

# Memorandum



CITY OF DALLAS

DATE January 4, 2023

TO Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

SUBJECT **Engaging Welcoming Taskforce Members and City Departments to Renew the City of Dallas's Certified Welcoming Status**

Workforce Education and Equity Memo

In 2018, the City of Dallas adopted the Resilience Strategy which called for the City to be a Welcoming City as a component of building resilience across our diverse communities of Dallas. Recognized as key part of Dallas' growth and vibrancy, immigrants make up approximately 24% of Dallas population. Immigrants play a critical role in Dallas' economic advancement, making up 30% of the local employed workforce. By becoming a welcoming city, Dallas can continue being a globally competitive world class city.

The City of Dallas has participated in the Certified Welcoming City Program. The [Certified Welcoming City Program](#) is a best in class standard for counties and cities to demonstrate alignment of policies, programs, and partnerships with the research-based standards that promote immigrant and refugee inclusion. As a third-party evaluation, the Certified Welcoming Program ensures that the Office of Equity & Inclusion – Welcoming Communities & Immigrant Affairs Division (OEI-WCIA) is embedding promising practices throughout the implementation of welcoming efforts, which connect with the City's commitment towards empathy, engagement equity, and excellence. The City of Dallas is the first city in the State of Texas to receive certification and has been recognized nationally for advancing welcoming, equity, inclusion and belonging across a wide variety of metrics detailed below.

Through participation in the Certified Welcoming Program, the City of Dallas conducted a self-assessment consisting of 105 criteria and coordinated and hosted a site visit that was conducted by national partner and certification administrator, Welcoming America. Crucial to this process is working with internal City departments Welcoming Taskforce and our community at-large to advance equity and inclusion as a welcoming city.

## **Welcoming Taskforce: Engaging Community Leaders to Promote Immigrant Inclusion**

Community engagement has been foundational for Dallas' progress in becoming a more inclusive and welcoming city. Welcoming efforts began with community members asking local government to play a leadership role in promoting immigrant inclusion. In 2017, the Welcoming Task Force was established to include immigrants and allies from diverse

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backgrounds and sectors including government, safety, health, education, business, faith based and nonprofit. Collaboratively the Welcoming Taskforce has worked with the City of Dallas to develop the Welcoming Dallas Strategic Plan and subsequently support with implementation efforts and provide consultation.

Since the adoption of the Welcoming Dallas Strategic Plan, OEI-WCIA continues to engage Welcoming Taskforce Members by:

- Co-Hosting convenings and events including citizenship information forums & legal workshops, COVID-19 pop-up clinics, cultural dinners, and festivals
- Publishing a weekly email to Welcoming Taskforce Members to share updates from the City, community resources and crowd source support or feedback on issues that impact immigrant residents
- Collaboratively develop tools such as the Welcoming Newcomers Site that increases awareness among Dallas residents about the ways to volunteer or donate for newcomers
- Expanding the City's community outreach efforts to marginalized communities by creating bi-directional communications with community partners. Examples of this work are demonstrated through the Rapid Resilience Grant which worked with promotoras to support recovery efforts from the pandemic and more recently through Chair Schultz's Esperanza District Community Engagement Initiative

Welcoming Taskforce members have been key leaders in all of OEI – WCIA efforts and have been an important part of the Certified Welcoming Audit. To demonstrate Dallas' commitment to Welcoming, City employees and community representatives from the Welcoming Taskforce and other community partners were interviewed by auditors to discuss the City's work since the first audit was conducted.

### **Certified Welcoming Standard**

In order for the City of Dallas to renew its Certified Welcoming status, demonstratable documentation is provided to Welcoming America within each of the core categories. Below are the ways that OEI engaged community leaders to demonstrate alignment with the Certified Welcoming Standard:

**Government Leadership:** In welcoming places, local governments implement systems and programs, such as designating a unit and staff to coordinate immigrant inclusion, that strengthen community efforts and embed inclusion within government agencies.

To demonstrate City of Dallas efforts:

- City Manager T.C. Broadnax and Chief of Staff Genesis Gavino spoke on the City's commitment to equity and welcoming by formalizing the Welcoming Dallas Strategic Plan and continuing investments in partnerships that removed barriers and promoted inclusion for immigrant residents. Welcoming

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America highlighted the City's digital equity efforts as a strength in their preliminary analysis.

- Council Member Jaynie Schultz and Assistant City Manager Liz Cedillo-Pereira shared how the City of Dallas prioritizes equity as an organizational value and works with other City Council Members to review equity issues that impact the City through the Workforce, Education, and Equity Committee
- Dr. Wilson, Dr. Lisa Rainey, Kevin Acosta, Isabel Camacho, and Frances Espinoza represented OEI to discuss efforts to draft the Racial Equity Plan and how immigrant inclusion was included throughout the community engagement and policy development process. Information was also shared about how City of Dallas has been working to reduce housing discrimination and reduce eviction rates among immigrants
- Community partner, The Concilio, were invited to share how the organization works collaboratively to support the City's community engagement efforts among Latino immigrant community to collect feedback utilizing *promotoras* and immigrant community leaders.

**Equitable Access:** Welcoming places work to ensure community services and opportunities are available to all residents, including newcomers. This includes improving access to healthcare, childcare, transportation, and more.

- Community, Outreach and Marketing Director Catherine Cuellar and colleagues, Gonzalo Reyes, Rocio Santos de Jesus with Language Access Coordinator Adriana Portillo shared how the City of Dallas is advancing language access across City departments
- Dr. Lance Rasbridge, Parkland Health's Refugee Outreach Coordinator and Jovelyn Castellanos Parkland Health's Program Coordinator of Constituency Outreach and Community Relations, shared about collaborative efforts to organize a working group focused on hosting COVID-19 pop-up clinics in apartment complexes where immigrants and refugees lived
- Mirjana Omeragic, Senior Director of Refugee and Victim Services from Mosaic Family Services, shared how OEI collaborates with multiple organizations to mobilize a Refugee Mental Health Coalition that increases awareness of mental health supports and best practices for providing services to immigrants.
- Shannon Adams, Community Services Administrator from the Dallas Public Library shared efforts to connect immigrant residents with supports such as ESL and workforce as well as the Enhanced Library Card to provide supplementary identification support for those that have difficulties accessing a state or federal ID

**Civic Engagement:** Welcoming communities actively ensure that residents, including newcomers, fully participate in civic life by increasing access to leadership and democratic spaces.

- Almas Muscatwalla, Director of Dallas Responds shared her experiences as an immigrant serving as a member of the Mayor's Anti- Hate Advisory

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Board as well as working with community residents to establish the Dallas Responds Center for migrants from the southern border who are needing short-term assistance

- Barbara Larkin, Vice President of Voter Services, and Shannon Fitzgerald Board Member and Voter Registration Director from the League of Women Voters demonstrated collaborative efforts to host naturalization ceremonies and to work with the City to register newly sworn US citizens
- Nubia Torres, Director of Immigration Legal Services, and Jessica Hernandez Program Manager from Catholic Charities Dallas and Enrique Polavieja from Immigration Specialist from the International Rescue Committee discussed the partnership with the City to increase access to naturalization for eligible residents to become US citizens

**Connected Communities:** Welcoming communities build connections between newcomers and long-term residents by strengthening relationships, communicating shared values, and promoting a welcoming culture through institutional communications.

- Vanna Slaughter who served previously as the Director of the Office of Welcoming Communities and Immigrant Affairs shared how allies have been influential in supporting welcoming messaging.
- Joel Schwitzer, Regional Director from the American Jewish Committee Dallas discussed partnering with OEI – WCIA to develop the Welcoming Newcomers Site to promote awareness of volunteer and donation opportunities
- Rafael Tamayo, Manager of the Oak Cliff Cultural Center, shared how immigrant artists are invited to lead culture initiatives that increase empathy, connection and celebrate diversity
- Myna Mendez from Las Comadres de Dallas y Mas shared her experiences as an immigrant community leader to collaborate with the City to increase connectivity to information and resources that can improve health and safety in immigrant communities

**Education:** Welcoming communities strive for an educational system that ensures all students have the support they need to succeed in school and the education they need to succeed in the workforce.

- Huseyin Pecker Executive Director from the Dialogue Institute shared how immigrant residents worked with refugee resettlement agencies to provide culturally responsive programming for Afghan youth who recently arrived in Dallas.
- Amairani Espinoza DFW Program Manager from ImmSchools shared how their organization partners with OEI –WCIA to promote educational supports for immigrant youth
- Ricardo Corpus, the Chair of the City of Dallas Youth Commission, talked about his experience serving as a Youth Commissioner to increase

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awareness of opportunities for youth and working with COM to publish the Dallas Youth Magazine

- Rachel Dyussengaliyev, Youth Program Supervisor from the International Rescue Committee shared about collaborative efforts to connect refugee youth with resources, as well as to train Parks and Recreation staff on how to connect with immigrant families

**Economic Development:** Welcoming communities harness the full potential of all residents, including those from other countries who have the skills and assets to thrive, by developing economies that leverage all talents.

- Estefania Ramirez, Digital Equity Coordinator and Hala Hababi, Director of Islamic Center of North America, shared their efforts to promote digital inclusion among immigrants and have been working with the Skilled Immigrant Integration Grant to prioritize digital literacy that supports accessibility to workforce opportunities
- Dr. Dena Owens, Workforce Initiatives Manager from the Small Business Center shared how the City of Dallas works closely with diverse minority chambers of commerce to connect immigrant entrepreneurs with resources to start and grow their businesses, as well as connections to procurement opportunities
- Cruz Correa, Program Manager from the Office of Community Care shared how the City of Dallas contracts with local nonprofit organizations to provide 1:1 financial coaching and wrap around supports for immigrants as they navigate the US banking system
- Noel Mendoza, Community Partnership and Human Trafficking Outreach Coordinator from Mosaic Family Services, Paola Chavez Community Outreach Coordinator from Unbound Now North Texas and Ingrid Guerrero a survivor of human trafficking shared how they partner with the City to address human trafficking among the Dallas immigrant community
- Domingo Castillo, Community Outreach and Resource Planning Specialist, the Department of Labor shared how he collaborates with the City to increase community awareness of worker's rights and to promote safe working conditions

**Safe Communities:** Welcoming communities foster trust and build relationships between residents and law enforcement and safety agencies. This includes training public safety staff on working with diverse communities and more.

- Dallas Police Department Manager Robert Munoz, Sgt. Eddie Reyes, and DPD Community Representative Kimberly Nam all shared how the DPD has implemented community outreach initiatives to support among diverse immigrant communities to build trust and promote awareness of rights
- Travis Houston Assistant Emergency Management Coordinator from Office of Emergency Management shared how OEM has been including interpretation as part of emergency communications process and how OEM

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has connected local nonprofits organizations with federal resources to support migrants arriving from the southern border.

- Shalaina Abioye, Executive Director from the International Rescue Committee shared about the collaborative effort with International Rescue Committee and the Vera Institute of Justice to launch the Dallas SAFE Program which provides defensive legal services for immigrant residents facing deportation

### **Next Steps**

In February 2023, Welcoming America will provide an official audit report with an assessment for the City of Dallas. Along with the guidance of the results of the audit report, ongoing partnerships and community engagement will drive the following areas of focus:

*Language Access:* Welcoming America applauded the City's efforts to expand language access for Spanish speakers and recommended continuing the increasing access for Dallas' language diverse communities

*Citizenship:* For the past three years, the City of Dallas has invested in legal services for eligible residents to apply for US citizenship. Hundreds of residents have received pro-bono legal assistance to file their applications. In becoming a US citizen, Dallas residents benefit both civically and economically, having the right to vote and access to job opportunities with increased pay. We aim to increase the capacity of these formal partnerships to be able to serve growing populations that require extra assistance, especially Dallas' growing refugee population.

*Dallas SAFE Program:* Among deportation cases that began in the last five years (FY2017 – FY2021) in the Dallas Immigration Court, 79 percent do not have legal counsel to assert their legal rights before the immigration judiciary. In response, the City of Dallas established the Dallas SAFE Program to advance universal representation to mitigate the risks caused by detention and give Dallas residents a fighting chance to remain united with their families. In partnership with the Vera Justice Institute and International Rescue Committee, Dallas residents who participate in the Dallas SAFE program receive legal defense as well as wrap-around services such as rental and utility bill assistance and mental health services for their family. More than a third (37 percent) of Dallas's SAFE clients are parents. Currently, the program's biggest challenges include consistent, sustainable, and expanded funding to meet the significant unmet need in Dallas.

*Economic Inclusion:* OEI – WCIA aims to collaborate with internal departments such as the Dallas Public Library and the Small Business Center and community stakeholders to promote economic inclusion for immigrants. Examples of this work include ESL classes, recognizing international licenses and credentials, increasing digital literacy, and promoting supports for immigrant entrepreneurs.

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If you have any questions, please contact ACM Liz Cedillo-Pereira at [liz.cedillopereira@dallas.gov](mailto:liz.cedillopereira@dallas.gov) or Christina da Silva, Welcoming Communities and Immigrant Affairs Division Officer at [christina.dasilva@dallas.gov](mailto:christina.dasilva@dallas.gov)



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