

EXAMPLES OF PRACTICES EMPLOYED IN OTHER STATES TO ASSIST IMMIGRANTS

House Joint Resolution 604 of the 2003 Virginia General Assembly directed the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) to study the acclimation of Virginia's ethnically diverse population. As part of this study, JLARC staff examined some of the practices employed in other states to assist their immigrant populations. Practices were identified primarily through a review of written material concerning immigrant populations in the United States. This listing is intended to provide some examples of additional programs that could be considered for implementation in Virginia, as resources become available. The specific needs and goals of individual communities in Virginia will impact the appropriateness of the practices identified. Additional information on immigrant programs can be found in the JLARC report, [Acclimation of Virginia's Foreign-Born Population](#) (House Document No. 9 of the 2004 Virginia General Assembly).

Identifying Best Practices in Schools

Several states' departments of education have focused on boosting the achievement of limited English proficient (LEP) students by identifying best practices and widely disseminating the information across school systems. In both Texas and California, their departments of education have websites that link to other websites with information on best practices and education research on serving LEP populations. In school year 1998-1999, Texas specifically investigated best practices among its schools for educating LEP students. The report is available through its website at: <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/dpchs/research.html>. The New Jersey Department of Education is currently undertaking a similar process of identifying model practices for educating LEP students, as a way to both promote effective practices among school districts and to recognize outstanding schools.

Providing Information to Parents on U.S. Education System

The educational systems in some countries differ significantly from the U.S. education system. Immigrants from these countries seeking to enroll their children in U.S. schools may benefit from receiving more information on the expectations set for teachers, students, and parents. For parents that have limited English proficiency, and who speak uncommon languages, it may be especially difficult to locate and understand information on how schools operate. Minnesota has met this need for information by producing a video for newcomers with children in the Minnesota school system. The video is intended to help foreign-born parents navigate the school system and to learn what they can do to help their children. For example, the video explains why vaccinations are

needed, discusses the different types of transportation available to students, and explains the importance of attendance and what to do if a child will miss school due to illness. The video is currently available in six languages (English, Spanish, Amharic, Hmong, Russian, and Somali). Minnesota Department of Education (DOE) staff reported that they will be making the video available in three additional languages in the near future. According to DOE staff, the estimated total cost of production for the video in the six languages currently available was between \$4,000 and \$5,000.

Adult English-As-A-Second-Language (ESL) Assistance

In some states, such as Florida, a program called Crossroads Café reportedly has been very popular. Crossroads Café consists of 26 video-taped lessons, each 30 minutes in length. There is also a workbook with exercises for each lesson. The lessons focus on language communication rather than repetition of vocabulary, and also address cultural issues. The program can be used in a classroom or lab setting, and can also be used as a self-taught program for improving English skills. One member of the Florida Adult English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Practitioners Taskforce said that the program has been very popular with volunteer and faith-based program because the scripted lessons make it easy for a teacher to use and the materials for the program inexpensive. Libraries in Florida have used state and federal grants to purchase copies of the series, and there is no cost to the state for running the Crossroads Café series on public television.

The Crossroads Café program is also available at some libraries and community colleges in Virginia. In addition, the program is currently being broadcast through the local public broadcasting station in at least one Virginia locality (Harrisonburg). According to staff at the Virginia Department of Education, the Crossroads Café program is useful primarily as a supplement to other forms of English instruction.

Employer Grants for On-Site ESL Classes

In Illinois, state grants are available for employers that want to provide employees the opportunity to learn English at their place of employment. The Illinois Secretary of State's Literacy Office administers the grant program, which has been in place since 1990. Between 1990 and 2004, the amount of grant money available each year was about \$500,000. Employers are required to provide matching funds (100 percent of the grant amount). However, an employee's time away from the job may be counted toward an employer's obligation to match grant funds. Such an approach provides benefits to both the employees and employers.

Bilingual Nursing Assistant Program

Although states and localities are frequently concerned about the cost of providing services for immigrants, immigrants also are capable of fulfilling important needs within the U.S. employment sector, such as the need for more nurses. Educational institutions in states such as Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Texas have created bilingual nursing assistant programs to make use of the immigrant resources. For example, a bilingual nursing assistant program has been in place for three years at the Milwaukee Area Technical College in Wisconsin. The program was made possible through a grant from the Wisconsin Technical College System Office. Students must meet standards in Spanish and English proficiency prior to enrolling. They also must pass a state certification exam, in English, after completing the course. The College tries to insure that students who enroll intend to complete the program by offering a free, optional, pre-technical course for two hours a day for one week prior to classes starting. The Coordinator for the program indicated that the pre-technical course has been successful in keeping attrition low. This program provides a way to serve Spanish speakers in health care settings, while at the same time provides the graduates with higher paying jobs than they may otherwise be able to obtain and typically results in access to employer-based health insurance.

Establishing References for Employment

Often refugees lack work references needed to gain employment in the United States. Volunteering is one way for them to establish references. For some organizations, refugees may be able to fill important niche needs. For example, the Office of Multicultural Services in Minnesota, which provides many services to immigrants, uses refugees as volunteers. The refugees are referred by Minnesota's Refugee Office. For the Office of Multicultural Services, refugees' knowledge of their own cultures and their native language skills are useful in serving other immigrants. And, it provides the refugees with a work reference, which can be used subsequently to obtain paid employment.

Law Enforcement Outreach to Immigrant Communities

According to various law enforcement sources and immigrant groups, immigrants are sometimes seen as targets for criminals because they may fear reporting crime to the police, due to their immigration status or their perceptions of the police in their native countries. Encouraging immigrants to report crimes and educating police officers about this issue, are ways to combat and discourage crime. States with a high number of immigrants, such as Texas, are especially aware of this problem and have taken some steps to address it. For example, in Arlington, Texas, the police department offers a citizens police academy conducted in Spanish. The program is 12 weeks, with meetings once a week. There are two classes each year. According to a representative of the department, interest in the program has been strong and has resulted in improved relations with the Hispanic community.

In addition, the police department has been using television to reach Hispanics and teach them how to avoid becoming victims of crime. The police department created several 90-second segments offering crime-prevention and public-safety tips, based on input from local police officers. The segments, presented in Spanish, are being shown twice a week on the local Spanish-language station. The police department does not pay for the segments. Instead, the local television station has found private sector sponsors to pay for the segments.

Establishment of a Credit Union

According to local police and ethnic leaders, many immigrants do not trust banks in their native countries, and therefore, distrust banks in the United States. Without a bank, these immigrants are especially vulnerable to becoming victims of theft. Providing immigrants with access to financial institutions they trust is one way to address this problem. In Durham, North Carolina, a Latino credit union has been established to meet the needs of its Latino residents. Members of Durham's Latino Community Credit Union benefit from a variety of free and low cost banking services available to them. For example, the credit union teaches (free of charge) financial education classes. The credit union staff also report that they are able to meet the particular needs of their members because all staff are bicultural and bilingual. The similarities between staff and the members serve to establish trust.

Federal "Money Smart" Program

In 2001, the FDIC began distributing to the public free-of-charge a program called "Money Smart." Money Smart is a basic financial education curriculum that consists of ten one-hour sessions. The lessons cover a range of topics, from using checks and understanding credit, to buying a home. The curriculum is scripted and is available now in four languages: English, Spanish, Chinese, and Korean. The low cost, the importance of the content, and the availability of the curriculum in multiple languages make it a valuable tool for helping immigrants to the United States navigate the U.S. financial system and better manage their money. It may also serve to encourage the use of banks among immigrants who may be reluctant to use banks based on experiences in their native countries. The program is available both to organizations and to individuals.

Assisting Victims of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence issues confront individuals of many different backgrounds, but may be especially challenging for women who are unfamiliar with the United States and do not know how to find help or even that help is available. In 2003, the City of New York published a guide called, "Medical Providers' Guide to Managing the Care of Domestic Violence Patients Within a

Cultural Context.” The publication explains the importance of screening patients for domestic violence, provides a roadmap for implementing a domestic violence screening program, and includes a list of community resources. In addition, the guide includes practical exercises and specific advice for doctors in assisting patients who may be victims of domestic violence. The website address is: http://www.nyc.gov/html/ocdv/pdf/providers_dv_guide.pdf.

Provision of Information

Some immigrants arrive in the United States without much knowledge of the community resources most U.S. citizens take for granted, such as how to enroll their children in schools or how to access health care. A number of localities and states have addressed this issue by creating an advisory board or an office of immigrant affairs to serve foreign-born individuals. For example, New York City has a Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs. Its web site provides basic information on employment, public schools, and public benefits. It also has links to other relevant federal and state agencies. The Office acts as a liaison among immigrants, community based organizations, and city agencies. It refers those in need, whether an immigrant, community organization, or city agency, to the appropriate person or resources.

The New Iowan Center is an organization that reportedly has been particularly successful in serving newcomers. Initially, the center was directed at Latinos and focused on employment, but it has since expanded to include 27 programs. The center partners with many service providers and volunteers in the community and offers services on-site, such as classes in English, civics, and banking. Twice a month the center hosts educational seminars on issues such as human rights, labor laws, and buying a home. In addition, the center distributes updates on immigration policies to 47 organizations in the area.

In Missouri, a project called the Missouri Multicultural Network was established based on a recommendation of the Missouri Legislature’s Joint Interim Committee on Immigration. This project is overseen by Missouri Southern State University’s Institute of International Studies. The cornerstone of this project is a web site that provides information on banking, employment, health care, housing, and a range of other services. Partner agencies assist with providing information on the web site and provide additional resources. Many portions of the web site are available in both Spanish and English. In addition, the site includes an online naturalization assistance course. The website address is: <http://mssu.edu/missouri/index.htm>.

Leadership Training

Some immigrants lack the knowledge and skills they need to make their voices heard within organizations or across a broader audience. In a few

localities, an effort is being made to help immigrants gain the skills they need to effectively communicate their needs within their broader communities. For example, a coalition called One Lowell, in Massachusetts recently undertook a project to improve the leadership skills of immigrants. The project involved providing six training sessions for immigrants designed to improve their leadership skills and other related skills. Topics for the sessions included financial management of non-profit organizations, grant writing, public speaking, and working with the media. In another setting, non-profit groups in the area came together to discuss reasons why few immigrants serve on their boards and to identify ways to facilitate their participation. In both Portland, Oregon and Nashville, Tennessee similar projects have been undertaken to develop the leadership skills of recent immigrants. All three projects have been undertaken as part of the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) New Americans project. Additional information on this initiative can be found at: http://www.ncsl.org/programs/immig/community_orr.htm