



ANNUAL REPORT

FISCAL YEAR 2020

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- An Overview3
 - Introduction3
 - Mission Statement.....3
 - Governance4
 - Membership4
 - Structure5
- Year Four in Review6
 - Overview6
 - Goals and Action Items6
 - Accomplishments8
 - Related Accomplishments10
- Looking Ahead to Year Five.....11

AN OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Created in 2016, the Maryland Skilled Immigrant Task Force is a consortium of stakeholders that seek to leverage skills that foreign-trained professionals bring to the United States in order to meet local job market demand.

Skilled immigrants are those who have acquired extensive education and/or occupational experience abroad. Many come to Maryland ready to work, offering great benefits to local industry, including global skills, multilingualism, workplace diversity, and cultural knowledge.

Unfortunately, prior to securing employment in their professional fields, skilled immigrants may experience significant challenges including limited English language proficiency, costly credential evaluations of their foreign degrees, complex licensing and recertification processes, lack of professional networks, and lack of knowledge of alternative career pathways.

The Task Force consists of representatives from the Maryland Department of Human Services, the Maryland Department of Labor, community colleges, refugee resettlement agencies, American Job Centers, the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives, and other immigrant-serving organizations. A full list of Task Force organizational members can be found on page 4 and 5.

The Task Force believes that the State of Maryland can lead the way in creating a win-win environment in which immigrants secure jobs matching their professional and educational backgrounds while helping the business community more readily meet its workforce needs.

This report covers year four of the Task Force, from July 2019 through June 2020.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Skilled Immigrant Task Force collaborates across organizations to advance workforce system accessibility and career opportunities for foreign-trained individuals in Maryland.

SKILLED IMMIGRANT DEFINITION

A work-authorized foreign-born and foreign-trained worker with at least (2) years of formal or informal education, training, or on-the-job experience that has led to special skills, training, knowledge, and/or abilities for certain types of work.

GOVERNANCE

The Task Force was co-sponsored by two state agencies: the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Department of Labor (Labor).

DHS is Maryland's primary social service provider, serving more than one million residents annually. Through its 24 local departments of social services and other social programs, DHS aggressively pursues opportunities to assist people in economic need, provides preventive services, and protects vulnerable children and adults. Within DHS' Family Investment Administration is the Maryland Office for Refugees and Asylees (MORA), which provides support and services to federally recognized refugees and other humanitarian immigrants including asylees, certified Victims of Trafficking, Special Immigrant Visa holders from Iraq and Afghanistan, Cuban and Haitian entrants, and certain Amerasians.

MORA has helped more than 40,000 refugees and eligible humanitarian immigrants make Maryland their home through a statewide network of public and private organizations. MORA provides transitional cash assistance, employment services, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes, vocational training, health case management, and other supportive services. MORA partners assist individuals to become independent, contributing members to the national and local economy through a number of transitional services aimed at helping individuals achieve social and economic self-sufficiency. For more information, visit MORA's website at <http://dhs.maryland.gov/maryland-office-for-refugees-and-asylees/>.

Labor is Maryland's job development agency. It supports the economic stability of the state by providing businesses, the workforce, and the consuming public with high-quality, customer-focused regulatory, employment, and training services. Divisions within Labor consist of Occupational and Professional Licensing, Unemployment Insurance, Labor and Industry, the Maryland Racing Commission, and the Division of Workforce Development and Adult Learning (DWDAL).

DWDAL oversees the state's adult education programming (family literacy, GED® preparation, and English as a Second Language) and the American Job Centers (AJCs). DWDAL is responsible for implementing the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) in Maryland. WIOA was signed into law on July 22, 2014, and took effect July 1, 2015. It addresses the needs of both businesses and jobseekers and establishes a workforce system that relies on strong, cross-sector partnerships. The Maryland WIOA State Plan is available here: <http://www.labor.maryland.gov/wdplan/wdstateplan.pdf>.

MORA and DWDAL are co-leads of the Task Force, sharing responsibility for overall governance, including developing strategy, facilitating meetings, inviting partners, and overseeing workgroups.

MEMBERSHIP

The Task Force is a robust network of multi-sector stakeholders, including service providers, educators, and both the public and private sector. Fourth-year membership included representation from the following local, state, and national organizations:

- Anne Arundel Community College
- Baltimore Alliance for Careers in Healthcare
- Baltimore City Community College
- Baltimore City's Mayor's Office of Employment Development

- Baltimore City’s Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs
- Chesapeake College
- Chesapeake Multicultural Resource Center
- Community College of Baltimore County
- Department of Human Services (State of Maryland)
- Department of Labor (State of Maryland)
- Ethiopian Community Development Council
- Howard Community College
- Howard County Library System
- Howard County Office of Workforce Development
- Governor’s Office of Community Initiatives (State of Maryland)
- Governor’s Workforce Development Board (State of Maryland)
- International Rescue Committee
- Latino Economic Development Council
- Literacy Council of Montgomery County
- Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
- Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area
- Montgomery College
- Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services
- Montgomery County Gilchrist Immigrant Resource Center
- Montgomery County Office of Community Partnerships
- Prince George’s Community College
- Employ Prince George’s
- Prince George’s County Department of Social Services
- Upwardly Global
- Welcome Back Center of Suburban Maryland (Latino Health Initiative)
- World Education Services Global Talent Bridge

STRUCTURE

At monthly meetings, stakeholder organizations build relationships, share ideas, and discuss best practices. These meetings primarily take place at DWDAL in Baltimore, Maryland. Several times throughout the year, site tours of organizations throughout the state occur instead of the regular monthly meeting. Since the onset of the COVID pandemic, the monthly meetings were held virtually to continue working on immigrant integration and inclusion and to ensure that the Task Force plays a critical role in providing comprehensive and important health resources for immigrant communities.

In addition to monthly meetings, workgroups consisting of small groups of members work on tackling specific issues. Workgroups are temporary and active for a pre-determined window of time so that participants can gauge their availability based on workload at their primary organization. Deliverables and group goals are clearly outlined on a schedule that is feasible, and the groups are intentionally staffed with appropriate representation from relevant member organizations to ensure that the group can effectively accomplish its task. Workgroups are determined through group discussion during monthly Task Force meetings.

YEAR FOUR IN REVIEW

OVERVIEW

In year four, nine meetings were held. Two of the regularly scheduled monthly meetings were site tours. Site tours took place at IBEW Local 24, a registered apprenticeship sponsor, and the International Rescue Committee in Baltimore, a refugee resettlement agency. At each of these sites, members received a tour of the facility as well as information about services offered. One of the planned site tours was cancelled due to coronavirus-related office closures. Also because of coronavirus, three of the year's meetings were held virtually.

The full member list can be found on page 4 and 5.

In the fall of 2019, the Task Force decided to create new goals and action items. The previous goals and action items were used for both years two and three, and many of the items were accomplished. Therefore, the Task Force used its two meetings in September and October of 2019 to establish the following new goals and action items.

GOALS AND ACTION ITEMS

In order to adhere to the above mission and in accordance with the opinions of Task Force members, the following three goals guided the Task Force in year four:

1. *Partnerships and Visibility*
Strengthen partnerships and increase visibility of the Task Force and of challenges facing skilled immigrants.
2. *Resource Documents and Barrier Reduction*
Develop tangible tools and resources that service providers or job seekers can use to reduce or remove barriers to employment for skilled immigrants.
3. *Business Engagement*
Explore and conceptualize business engagement opportunities that will benefit skilled immigrants and Maryland's business community.

Each goal listed above was connected with a menu of suggested action items. Throughout the year, the Task Force chose action items on which to focus efforts, either by creating a workgroup or having DWDAL or MORA staff fulfill the task. The table below details the goals, potential action items tied to each goal, and accomplishments. Action items highlighted in red indicate progress or completion on that specific item, and those in italics indicate a workgroup was created to address that item. Further information on accomplishments can be found on page 8.

Goals	Potential Action Items	Accomplishments
<p>Goal #1: Partnerships & Visibility</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create a catalog of success stories highlighting how partnerships and resources stemming from the Task Force have increased immigrant integration into Maryland's workforce system 2. Make at least two joint presentations at conferences/convenings regarding cultural competency, language access, and/or Task Force information, partnerships, and resources 3. <i>Expand Task Force membership generally</i> 4. <i>Continue site visits to expand connections among Task Force members and at other relevant organizations to bolster partnerships and referrals</i> 5. Learn about best practices in other states and see how to incorporate these into Maryland 	<p>Presentation opportunities were unfortunately postponed or cancelled due to COVID-19.</p> <p>The Membership Expansion workgroup formed to create a list of potential new members.</p> <p>Two site visits took place during the year; others were put on hold due to COVID-19.</p>
<p>Goal #2: Resource Documents and Barrier Reduction</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Create a Resource Guide comprised of relevant contact and programmatic information to be used by immigrants and distribute copies to relevant organizations statewide</i> 2. <i>Update and further disseminate the previously-created Financial Education Guide</i> 3. Create a career pathways/licensing guide for a specific occupation based on employment data/immigrant needs and disseminate guide accordingly 4. <i>Explore the possibility of hosting career or resource fairs for immigrants</i> 	<p>The Resource Guide workgroup continued work from year three to reformat the original Resource Guide so it was more usable for immigrants.</p> <p>The Financial Education Guide workgroup formed to revamp the existing guide to include more resources and be more user-friendly.</p> <p>Task Force members participated in the African Workforce Resource Fair, hosted by the Governor's Commission on African Affairs.</p>
<p>Goal #3: Business Engagement</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Understand the Maryland Department of Labor's approach to workforce development (Governor's Workforce Development Board, Business Solutions, and, Maryland Business Works)</i> 2. <i>Finalize a document for staff to use regarding international talent and offer talking points to use when discussing skilled immigrants</i> 3. Expand Task Force membership to business-oriented organizations 	<p>The Task Force received presentations on Labor's approach to workforce development.</p> <p>The International Talent workgroup formed to finalize a document highlighting the benefits of hiring New Americans.</p>

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Many of the accomplishments of the Task Force's fourth year were related to specific action items tied to the three goals. A further discussion of these accomplishments can be found below.

Partnerships and Visibility

Task Force members had applied to present at several other conferences, but due to the pandemic all of these were cancelled or postponed to 2021.

The Task Force was also invested in the idea of expanding Task Force membership to organizations not currently represented. The Membership Expansion workgroup was created to look through the current organizational member list and brainstorm what other partners might be an asset to the Task Force.

Site visits were continued in year four to the extent possible given COVID-19. Site tours took place at the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 24, a registered apprenticeship sponsor, and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Baltimore, a refugee resettlement agency. Other planned site tours were put on hold due to COVID-19.



The Task Force toured the IBEW Local 24 which trains qualified candidates to be electricians and technicians through the Joint Apprenticeship Training Committee (JATC) on July 24, 2019. The JATC is the first and oldest Registered Apprenticeship Program in Maryland.

Resource Documents and Barrier Reduction

Within the Resource Documents and Barrier Reduction goal, the Task Force utilized two workgroups to respond to the first two action items. The Resource Guide workgroup, convened in the previous year, worked to revise the existing Resource Guide designed for staff into a more usable and reader-friendly version that could be used by immigrants. After reviewing examples from other states, the group decided on what types of organizations to keep on the resource document. In year four, DWDAL staff worked to finalize, publish and disseminate the document to partners.

In year two of the Task Force, a workgroup convened to create a Financial Education and Services guide. In that year, the workgroup created a brochure detailing various resources related to loans, taxes, fraud, and financial education providers located throughout the state. Initially, it was envisioned that this workgroup would only need two months to focus on a brief update of the guide, to include

checking links and contact information to confirm accuracy. Instead, the workgroup decided that a more substantive overhaul of the guide was needed, to include additional resources, a glossary of key words, less text to ensure readability, particularly for Limited English Proficient individuals, and general reformatting. After finalizing the changes to be made, the graphics team at DHS began working on the updated guide, which will then be shared with Task Force members for additional feedback. This action item will continue into year five of the Task Force.

The fourth action item within this goal focused on barrier reduction. Given the challenges skilled immigrants often face, Task Force members were interested in exploring the idea of hosting career or resource fairs. One of the Task Force organizational members, the Governor's Commission on African Affairs within the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives, decided to host an African Workforce Resource Fair. The goal of this Resource Fair was to ensure African residents in Maryland are informed of available workforce and education resources. Many Task Force organizational members attended the Resource Fair and shared information about workforce services, training programs, adult education classes, and credential evaluation. The Resource Fair was a great success, and many other ethnic commissions within the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives decided that they also wanted to host such events.



The Governor's Commission on African Affairs (GCOAA) Workforce Development and Education Subcommittee hosted their 1st Workforce Resource Fair for the African Community on Friday, December 6, 2019 in the Beacon Room at Bowie State University. From left to right: Jacqueline Acevedo, Supervisor, Montgomery County; Vioenette Velez, Workforce Training Facilitator; Barbara Ebel, Labor Exchange Administrator, Montgomery County; and Aneta Lefterov, Business Service Representative introduced the participants to the public workforce system in Maryland. Photo Credit: Joanne Oport.



A representative from the Skilled Immigrant Task force and member of the Adult Education and Literacy Services staff, Jamie Harris, was at the event to highlight resources made available for the skilled immigrant population in Maryland.

Business Engagement

While business engagement has always been a goal of the Task Force, varied approaches to working with businesses by Task Force members historically led to a lack of clarity on what concrete actions could be taken. When creating the action items for this goal, Task Force members decided that it would be important to more fully understand the various business engagement strategies used at Labor. Through a series of presentations at monthly Task Force meetings, members were given information about the Governor's Workforce Development Board, the DWDAL Business Solutions team, and the DWDAL Maryland Business Works program.

The International Talent workgroup formed to finalize a document highlighting the benefits of hiring New Americans. The workgroup is incorporating the feedback and finalizing the document, which will be published to Labor's website and disseminated to partners.

RELATED ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In addition to the accomplishments directly related to the goals of the Task Force in year four, members continue to recognize the achievement of regularly convening as a group of diverse stakeholders. Through this convening, members continue to become better acquainted with the work of other organizations, paving the way to increased client referrals for needed services and partnership. New Task Force members are invited to share information about their programs and services; two organizations that did so this year are Streetwise Partners, a mentoring organization, and the Maryland CASH Campaign's BankOn Maryland, an initiative to help unbanked and underbanked individuals better access banking services.

In the summer of 2019, DWDAL hired a new New Americans Initiative Coordinator whose role is dedicated to co-leading the Task Force. DWDAL and MORA staff participated in the Office of New Americans network, led by WES Global Talent Bridge and New American Economy.

Also in year four, DWDAL updated [the Language Access Plan \(LAP\)](#), the document guiding everything related to language access for DWDAL and the Division of Unemployment Insurance. This important plan is written in accordance with Section 188 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) (nondiscrimination), Maryland law, and Labor's Office of Fair Practices draft Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Plan. The LAP is updated every two years to include any new data and promising practices. Task Force members were able to provide input on the LAP prior to it taking effect. An accompanying resource guide and presentation were created to assist Labor staff in implementing the LAP.

Task Force members also continued to be informed of other relevant DWDAL policy drafts and discussions and were offered the opportunity to attend stakeholder policy sessions and provide feedback during public comment periods.

In the fall of 2019, DWDAL staff created and presented all-day trainings to all Correctional Education staff throughout the state. The trainings focused on cultural competency and included information about implicit bias, cultural competency in the classroom, and best practices when working with LEP individuals.

Due to unprecedented challenges with the COVID-19 pandemic and the Governor's "Stay-home-orders," the Task Force transitioned to monthly virtual meetings in May 2020.

LOOKING AHEAD TO YEAR FIVE

Several projects which began in year four will continue to year five, including the creation of a final International Talent one-pager and a Resource Guide for New American Job Seekers. In year five, there will be new action items including:

- Creating a catalog of success stories highlighting how partnerships and resources stemming from the Task Force have increased immigrant integration into Maryland's workforce system;
- Providing at least two joint presentations at conferences/convenings regarding cultural competency, language access, and/or Task Force information, partnerships, and resources which can be virtual or in-person due to the current circumstances and the uncertainty surrounding the coronavirus outbreak;
- Publishing a career pathways/licensing guide for a specific occupation/industry based on employment data and immigrant needs, and disseminate the guide accordingly;
- Interviewing employers to talk about the many benefits of hiring internationally trained individuals and honoring the employer(s) champion of hiring foreign trained professionals; and
- Exploring a possibility of hosting a career fair.

In addition, Maryland will continue its work with the Office of New Americans State Network and the Skilled Immigrant Integration Program (SIIP) Alumni Network to stay informed of best practices in other states.