Mayor Tom Potter's office. The facilitation team consisted of Kristin Lensen, of Kristin Lensen Consulting, and writer Ann Sihler.

Activities of the Task Force

In its monthly meetings, the task force reviewed aspects of City government and services that are working well for immigrant and refugee communities, identified obstacles and problem areas, and developed a set of recommendations to address the most important issues.

The task force also had the opportunity to issue two public statements regarding current events related to immigrants and refugees in Portland. In one statement, the task force expressed its disappointment with the June immigration raid at Del Monte produce facilities in Portland, and it thanked Mayor Tom Potter, the Portland Police Bureau, and the crisis response team for their responses to the situation. In another statement, the task force expressed its support for the establishment of a community gathering center as proposed by Portland's visionPDX project, assuming that immigrants and refugees are involved in the center's development, implementation, and operation.

What's Working, What's Not

Parks, police, and SUN schools provide valuable services, but immigrants and refugees still face many barriers to full participation in Portland life.

What's Working?

Immigrants and refugees make use of many services available to the general public in Portland. The task force offers the following examples of aspects of city life that are working for their communities, to some extent:

- Parks, transit, and libraries. Immigrants and refugees describe Portland's parks and recreation centers as accessible to their communities and good places for families to get together. Portland Parks and Recreation's ethnic outreach and summer programs are appreciated, and immigrant and refugees have noticed that some written materials are being translated into languages other than English (although more needs to be done in this area). Immigrants and refugees use public transportation and libraries and say they especially value TriMet's summer youth fares and the variety of programs at libraries.
- **Police.** Immigrants and refugees see Portland as a relatively safe city, which is comforting for families. The police's emergency response teams are viewed favorably, as are police efforts to work with immigrant and refugee communities. Particularly noteworthy have been Portland Police Bureau's collaboration with Arab and Muslim communities after 9/11 and its community policing partnership agreements with different communities.
- **Schools**. Portland's public schools offer great opportunities to immigrant and refugee children, and the English as a Second Language classes are helpful.
- **Community and social services.** Portland's immigrant and refugee communities value the city's SUN schools, various community and recreation centers, food programs for the elderly, and homeless shelters. The City's presence in dialogues with businesses about day laborers has been supportive of immigrants and refugees. In addition, immigrants and refugees appreciate it when medical care is offered without personal identification being required, such as at St. Francis Dining Hall.

(Note: Not all of these services are provided by the City of Portland. For a list of services or supports that City bureaus offer specifically for immigrants and refugees, see the appendix to this report.)

In addition, members of the task force have found politicians in Portland relatively accessible. This is particularly true of Mayor Tom Potter, who has reached out to immigrants and refugees and been willing to work with their communities. In recent years there has been a noticeable shift in thinking at City Hall about immigrants and refugees. The City is attempting to diversify its workforce, it is taking more of an interest in helping immigrants and refugees, and it is more frequently funneling funding directly to immigrant and refugee communities, rather than through a third party. These are positive developments for Portland's immigrants and refugees.

Challenges That Remain

The task force identified the following challenges to participating fully in civic and public life:

- Linguistic and cultural barriers. Some immigrants and refugees (especially newcomers) have limited English skills and different cultural norms and behaviors than U.S.-born Americans. This creates obvious communication challenges when City offices do not have multilingual and multicultural staff. In addition, Portland's immigrants and refugees may be hesitant to interact with someone outside their own culture or to make use of services or facilities that do not exhibit some degree of racial or ethnic diversity. For some immigrants, not seeing someone "like themselves" suggests that the facility, activity, or service is not for people like them.
- Questions of integration. Immigrants and refugees wrestle with how much to integrate into U.S. society. Participating fully in civic and public life may mean giving up certain culturally or religiously based behaviors, attitudes, or styles of communication, at least in public. This can be uncomfortable or unacceptable because, in some ways, giving up culture is giving up part of one's identity. Immigrants and refugees may also be slow to involve themselves in civic life because some of them come from cultures that do not welcome public involvement in government affairs.
- Attending to basic needs. Some immigrants and refugees in Portland are dealing with
 addressing their basic needs for food, clothing, housing, and health care and do not
 have time and energy to focus on civic involvement, leadership development, or
 community advocacy.
- **Issues of employment.** Immigrants and refugees in Portland see a need to expand employment opportunities for people of color, including themselves. Day laborers, some of whom are immigrants and refugees, face a variety of abuses, including non-payment of wages, hostility from the business community, and robberies.
- Lack of awareness or understanding of resources. Some immigrants and refugees in Portland are not aware of all the resources that are available to them or how certain systems work, such as 9-1-1 emergency response. This could be due to language barriers, illiteracy in English, or simply the fact that, for anyone entering a new society, it takes time to learn how government, schools, law enforcement, and other institutions work. In some cases, the more different the new society is from what one is accustomed to, the more difficult it is to understand and make use of available resources.
- **Fragmentation of service providers.** In the Portland area, health and human services are provided by a combination of the City, Multnomah County, and non-governmental agencies. It can be hard for immigrants and refugees to know who to go to for information or support, and the different services are not always coordinated.
- **Fear**. Some immigrants and refugees do not participate fully in civic and public life because they are afraid of attracting attention that could bring them harm. For example, Portlanders who are recognizably Arab or Muslim continue to face incidents of hostility from the general public, and the detentions and deportations

that followed 9/11 are still fresh in their minds. Some of these people prefer to keep a low public profile, for greater personal security. Other immigrants and refugees are afraid of the police or immigration authorities. This fear may arise because of a person's immigration status, but it could also be based on their experience with police in the United States (in Portland or elsewhere) or the understanding of law enforcement that they bring with them from their country of origin.

- **Legacy of discrimination.** Immigrants and refugees see gaps in their access to housing education, and employment that may be due to the lingering effects of past discrimination. Portland has not always been a welcoming city to people of color. Even today, City government and other institutions are not as inclusive as immigrants and refugees feel is necessary.
- **Uneven school services.** Portland's immigrants and refugee communities are dispersed through the city, and different communities need different services in the schools, especially when it comes to language services. Youth are sometimes not able to access the services they need at their own schools, even though the service may be available somewhere else.

In accordance with its charge from City Council, the task force worked on developing recommendations to address these and other barriers to immigrant and refugees' full involvement in civic and public life.

Recommendations

Portland's immigrants and refugees want formal structures and opportunities to participate in civic life and decision making.

Members of the Immigrant and Refugee Task Force identified many issues that influence their communities' level of involvement in local government and civic life. However, given the limited timeframe for the task force's work, the group narrowed down its concerns to the most urgent areas and developed four recommendations it would like the City to implement.

A key recommendation—the highest priority for the task force—is for the City to create an office of immigrant and refugee affairs. Having such an office would facilitate additional work to increase immigrant and refugees' involvement in local government and civic life, and it would provide an organizational structure for immigrants and refugees to address issues that are not captured in the four recommendations presented in this report. In other words, task force members see their charge from the City as an ongoing process and believe that having an immigrant and refugee affairs office is important to long-term success.

By and large, the task force's recommendations have less to do with the provision of specific services than with establishing formal structures and opportunities for immigrants and refugees to develop their leadership skills and participate in decision making in local government. Using a biological analogy, task force members would like the "cell" of City government to have "receptors" that immigrants and refugees can bind to—via offices, avenues of communication, advisory boards—so that immigrant and refugee concerns are considered when the City takes action on a variety of issues.

It also is important to note that immigrant and refugee communities want not just to take, but to give. They recognize that they need certain services from City government and feel that the City has an obligation to provide them a level of support, just as it does to other vulnerable residents. But Portland's immigrant and refugee leaders also are eager to offer their skills, experience, insight, and effort to collaborate with City government — to support their communities, improve communication and understanding among the city's diverse residents, and truly make Portland the open, welcoming, accessible town it often is described as.

The task force's recommendations are as follows, in order of priority:

1. Create an office of immigrant and refugee affairs.

Recommendation: Create an office of immigrant and refugee affairs, with a multi-ethnic staff, that would serve as a bridge and facilitator between the immigrant and refugee community and City government.

What This Would Accomplish

- Immigrant and refugee communities would have a permanent "place" within the City's operational structure and a stronger voice in City government.
- City government would have a structure for consulting, communicating, and collaborating with Portland's collective immigrant and refugee communities on issues that affect them.
- As a group, immigrants and refugees would have the organizational and financial resources to (1) continually increase their civic engagement, (2) address ongoing issues for their communities, and (3) respond to new issues that come up.
- Portland's non-immigrant community would learn more about immigrants and refugees through outreach and education conducted by the office of immigrant and refugee affairs.

Reasoning

Issues related to immigrants and refugees in Portland are many, continual, and changing, especially as the city becomes more diverse. Ongoing concerns among immigrant and refugee communities include public education, community outreach and support, youth leadership development, and crisis management. At the same time that immigrant and refugee communities are working on these issues (with the help of local governments and non-governmental service providers), new issues arise. This year, for example, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids at Del Monte facilities in Portland were a dominant concern, from the law enforcement, humanitarian, and public policy perspectives; next year, Portland could be facing an influx of Iraqi refugees and trying to meet the humanitarian needs this would create. In addition, immigrant and refugee leaders continually aspire to participate more fully in local government and see that their communities' concerns are heard and addressed.

The task force believes that both the immigrant and refugee communities and City government would benefit from creation of an immigrant and refugee affairs office at the City. The office could (1) offer advice or technical assistance to the City in examining policies and practices that affect immigrants and refugees, (2) be a focal point for activities such as youth leadership development and voting campaigns that would increase immigrant and refugees' civic engagement over time, and (3) be a resource to the City and the general public for information on cultural competency, immigration policies and laws, and immigrant and refugees' experiences, perspectives, and issues.

An office of immigrant and refugee affairs could work in a variety of areas:

• Civic engagement

- Provide orientations for immigrants and refugees on civic engagement opportunities and how city government works.
- Organize and support citizenship workshops, voter registration, and other efforts that promote civic participation of immigrants and refugees.
- Partner with community-based organizations to create leadership development opportunities for immigrants and refugees, including youth.

 Facilitate the naturalization application process by working closely with the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), which is developing a new naturalization center in Portland.

• Services and support

- Develop a multilingual, city- and county-wide resource guide that provides contact information for services of interest to immigrants and refugees and practical information on American economic and social systems. Topics could include transportation, housing, entrepreneurship, banking, citizenship, health care, and emergency and social services.
- Create a crisis management plan that further coordinates citywide emergency response services and involves the immigrant and refugee communities.
- Provide support to immigrants and refugees who experience racially, ethnically, or religiously based injustice.
- Help build trust between law enforcement and immigrant and refugee communities.

• Outreach (internal and external)

- Assist the City in developing cultural competency training for its employees.
- Assist the City in providing user-friendly, multilingual information to immigrant and refugee communities.
- Develop an immigrant and refugee speakers bureau that could share immigrant and refugees' perspectives with specific audiences (school boards or City bureaus, for example) or the general public.
- Educate the public about current immigration policies and laws.
- Provide opportunities for immigrant and non-immigrant communities to meet and interact as Portlanders.
- Reach out to immigrant and refugee communities via community events, cultural nights, correspondence, and other means.
- Publicize immigrant and refugee contributions to Portland's social, economic, cultural, and political life through events, announcements, and awards.

• Public education

- Educate school boards and public school staff about immigrant and refugee communities and their children's educational needs.
- Advocate for more cultural representation (such as world history and geography) in the school curriculum.
- Work with school districts to improve ESL instruction, ensure that the quality
 of ESL instruction is consistent throughout the city, and help prepare
 immigrant and refugee students for higher education.
- Develop strategies to ensure that immigrant and refugee students have equal access to education.

There is overlap between some of these activities and other recommendations put forth by the task force, especially those that would involve immigrant and refugee

communities in a training or advisory capacity. Depending on when the immigrant and refugee affairs office was established, the office might be able to take the lead on implementing some of the other recommendations or provide significant input into their implementation. Eventually the office could be housed in a multicultural or community gathering center (see Recommendation 2).

Cost and Implementation Considerations

Creating an office of immigrant and refugee affairs would involve forming a work group composed of City staff and representatives of immigrant and refugee community organizations. This work group would determine specific staffing, funding levels, facilities, and first priorities for the office. The office should be funded by the City.

The task force recommends that the office be staffed by a program manager, three program specialists, and a senior administrative specialist, at an annual cost of approximately \$418,000. Annual costs for materials and services would be approximately \$93,000, and one-time start-up expenses would be about \$29,000.

Organizationally, the office would be a separate entity—not part of an existing City bureau—that reports directly to the mayor. Establishment of the office would be phased in over several years.

2. Establish a multicultural center.

Recommendation: Establish a multicultural community center that can house a variety of immigrant and refugee organizations, has space for large meetings and community gatherings, and offers opportunities for people of different ethnicities to mingle.

What This Would Accomplish

- Immigrant and refugee community groups would gain a measure of stability by having dedicated office and meeting space over the long term.
- Immigrant and refugee groups could expand their programming and host large-scale events that strengthen their communities.
- Immigrants, refugees, and non-immigrant people of color could more easily engage in joint problem-solving discussions that would help government agencies and community-based organizations do their work better.
- The immigrant and refugee community would be more visible to the larger Portland community, and there would be more opportunities for cross-cultural communication and interaction.

Reasoning

Immigrant and refugee organizations in Portland have limited funding and office space, and they sometimes struggle to find facilities large enough for culturally specific gatherings, celebrations, educational events, and other programming. In addition, community-based organizations want ready access to large spaces where they can organize and hold joint meetings with other groups.

Establishing a multicultural center that would house community-based organizations and provide space for large gatherings would address some very practical needs that

immigrant and refugees have. It also would make it easier for different immigrant and refugee communities to communicate, coordinate, and solve shared problems. (Although each community is unique, they share some concerns related to education, policing, civil liberties and human rights, and immigration law and policy. These concerns and others are documented in *Uniting Cultures in Portland: Bridging the Gaps in City Policy*, by the 2006 "Politics of Immigration" Capstone students at Portland State University, the Center for Intercultural Organizing, and Bridgetown Voices, available at www.interculturalorganizing.org/resources/publications.html.) If the multicultural center also housed groups representing non-immigrant people of color, there would be more opportunities for these communities, immigrants, and refugees to communicate and collaborate.

A multicultural center could also provide services to the general public—not just immigrants and refugees. For example, multicultural events and exhibits could be enriching and of value to the entire community of Portland.

Costs and Implementation Considerations

This recommendation could be implemented in connection with the community gathering center described as part of the visionPDX process, as long as task force members and their communities were involved in planning, implementing, and operating the center. Costs for the visionPDX community gathering center have not yet been estimated. The task force envisions the City providing funding to establish the multicultural center but that the immigrant and refugee communities would develop some of their own resources over time and contribute to the funding of the center.

3. Provide additional resources for immigrant and refugee organizations to train their constituents in civic engagement.

Recommendation: Provide additional resources for community-based organizations to train or support their constituents in civic engagement.

What This Would Accomplish

- Immigrants and refugees would understand better how to involve themselves in public life and make their voices heard.
- Immigrants and refugees would develop their leadership skills and begin to serve on a variety of City advisory committees, boards, and commissions and eventually be elected to public office.
- Immigrant and refugee communities would be heard, and City government would make decisions that positively affect immigrant and refugee communities.

Reasoning

When they arrive in this country, many immigrants and refugees have had only limited exposure to American civic processes. They may not know how to express themselves politically in the United States, advocate for their communities, or work with local government to bring about positive change. To begin remedying this situation, in 2007 the City of Portland provided \$70,000 (through the Office of Neighborhood Involvement) for organizations that serve underrepresented groups to train their constituents in leadership and civic engagement. Currently, about 45 people of color,

immigrants, and refugees are being trained in this Diversity and Civic Leadership Academy, which is run by the Latino Network in partnership with Oregon Action and the Center for Intercultural Organizing. Topics being addressed during the year-long training include city governance, bureau functions, power dynamics, leadership styles, facilitating dialogue and leading meetings, using the media, and organizing an issue campaign. Each organization has tailored the curriculum and structured the trainings to meet the specific needs of its constituents.

The City is providing \$245,000 in additional funding for similar efforts, namely the Diversity and Civic Leadership Organizing Project and the Neighborhood and Community Engagement Initiative. These efforts will focus on building partnerships with diverse organizations and building capacity for people of color, immigrants, and refuges to engage in civic governance.

Given the number of and racial and ethnic diversity of immigrants and refugees in Portland, the pool of people currently being trained in civic engagement is small (the effort is not yet reaching the Asian and Arab/Muslim communities, for example). If immigrants and refugees are to participate meaningfully in civic life and have a voice commensurate with their population in Portland, training opportunities for budding civic leaders will need to be significantly expanded, through the Diversity and Civic Leadership Academy and similar programs.

It is important that trainings be designed, developed, and implemented by local community-based organizations, rather than by the City or other outside groups. Using community-based organizations has several benefits:

- It allows the curriculum to be tailored to the needs of the specific community. The differences in the way the Latino Network, Oregon Action, and the Center for Intercultural Organizing are implementing their trainings, even during just the first six months, is evidence of the need for adaptation to individual communities.
- In many communities, it increases participation. Members of underrepresented communities often do not engage in processes led by "others" because of language and cultural barriers.
- It builds the capacity of the community-based organizations themselves, so that they can better serve their constituents over the long term.

Costs and Implementation Considerations

In 2007, the City committed \$315,000 to the Diversity and Civic Leadership Academy, Diversity and Civic Leadership Organizing Project, and Neighborhood and Community Engagement Initiative. The task force recommends that the City continue to support these and similar programs that train immigrants and refugees in civic engagement, and that the level of support increase — at the very least—in proportion to the projected increase in the number of immigrants and refugees living in Portland.

4. Assess City Human Resources policies and practices.

Recommendation: Conduct a professional evaluation to (1) assess the City's current Human Resources (HR) policies and practices, and (2) recommend changes that would

result in the recruitment, hiring, and retention of multilingual and multicultural staff to serve Portland's fast-growing immigrant and refugee communities.

What This Would Accomplish

- The City would be better able to provide culturally competent services to the residents of Portland.
- Employment opportunities in City government would be extended to immigrant and refugee adults and youth—through direct employment, internships, and volunteer programs.
- Employees at the City would begin to develop a shared understanding of diversity, cultural competency, and equality in a city with changing demographics.

Reasoning

Approximately 13 percent of Portland's residents were born in another country. Like other residents, these immigrants and refugees purchase water and sewer service from the City, apply for building permits and business licenses, attend City-sponsored events such as home-buying fairs, and access a variety of emergency, social, and recreational services provided by the City. Although many City bureaus have made an effort to provide interpreters and translate written materials into languages other than English (see appendix), immigrants and refugees' access to City services still is limited by a lack of multilingual and multicultural staff—employees who can communicate with Portland's newcomers in their own languages and with sensitivity to their cultural norms, perspectives, and behaviors.

The task force believes that establishing a City workforce that better reflects Portland's changing demographics would lead to improved access to City services. As an added benefit, a diverse workforce would employ immigrants and refugees within the City, where they could assist management and staff in developing a shared understanding of diversity, cultural competency, and equality in a city whose demographics are shifting.

The task force is concerned that some HR policies and practices may unintentionally act as barriers to the recruitment, hiring, and retention of immigrants and refugees. It was beyond the scope of the task force to do a thorough review of HR policies and practices itself, but the group offers up the following examples of how choices of policies and practices could influence the composition of the workforce with respect to immigrants and refugees:

- **Placement of job announcements.** Placing job announcements in publications targeted at particular racial or ethnic populations can attract a more diverse pool of applicants. It also demonstrates a good-faith effort by the City to hire immigrants and refugees.
- Language of job announcements. Much communication in immigrant and refugee communities is by word of mouth. Although almost every job in the City requires fluency in English, publishing job announcements in other languages widens the readership by immigrants and refugees and allows non-English speaking relatives and friends to alert qualified English-speaking candidates of an opening.

- **Application procedures.** Requiring that job applications be submitted only online, and not accepting hard copy applications, effectively eliminates qualified candidates who do not have access to computers or are not comfortable using them. Many immigrants and refugees fall into these categories.
- **Interviewers' cultural competency.** Immigrants and refugees sometimes have different communication patterns from those of native-born Americans. For example, not looking someone in the eye may be a sign of respect, rather than insecurity. For immigrants and refugees to be fairly evaluated, interviewers should have enough intercultural training or experience to correctly interpret such behaviors.

A professional assessment of the City's HR policies and practices would assist the City in identifying and eliminating unnecessary barriers to the employment of immigrants and refugees and encourage the establishment of cohesive, citywide policies for diversifying the workforce to better serve the public.

Costs and Implementation Considerations

For this recommendation to be effective, it may be necessary for the City to hire an outside consultant with expertise in both cultural issues and human resource management systems — an objective, disinterested person who is proficient in both areas. Such an evaluation is expected to cost approximately \$150,000 and take about a year to complete. From a practical perspective, it may take a year or two before the evaluation could begin because the City's central HR department currently is in the midst of implementing both charter reform changes and a new computer system.

Other Considerations

Task force members also are concerned about racial profiling of members of their communities and issues of social justice, equity, and human rights for immigrants and refugees. Given that the City has an ongoing Racial Profiling Committee and is in the process of establishing a new human rights or human relations commission, the task force elected not to develop recommendations specific to these two topics. However, this decision does not reflect a lack of interest. The task force supports continuation of the Racial Profiling Committee and the inclusion of immigrants and refugees on the human rights or human relations commission.

Appendix

City Services for Immigrants and Refugees

Several bureaus translate publications into non-English languages, while other bureaus offer programs and outreach that include immigrants and refugees.

During the course of the Immigrant and Refugee Task Force's work, City bureaus were invited to self-report on specific services or support that they offer to Portland's immigrant and refugee communities. The results are presented below.

In summary, several bureaus translate bureau publications into a variety of non-English languages. Others sponsor community or leadership development programs, fairs, or outreach programs to particular racial or ethnic communities that include immigrants and refugees. The Office of Neighborhood Involvement, Portland Parks and Recreation Bureau, Bureau of Housing and Community Development, and Portland Development Commission all have several programs targeted at particular communities.

Note: The information in this appendix is not a comprehensive assessment. Rather, it is a summary of self-reporting by bureau representatives who chose to respond to the task force's inquiries.

Bureau of Water Works

- The Water Bureau Costumer Service Department offers information in more than 40 languages.
- Low-income individuals can apply to a low-income program based on their zip codes.
- Two annual publications the Consumer Confidence Report and a regulatory brochure are issued in Russian, Vietnamese and Spanish.

Office of Emergency Management

- Emergency preparedness information is offered in 15 different languages.
- A volunteer-based institution called the Speakers Bureau offers presentations in different languages, on request. Firefighter Jerry Alvarez will be teaching the Neighborhood Emergency Program completely in Spanish.

Office of Sustainable Development

• No specific programs. If interpreters are needed, the office refers to the City Language Bank.

Bureau of Environmental Services (BES)

Anyone who calls BES with requests for special accommodations will be assisted.

- The following materials have been translated into five languages: the Flooding Detours and Safety brochure; Freeze the Grease campaign; Web site fact sheets on CSO, watershed health, and who BES is; Clean River Rewards program flyer; BES job opportunities flyer; sewer connection brochure; and sewer costs/payment brochure.
- The following materials have been translated into Spanish only: poster and signs about restaurant best management practices; Is Your Lawn Chemical Free, Maybe It Should Be; various materials for events like Explorando on Slough (an annual event hosted for the Latino community in conjunction with the Columbia Slough Watershed Council); and administrative rules for sewer connection.

Office of Neighborhood Involvement (ONI)

- ONI co-funds a program called Immigration and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO), whose mission is to assist refugees, immigrants, and multi-ethnic communities in develop self-sufficiency and cultural awareness.
- Through ONI, the City funds the Diversity and Civic Leadership Academy, which
 is intended to expand opportunities for civic governance for underrepresented
 communities.
- ONI maintains a list of institutions that support people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Portland Development Commission (PDC)

- In 2007, PDC sponsored six different community home-buying fairs at a level of \$10,000 each. The fairs were designed to promote home ownership opportunities to first-time homebuyers, people of color, and —in most cases non-English speaking households.
 - Lents Home Buying Fair sponsored by Rose Community Development in April offered home-buying informational material and classes in Spanish, Russian and Vietnamese.
 - Latino Home-Buying fair sponsored by Hacienda CDC in April, offered promotional materials and classes in English and Spanish.
 - The Native American and Youth and Family Service Center (NAYA) hosted its second annual Native American Housing to Homeownership Fair in July.
 - The Asian and Pacific Islander Community Improvement Association (APICIA) successfully held its eighth annual Asian and Pacific Islander Home-Buying Fair in August and held classes in Chinese, English, Korean, Laotian, Mandarin, Mhong, Russian, Tagalog, Thai, and Vietnamese.
 - The Abriendo Puertas Home-Buying Fair organized by the Latino Home Initiative took place in September and had advertising and classes in Spanish and English. For this fair, PDC staff produced a 30-second television commercial in Spanish that aired on Univision to attract Spanish speakers to the fair.
 - In October the African American Alliance for Homeownership (AAAH) held its eighth annual Home Buying Fair.

• PDC is currently researching the best means to deliver its program information in languages other than English, and the commission's staff are researching options for obtain translation services for non-English speaking clients.

Bureau of Emergency Communications (BOEC)

• The BOEC offers help in an extensive number of languages through a company called Language Line.

Bureau of Housing and Community Development

- Assistance is provided in Spanish, Japanese, and Vietnamese. The bureau co-funds a program called Immigration and Refugee Community Organization.
- The bureau's Economic Opportunity Initiative is designed to help immigrants and refugees—particularly those newly arrived—get or keep employment or start a successful small business. The program serves approximately 1,500 people through a variety of projects operated by community-based service providers. Among other projects, the Child Care Improvement Project operates networks of at-home childcare service providers, including networks for Hispanic, African, and Eastern European immigrants. Several other projects specifically serve immigrant populations:
 - The Immigrant Credentialing Project, at Southeast Works. This project assists Russian and Cuban immigrants who have education, experience, and professional certifications from their countries of origin but are unemployed or working in low-wage jobs. The program provides education and job readiness training, places people in jobs in the area of their qualifications and experience, and provides ongoing job retention services. Additionally, program staff work with federally recognized organizations who translate foreign degrees and professional certifications. The project is in its second year out of three. To date, 38 participants have been enrolled and 19 have been placed in employment.
 - The PACE program at International Refugee Center of Oregon. This program provides job readiness training, professional technical training, and job placement for immigrants in the metals industry. Program participants are Eastern European, African, Hispanic, and Asian immigrants. Most are referred from the Refugee Resettlement Program, a federally funded program providing resettlement services for 8 months, administered locally by Lutheran Community Services. The PACE program works with many local employers, including Gunderson, Boydstun Metal Works, and WW Metal Fab. Now in its second year out of three, the program has enrolled 99 participants, and 87 have been placed in employment.
 - The Youth Transitions Program at the International Refugee Center of Oregon. This program provides education and career counseling, job search assistance, and placement into post-secondary education and training for youth clients of Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO). Immigrant youth seeking to attain career goals that require continued education and training are intended beneficiaries of this program. To date, five participants have been enrolled in the first year of this three-year program.

- The Peer Supported Employment Program at Human Solutions. This program provides case management, adult basic education, referrals to professional technical training, and job placement services for Eastern European immigrants. The project is in its second year of a three-year program cycle. To date, 59 participants have been enrolled and 23 have been placed in employment.
- African Refugee Immigrant Network of Oregon (ARINO), through the Enterprise Community Commission (ECC). No outcome information is available yet on this new project.
- The bureau funds several housing- and homeless-related programs and services that are used by low-income residents, minorities, and immigrants and refugees, among others:
 - Affordable housing throughout the City of Portland, including "family-size" apartments and apartments that even extremely low-income households can afford to rent.
 - 211*info*, a free telephone service staffed by information and referral specialists who can direct callers to health and human services resources. Immigrant and refugees can have difficulty locating what they need in our confusing health and human services system. 211 can help direct callers to the right resource for everyday needs, as well as crisis situations. 211*info* makes every effort to provide information and referral in the caller's language.
 - HousingConnections.org, a free, Web-based service in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Russian that lets people find detailed, up-to-date listings for affordable housing to rent or to buy. The listings include both subsidized and private market housing throughout the Portland region. Immigrants and refugees seeking a home large enough for an extended family or close to a specific ethnic food market or cultural center will appreciate the search features. Units accessible to people with limited mobility are also listed. For people who do not have access to a computer or do not read English, Spanish, Vietnamese, or Russian, HousingConnections.org offers telephone support (503-802-8562).
 - Homeownership education programs for people who are currently renters but would like to become homeowners. These programs are offered through several different providers, and in several different languages.
 - Multiple minority homeownership fairs to promote homeownership by households of color. The fairs are open to anyone who would like to become a homeowner. The bureau currently sponsors culturally specific fairs for the African-American, Latino, Asian and Pacific Islander, and Native American communities.
 - A limited amount of short-term rent assistance to prevent households that have fallen behind in their rent from being evicted into homelessness, and to assist households that are homeless or living in dangerous substandard conditions to move into safe, stable housing.

Portland Parks & Recreation

- Portland Parks & Recreation Outreach Services Program has dedicated full-time staff who specifically works with Latino and Asian/Pacific Islander communities. This outreach program provides interpretive resources, internal staff cultural competency training, creation of specific cultural programs and assistance connecting target communities to already existing Parks programs.
- Parks & Recreation facilities and open spaces are available to all Portland residents and visitors and have been used by immigrant and refugee communities.
- Parks and Recreation has a scholarship program that provides financial assistance for registered Parks programs to those with an economic need.
- The Parks customer service center has full-time multilingual staff available, as do select community centers. Some SUN Community School staff are multilingual.
- The Southwest Community Center has participated in the following outreach programs and activities with the refugee community in Southwest Portland.
 - Markham Park Summer Playground Program. The Southwest Community
 Center, through Project Inclusion, held a summer playground program at
 Markham Elementary in the summer of 2007. The program served 1,560 youth
 and served 1,234 free federal lunches. It was held form June 21 through August
 16, from 9 a.m. 5 p.m., for youth up to 18 years old. During a typical day of
 the program, approximately 75 percent of the youth participating were
 refugees.
 - Grauer Back-to-School Project. The Southwest Community Center provided children and teen activities for the St. Luke's Church annual back-to-school supply and clothing project for more than 200 refugee families in southwest Portland.
 - Hillsdale Terrace & Slavin Court. In the summer of 2007, the Southwest
 Community Center offered a teen night at Hillsdale Terrace and a separate
 event at Slavin Court, serving a total of 40 participants, some of whom were
 refugees. The community center is continuing its outreach efforts with monthly
 special events at each site throughout the year.
- Through Montavilla Community Center: In the last budget year, there was a free teen program every Friday evening at the Ortiz Center (Cully Neighborhood), with food, a computer lab, and video game competitions.
- In the summer of 2007, through project inclusion funds, swim lessons for families living around the Ortiz Center (Cully Neighborhood) were provided at reduced price, as were punch cards for swimming.
- The University Park Community Center partnered with the African Women's Coalition this summer. UPCC provided rooms twice a week for the organization to provide an African Refugee Youth Summer Program that basically was a summer school designed to support academic achievement among African immigrant youth
- On August 17, the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO) used the Mt. Scott Community Center auditorium and rented the roller rink for an event.