

**City of Alexandria, Virginia
FY 2024 Proposed Operating Budget & CIP
Budget Questions & Answers**

April 17, 2023

Question:

What would be the cost and benefits associated with creating a multi-lingual office or division of immigration affairs?

Response:

A multi-lingual or multicultural office in other jurisdictions generally services four roles: (1) to build cultural competence within the organization for employees through training and standard operating procedures for language access, (2) to build capacity for language access through access to professional and volunteer interpreters and translators, (3) to support immigrant and refugee communities with immediate needs including civics and English classes (4) to build community and economic empowerment. Our Office of Communication and Public Information recently hired a Language Access Coordinator and is instituting plans to achieve the four roles identified previously. All of the City's language access resources are administered through the Office of Communications and Public Information. Services specifically oriented to foreign born residents are administered through a variety of different departments (e.g., ESL classes through the Alexandria Public Library; job training and placement through the Workforce Development Center), and current central coordination efforts are limited, which may introduce unnecessary and inequitable barriers to access for this vulnerable population.

The Race and Social Equity Officer team in the City Manager's office focuses on collaboration with City departments to evaluate policies, practices, and procedures for institutional and systemic bias that may benefit some residents and not others. Additionally, the team is charged with coordinating with underrepresented groups of population who have not traditionally been involved in government decision making, including non-English speakers and immigrant communities. The goal is to reduce and eliminate disparities and inequities experienced by all residents, especially those in communities of color and other groups who have been historically and systemically marginalized and to ensure current policies are revisited regularly to ensure all Alexandria residents are treated equitably. The benefits of engaging with historically marginalized communities will be in gathering more diverse input around policies that closely impact the livelihood of those groups of population as well as interaction within the larger Alexandria community. Depending on the needs, this function could need to be expanded by a couple of staff over time, costing around \$200,000-\$250,000 on an annual basis.

Immigration affairs resources in other jurisdictions generally serve three roles: (1) to direct foreign born residents, especially for recent immigrants, to support programs and services (e.g., housing, food assistance, social work, language access), (2) to facilitate citizenship and civic integration, and (3) to offer opportunities for foreign born residents to build connections in the community. Serving a foreign born population of over 36,000 individuals (ACS 2021 5-Year Estimates), the City of Alexandria currently offers

many of these resources, but they are not housed centrally. The Department of Community and Human Services, for instance, maintains a webpage detailing the resources, programs, and services available to new immigrants and refugees, including social safety net programs, access to housing, and connections to community partners. Community partners working closely with immigrant populations are Catholic Charities Diocese of Arlington, Catholic Charities Family Reunification Program, Lutheran Social Services, Tenant Workers United, ALIVE!, Dar Al-Hijrah Social Services, and MAP Clinics.

The Office would be principally tasked with coordinating the resources and services that are currently available to immigrants and refugees and creating accessible processes for new international residents to follow in order to cover immediate physical and social needs, to establish themselves economically, and to pursue citizenship. The Office would need at least two full-time staff members described below.

1. An Immigration Affairs officer (\$109,464.96 - \$196,128.75) to manage the office, to keep informed of relevant state and federal events that may impact immigrants and refugees in Alexandria, to sustain internal partnerships with City agencies to coordinate service provision, and to identify/resolve gaps in services for immigrant and refugee communities.

2. An External Partnerships/Community Engagement Specialist (\$60,283.86 - \$106,087.54) to work with community stakeholders (including community-based service providers) to support their work, to avail new resources for immigrants and refugees, and to pursue new partnerships as emergent needs arise.

The Office would also require start-up funds in the amount of \$100,000 to conduct inclusive outreach (e.g., convening community meetings, creating infographics and presentations, in-person and live-streamed events), to facilitate interdepartmental coordination, and to standardize Alexandria's immigration affairs practices with those of other similar jurisdictions. Additional annual operating funds similar to or greater than start-up funds would be necessary to maintain programs and operations for this Office.

NOTE: All estimates are based on the costs for the Office of Climate Action and Governmentjobs.com salary estimates for similar positions.