Connecting Service Providers to Engage the Region’s Immigrants

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Executive Summary

Approximately one in five residents of the Washington Metropolitan Region (the region) is foreign born and, like all residents, require access to the services provided by local governments. Conversely, local governments have an obligation to provide and make sure all services are available to all residents. Local service providers are doing their utmost to meet the immigrants' needs, but are, for the most part, working alone and without the benefit of information regarding what other localities are doing to manage these issues. Currently, there is no regional resource that connects local governments, non-profit organizations and faith based groups to each other for the purpose of serving this population. As we met with service providers, we heard repeatedly that regional information for service providers is nonexistent, ineffective and inaccessible and that they have a critical need for that type of resource. Each organization/locality must devise a plan for reaching the community and tackling each new issue independently.

In an effort to be most effective and timely, service providers are looking for a mechanism to share and consolidate information and lessons learned to best service the immigrants of the region. Our team proposes a web portal to act as a single information resource for these service providers. Notice that we use the term portal and not web site. The portal would be an actively updated resource and two-way communication tool. The portal is the optimal solution because it is:

A) Cost effective
   a. Less costly and more effective than mailings
   b. Data is current

B) Easy to administer
   a. Set up the site to push data to twitter, Facebook etc.
   b. Grab data from other web sites

C) Easy to use
   a. Information available on phone, laptop
   b. Familiar tool

D) Accessible
   a. 24 hour availability
   b. Take the site into the community to support ground efforts

E) Consolidated
   a. Organizations can post best practice information on the site
   b. Single resource for all information needed to serve the immigrant population.
Providers would have the ability to upload and search for best practice information from the varied service providers' organizations enabling the region’s service providers to more effectively serve the immigrant client. Information sharing would eliminate duplication of effort, enhance the quality of information provided to immigrants and reduce the response time required by duplicative research to allow assistance of an even greater number of immigrants. Additionally, in a financial climate where all organizations are doing more with less, providing a regional resource would optimize the efficiency and effectiveness of staff in addressing immigrants’ concerns and increase the satisfaction of immigrants due to the decreased response time.

Ensuring that immigrants are well served will benefit the region. Actively engaging immigrants stimulates the economy, improves health and safety for all and promotes civic engagement which is a necessary element to any vibrant and thriving community. Further, immigration reform is coming! Having the portal ready, available and capable of sharing and disseminating critical reform information ensures the region can proactively address the legislation’s requirements and needs of an active and growing immigrant community. Lastly, while the thrust of our efforts surrounds the immigrant population, this portal would provide information beneficial to all of the region's residents.
The Problem

Regional and local information for service providers is often ineffective, siloed, and inaccessible. Local governments can be very program specific and lack broad, regional knowledge. With reduced funding, local governments are limited in resources and do not have the capacity to train and sustain training for all front line staff. Regional and local governments working collaboratively have better knowledge and skills sets by combining their resource pools to identify the needs of the immigrant population.

Communication is broken between the immigrant community and government. In some situations, the immigrant groups are hard to reach, lack trust or have language barriers. Governments have difficulty reaching these immigrant groups who, in turn, may not know how to navigate the complexities of government to access services. Approximately 1 in 5, residents of the Washington Metropolitan area is foreign born. Forty percent come from Latin America, 36% come from Asia, 14% come from Africa and 9% come from Europe. The percentage is growing rapidly. The Washington DC region is 7th in the nation for top immigrant-receiving communities. Projections estimate that net immigration levels, nationally, will rise to 1.2 million a year in 2060 from 725,000 in 2012.

The immigrant communities of the region are a big part of the economy. Twenty eight (28) percent of immigrant population is employed and they make up 27% of the labor force. The inability to engage and provide services to this population restricts the full growth potential of region’s economy. Immigration reform is coming and will likely increase the demand for services.

Problem Statement

There is no regional resource to connect local government employees and other stakeholders to our local residents from hundreds of different cultures and countries who are a part of our communities but not enjoying the full range of services available to them. This problem has negative implications for our region’s immigrants and the service providers (faith based, non-profit, etc.) who attempt to assist them, but also local governments, businesses, and citizenry in general.

Initial Context
Our team was tasked with “Looking at Multiple Approaches to Immigration and Integration.” We reviewed a variety of data was researched and interviewed a number of local government employees and stakeholder organizations within the Washington DC Metropolitan region and throughout the country. The stakeholders and government employees represented a diverse group consisting of individuals from human services agencies, health departments, public schools, faith-based organizations community based nonprofits, business communities, appointed and elected officials and members of the immigrant community. Some of the municipal jurisdictions we researched were New York City, Fairfax County, Montgomery County, City of Manassas, Prince Georges County, Los Angeles – Long Beach County and the City of Fairfax.

In Long Beach, California, the county government staff communicates with the immigrant community through building relationships to establish trust. They seek input and provide opportunities for community members to actively participate in the planning and development of many of their programs.

In Fairfax County, one of the agencies uses what is described as a “Community Ambassador Model.” County government staff work with individual volunteers in community organizations that have very low turnover and build long term trusted relationships with the immigrant community. They capitalize on the volunteer organization’s social capital by using the individuals within these volunteer organizations to facilitate communication with the immigrant community.

In Montgomery County, the county government provides funding to cultural hubs that provide services to specific immigrant populations. The organizations are part of a network that provides services, information and information exchange amongst other non-profits.

Based on our research, we discovered a variety of jurisdictional approaches that appeared to be effective, but the approaches are not being shared throughout the region. This led us to conclude that information from service providers is ineffective, siloed, and inaccessible. Immigrants do not see borders; they see the Metropolitan Washington Area as one region and immigrants live, work and play throughout this region. Therefore, when trying to meet the needs of the immigrant population effectively, local governments must think regionally.
Scope, Methodology, and Research Summary

Scope

The size, diversity, and issues facing the region’s immigrant community and their relationship with local governments is immense and determining the scope of the project was a challenge for the team. The process of conducting research assisted the team in determining the scope of the issue and assisted in the development of our proposed solution.

The team initially had to determine whether we were going to focus on a single immigrant issue (i.e. Impact of Secure Communities on undocumented immigrants, Domestic Violence within Immigrant Cultures, or the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Bill), a specific immigrant community, or the immigrant community as a whole. As the team conducted preliminary research, it became apparent that it would be most prudent to include all immigrant communities as this allowed the potential for the broadest impact. The team discovered early in the research process that the scope should focus on the relationships between immigrant related stakeholders (i.e. non-profits, faith-based community, etc.) and the local governments versus the immigrant community directly.

By narrowing the scope specifically on the relationships and communication amongst the local regional governments with the foreign born residents, immigrant related stakeholders with the foreign born residents, and the local regional governments with the immigrant related stakeholders, the team was able to conduct its research with a clearer sense of mission to propose a solution.

Methodology

The team conducted this research utilizing the following methods:

- Primary Resources:
  - United States Census Bureau Data
  - Academic Reports on Immigrant Communities and Issues
• http://www.inforum.umd.edu/mdimmigration/content/md_immigration_commission_finalreport.pdf
• http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411986_community_based_organizations.pdf
• http://nationalhispanicleadership.org/agenda/
• http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Digital-differences.aspx
• http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2004/02/demographics-singer
• http://cra.gmu.edu/pdfs/research_reports/recent_reports/PopulationChangeintheWashingtonMetropolitanArea.pdf
• Top 10 arguments for Immigration Reform, Pauline Hovey, Catholic Herald, May 2-8, 2012
  o Websites of local governments (both local and other jurisdictions from across the nation)
• Interviews
  o Hispanic/Latino Community
    ▪ Sen. Victor Ramirez
    ▪ Del. Joselyn Pene-Meylnck
    ▪ Casa de Maryland
  o African Community:
    ▪ Ethiopian Community Development Council
  o Asian/Indian Community:
    ▪ Amy Trang – Fairfax County Agency on Aging
  o Multiple Immigrant Community Service Providers
    ▪ Montgomery’s County’s Gilchrist Center for Cultural Diversity
    ▪ Deborah Coram, Manager Civil Rights – Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority
    ▪ Corrine Remy, Workforce Compliance Officer, Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority
Throughout the research phase, the team would conduct weekly conference calls and shared notes to update one another upon their research and guide the team toward its specific solution.

Research Summary

Census Data

From Immigrants in the Washington DC Metropolitan Area Labor Market, Sonia Sousa, Ph.D. & Xiaochu Hu, George Mason University Center for Regional Analysis, September 2012:

The majority of the foreign-born population in the Washington DC metro area is from Latin America and Asia. However, compared to the national average, the African and Asian-born immigrant communities are highly represented in the region. Forty percent of the region’s foreign-born population is from Latin America, followed by Asia (36 percent), Africa (14 percent), and Europe (9 percent).

About 40 percent of the DC metro area’s foreign-born population arrived in the US in the last decade (2000s). The median length of stay in the US for foreign-born individuals living in this region is 13 years. However, only three percent of the region’s immigrants have arrived directly from abroad within the last year; eight percent relocated into the region from other locations in the US over the last year; and 89 percent have been living in the region since at least one year ago. About 45 percent of the region’s immigrants are US citizens by naturalization.

Immigrants in the Washington DC metro area tend to have lower levels of education than the native-born population. However, the region has a very high share of college-educated immigrants compared to the rest of the country. Of the region’s foreign-born population aged 25 years or over, 22 percent has less than a high school diploma (native population: six percent), and 40 percent has a bachelor’s degree or higher
(native population: 49 percent). About 40 percent of the region’s foreign-born population has limited English proficiency.

Immigrants are overly represented in the DC metro area’s labor force, especially as self-employed and private sector workers. In 2010, about 1.2 million of the Washington DC metro area’s population is foreign-born, accounting for 21 percent of the region’s total population, 26 percent of the working age population, 27 percent of the labor force, and 28 percent of the employed population. About one third of the region’s private sector and self-employed workers is foreign-born.

Immigrant workers are concentrated in different industries than native-born workers. The region’s foreign-born workforce is overly represented in the Construction and in the Recreation and Hospitality industries, as compared with the native-born population. Foreign-born workers are less likely to work in the Professional and Science and Technology Services, Public Administration, and Educational Services sectors compared to native-born workers.

Immigrants’ total earnings are lower than that of native workers, on average, but there are considerable differences depending, for example, on the immigrants’ place of origin.

The region’s foreign-born population generates a total income of about $45.4 billion, or 20 percent of the region’s total income. It is responsible for $41.4 billion of earnings, or 21 percent of the region’s total earnings. The foreign-born population generates $1.8 billion of self-employment income, or 23 percent of the region’s total self-employment income.

The median annual full-time, year-round earnings of an immigrant worker is about $42,000, below the $65,000 average for their native-born counterparts. The median household income for households with a foreign-born head is about $71,700, compared with $88,000 for the native-born households. Asian- and European-born immigrant households have median earnings and median incomes similar to that of the native-born. Latin American-born immigrants have median earnings about half of the native-born figure and their median household incomes are only two-thirds of that for the native-born.
Interview Summaries

Maryland

Maryland Senator Victor Ramirez (D-47):

Since 2003, Maryland State Senator Victor has represented District 47, eight years as a Delegate, and now as State Senator. Senator Ramirez serves as Deputy Majority Whip and was on both the Judiciary and Ways and Means Committees. He currently serves on the Senate Finance Committee, and is a member of the Maryland Educators Caucus and the Maryland Veterans Caucus. He was the lead sponsor of the Maryland DREAM Act which passed in the 2011 Legislative Session.

In an interview, Senator Ramirez cited the need for more engagement of the immigrant communities, and specifically the first generation immigrant community. Within the Senator’s District, there is a distrust of the government due to oppressive deportations from the federal government’s “Secure Communities” program. In 2010, Prince George’s County was second in the nation in non-criminal deportations per capita.

To improve the relationship and trust between the immigrant communities and local government, Senator Ramirez advocated for Prince George’s County Executive Rushern L. Baker, III to create a position of an executive level immigrant advocate in the Office of the County Executive as well as a Task Force on New Immigrants in Prince George’s County. County Executive Baker agreed to create these positions in October 2013.

Casa de Maryland

CASA de Maryland (CASA) is a community organization that was founded in 1985 by Central American refugees and North Americans. CASA was created in response to the human needs of the thousands of Central Americans arriving in the D.C. area after fleeing wars and civil strife in their countries of origin.
CASA's primary mission is to work with the community to improve the quality of life and fight for equal treatment and full access to resources and opportunities for low-income Latinos and their families. CASA also works with other low-income immigrant communities and organizations, makes its programs and activities available to them, and advocates for social, political, and economic justice for all low-income individuals.

George Escobar, CASA Director of Outreach, Kim Propeack, CASA Director of Public Relations, and Delegate Joselyn Pene-Meylnck were interviewed. CASA discussed that the pending driver’s license legislation (to allow undocumented to hold Maryland license) will have a big impact on local governments as well as their belief that federal immigration reform will radically change the demand for local services, both with increased numbers of residents looking for service, and in revenue increases from undocumented workers’ taxes going back to the municipalities where they live, instead of the state’s general fund. Furthermore they also discussed the number of licensed child care providers may increase substantially (and this is very much needed) as residents can become documented.

CASA explained that permitting issues are a big problem because new residents do not understand the need for permits for building and other activities and established residents report permit violations as a way to clean up their neighborhoods and/or drive immigrants out. There is a real need for education in this area.

CASA also mentioned that there is an enormous regional planning process needed around these issues, one that regional leaders may not be especially focused on. They also stressed that if there is as few as 3% of the people you are trying to serve speak only another language, then you must provide services in that language.

CASA recommended regional coordination of language access to local governments, especially for unusual languages such as Urdu. It is difficult and expensive to serve small numbers of speakers of other languages; MWCOG could provide a regional resource with some economy of scale.

CASA also supported MWCOG hosting a website with resources such as information, contacts, health and medical providers who speak other languages, legal services for
immigrants, permitting information, public works information (e.g., when, how, and where to put out the trash), transportation and transit education, Housing information—where to find it, how to maintain it, and education resources, especially outside of K – 12. They felt a website could be a valuable resources where front line municipal staff could go to exchange information and for individual employees to navigate through available resources.

**Gilchrist Center for Cultural Diversity:**

Montgomery County’s Gilchrist Center for Cultural Diversity provides activities and services to the County’s diverse community and functions as a central point of contact for residents to County and other community services. It is committed to working closely with government agencies, community organizations and individual residents to ensure high customer service and to meet the needs of this very diverse community. The interview took place with Karla Silvestre, Director for the Gilchrist Center.

Ms. Silvestre noted that getting word out to immigrants is a huge issue that all struggle with. They are only one county agency; immigrants often referred by another group, for example Catholic Charities. They are part of a network of groups supplying services and information including lots of information exchange amongst other non-profits

Ms. Silvestre sees their role as leaders in a two-way referral process that includes communication with immigrants such as by attending community events, utilizing County cable channel and 3-1-1 services, participating in Spanish language radio show, etc. The Center is viewed as trustworthy by the immigrant community and works closely with community based organizations.

Ms. Silvestre noted that if the outreach workers are seen as friendly, open and speak the language, the immigrants will find the government services. Unfortunately, getting message out of available services is not just an immigrant issue, local governments have similar problem with native residents as well.

Finally, Ms. Silvestre recommended the use of smart phones as the best way to reach immigrant communities. According to a Pew Center Research, there is an astounding and growing number of immigrants utilizing smart phone technology.
Virginia

Liberty’s Promise

Based in Alexandria, VA but serving the metropolitan Washington Region, Liberty’s Promise supports young immigrants in need while encouraging them to be active and conscientious American citizens. Their programs aim to make the immigrant experience an affirmative one for young newcomers while instilling in them a sense of pride and support for American ideals of democracy and freedom.

We interviewed Executive Director Dr. Robert M. Ponichtera and staff members Nikki Dompke and Allison Bouley. Dr. Ponichtera noted that what non-profits that work with the immigrant communities need most from local governments is more support in terms of providing funding and assistance in helping to find funding. He indicated that non-profits are only as strong as those who invest in them. He promoted Liberty’s Promise as a proven effective and efficient small non-profit that if invested in could exponentially multiple their impact on our immigrant communities.

Dr. Ponichtera also discussed how Liberty’s Promise works collaboratively with other non-profits and believes that the interaction and communication amongst the immigrant serving stake-holders and with the local governments is very functional. However, he reiterated that improved service to immigrant citizens will only come about with financial investment.

Fairfax County - Public Schools Department of Communications and Community Outreach

The Family and Schools Partnership operates under the Department of Communications and Community Outreach within the Fairfax County Public Schools. The mission of Family and School Partnerships is to connect, strengthen, and support Fairfax County’s families, schools, and community by providing programs, resources, and services that promote student success in school and in life. The Family and School Partnerships unit provides programs to enhance understanding of cultural backgrounds of families in Fairfax County. The interview took place via the phone with Ann Ulmschneider who is a member of the Family Involvement Team with the Family and School Partnership unit.
Ms. Ulmschneider discussed how culturally diverse the student population of the Fairfax County System is and how they have staff members that have lived and studied in many different countries, speak a variety of languages, and bring a wealth of experience and expertise to their presentations. Their program formats include panel presentations and facilitated discussions customized to meet the needs of the audience. Their clients include schools, businesses, and community groups. The program allows the participants to explore cultural values and practices that affect families and student achievement. Multicultural panels typically include people from African, Asian, European, Hispanic, and Middle Eastern heritages. A 90-minute presentation includes time for audience questions and discussion.

In addition to the multicultural programs and panel discussions, she discussed two examples of family services they offer. The Community Liaisons are Bi-lingual and support student registrars by talking with parents and determining if they have any needs that go beyond registering their child for school and work with county government offices and other service providers to connect them with resources such as transportation, housing, health, food etcetera. Community Liaisons help parents learn the necessary skills to empower them as advocates for their children by successfully navigating FCPS and Fairfax County government offices. The other is the Parent Liaison Program. Parent liaisons serve as a link between families and schools. They are comprised of individuals from a variety of cultures, languages, and races and support the school’s effort to enhance family involvement. They assist with family-school communication, which empowers families to become more active partners in their children’s education. Parent liaisons work in the schools and community to help families get the information and assistance they need to support their children at home and to ensure their academic success.

Fairfax County - Strategic Performance Management & Community Capacity Building Division

The work of the Strategic Performance Management & Community Capacity Building (CSIPM) Unit is a direct outgrowth from the Fairfax County’s efforts to learn from the nonprofit community, the business community, and county staff in order to develop a community/county vision for nonprofit capacity building. This “Listening Project” described the current status of nonprofit partners in Fairfax County and helped frame the county’s role in nonprofit capacity building. Therefore, this unit is tasked with designing, managing and implementing strategies/projects that will prepare nonprofits and community based providers to better support county initiatives and fill critical gaps in county human services.
In an interview conducted with Telly Whitfield, Strategic Performance and Nonprofit Capacity Manager, and Terry Reardon, Administrative Assistant IV, they were asked to explain some of the tools they use to communicate with the, nonprofit community, business community, faith base community and county staff in developing a community/county vision for nonprofit capacity building. They explained that they utilize a portal using SharePoint that is set up through the county IT department. It allows them to have on going communications, update project specifics and conversations using discussion boards with their partners. They discussed how they thought it could be an effective communication tool for county service providers and other partners within the county to use but weren’t sure if this portal could be expanded to support regional partners.

In addition, they informed us of a new website under construction named “Connect Northern Virginia” that might have similar components. This website will be able to recruit nonprofits to become members, connect nonprofits with funders, have mapping functions and provide other organizations like your own opportunities to collaborate with.

Fairfax County - Family Services Area Agency on Aging

In Fairfax County the mission of the Family Service Agencies are to promote the well-being of diverse communities by protecting and improving the lives of children, adults and families through advocacy, education and effective supportive services. We interviewed Amy Trang, PhD, a Multicultural and Community Planner for the Area Agency on Aging.

Dr. Trang noted that getting the information out to the immigrant community is frustrating at times because some policies and red tape prohibit staff from assisting and sharing resources with other departments. In addition, many in local government do not understand the different nuances within the immigrant communities and cultures. Although, over the years, her outreach efforts have been successful through what is she described as a modification of the Community Ambassador Model. The Community Ambassador Model, which she learned at a conference, provides the opportunity for two way communications between the immigrant community and county government staff.

County government staff works with individual volunteers in community organizations that work with specific immigrant populations. All of these organizations have very low
turnover because most are not funded by grants and have built long term trusted relationships within the immigrant community. The organizations have core group members who are their liaisons that pass messages out to the community through various communication channels such as word of mouth, radio in their language, social network, TV, etc… She feels this model is easy to implement because of the number of established community based organizations that share the same language and culture. The county agency capitalizes on the volunteer organization’s social capital by using the individuals within these volunteer organizations to facilitate communication with the immigrant community.

Arlington County/Washington DC – Ethiopian Community Development Council, Inc.

An interview took place with Sara Zullo, Special Program Officer with ECDC. She shared that localities are knowledgeable about the Hispanic population but they don’t have the knowledge or capacity to serve the clients ECDC sees. The language line helps tremendously. E-mails many times do not work for outreach. Door to door works well. When it comes to legal status, refugees are different than an immigrant. Africans are not coming as much as in the past. Their agency sees people coming from Burma, Nepal, Iraq, Iran, Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Congo and Afghanistan. They expect to have an influx of Syrians this year. When refugees come they have an I-94 green card. Many of them are looking for affordable housing. They may also be looking for places of worship, ethnic restaurants and local radio stations for news. These are all good ways to reach this community. They may have needs such as knowing what an I-94 is. Another point that people should remember is that immigration reform will not work for refugees as they are already legal. Once a person comes then they are able to sponsor the whole family.

Localities do not have a strong knowledge of immigration documents. People who work in social services are the most knowledgeable as they have worked with food stamps and other programs. The DMV is another example. In her opinion, all of the localities have good aspects. Maryland has better social services because of the public private partnership program for refugees.
Dar Al-Hijrah Mosque

This mosque is located in Falls Church in Fairfax County. Worshipers come from all over the region. The interview took place with staff at the mosque who conduct outreach. Staff stated that there is a social services component including a WIC office on site. There is also a Quranic school on site.

Washington, DC

Washington Metro

Interviews took place with Deborah Coram, Manager Civil Rights and Corrine Remy, Workforce Compliance Officer. They indicated that each ethnic group has to be appealed to in a particular way to participate. This depends on their individual culture. Their leaders need to play a role in encouraging their participation. Asian groups tend to be the hardest to get out; they tend to be self-sufficient and isolated. Hispanics come out but if they hear “government” it may provoke hesitation. Many feel they cannot trust government—either in their own country or here. However, involving credible leaders in the outreach effort can help overcome this resistance. (Example: to get Spanish speakers to a bus meeting we asked the priest to make an announcement at Sunday church. Attendance was very high—the meeting was held on church property right after Mass with encouragement for people to attend.)

Events that are held in churches, at health fairs, and any place that participants can also bring their children and the kids have something to do, are often better attended. You have to go where the people are to reach them. Take your own employees who are part of the community and speak the language (Metro has set up a pool of employees who speak other languages—a language resource team). COG has a Local Government Language Committee. DC has its own Language Access Law. If you get Federal financial assistance, you are subject to Title VI requirements (it is not just for transit)

The discussion included several suggestions on what the immigration project could do:

1. Hold a forum
2. Identify leaders in immigrant communities
3. Relationship building in immigrant communities

4. Pool regional resources for outreach

5. Pool regional resources to hire a consultant to develop an outreach plan

6. Survey the local communities to find out what their needs are

7. Develop a tool kit of community-based organizations and what they do

New York City

New York City - Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs

Building on its Charter mandate, the New York City Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) promotes the well-being of immigrant communities by recommending policies and programs that facilitate successful integration of immigrant New Yorkers into the civic, economic, and cultural life of the City. The interview took place via phone with New York City Commissioner of Immigrant Affairs’ Fatima Shama and her senior staff members.

MOIA explained that the support for their work with the city’s immigrants is a direct result of the support and leadership of Mayor Bloomberg. They explained that their office serves as a resource as much to the city’s agencies, departments, and immigrant related non-profits more than their direct impact on the immigrants themselves.

MOIA also explained their One NYC One Nation blueprint. Through strategic partnerships, One NYC brings together the City’s philanthropic, government and community leadership to leverage resources, programs and opportunities that strengthen immigrant communities. The initiative targets key audiences, especially new and emerging immigrant communities, to build their capacity, form city-community partnerships and ensure access to key resources, programs and government services.

MOIA informed the team that they did not have much regional collaboration with their neighbors (New Jersey, Connecticut, Long Island, Westchester County, etc.) regarding serving the immigrant community of their metropolitan region. They were very interested that MWCOG was approaching this issue from a regional perspective.
Criteria

Based upon the information gathered from our research the team identified twelve key criteria that we believe are critical to effectively addressing the problem. We then used these criteria to evaluate the viability of the most promising potential solutions. The twelve criteria were:

1. Cost
2. Two-way communication is possible
3. Gets information out about government services
4. Has Regional impact
5. Provides information in multiple languages
6. Broad reach
7. Easy to use
8. Easy to keep current
9. Easy to maintain
10. Easy to start up
11. Easy to reach providers
12. Easy to reach recipients

Alternatives

On the basis of our research regarding the current and potential needs, and existing and potential approaches to address the problem the team identified five alternative courses of action. There five possible solutions showed potential to address the issue of providing access to information so that service providers can work to remove immigrants from isolation and move them to becoming engaged with their community. The five alternatives were:

- Establish a regional web portal
- Publish a monthly newsletter
- Establishment of the community advisor method of outreach (door to door volunteers from the community to the community)
- Using shared community events such as soccer games, festivals and worship services to provide information and service.
- Establish an Office of Immigrant Affairs at MWCOG.
Alternatives Assessment Process

Once the 5 potential solutions were identified the team evaluated each alternative on its projected impact on each of the criteria, if that alternative were to be implemented. The evaluations were made on a 1-4 scale with 1 being “low impact” and 4 being “high impact”. The results of the alternative evaluation process can be found in Alternative Assessment Matrix on the following page.

After analyzing and developing the developed criteria the team then applied these criteria to several possible solutions. These include:

- Monthly newsletter
- Establishment of a community advisor outreach program
- Outreach at community events
- Developing Web Portal
- MWCOG Immigrant Affairs Office
## Alternatives Assessment Matrix

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<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Option</th>
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<th>Community Advisors</th>
<th>Community Events</th>
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<td>Easy to reach recipients</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>29</strong></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>24</strong></td>
<td><strong>45</strong></td>
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*4=High; 3=Medium; 2=Moderate; 1=Low*
Summary of Alternatives Assessment and Recommendation Choice

Once the alternatives were evaluated against the criteria the team discussed the findings and ultimately decided that the regional web portal was the best option. The discussion of the various alternatives is summarized below.

Monthly newsletter – this option would require a large budget to cover postage and cost of supplies. However the largest cost would be for staff to actually prepare the mailings and send them out. In the City of Falls Church, the Housing and Human Services Department receives probably 20 newsletters a month. If they are paper no one really takes the time to read them. If they are an electronic version sent through e-mail the size of the document is so large that most staff has to delete them before they are read to free up space in their computer system. An example of a regional newsletter that works well is the Housing Association on Non-profit Developers (HAND) organization monthly newsletter. The reach is all three jurisdictions and the topics are of interest to all of the readers. However the newsletter has several staff and contributors that make it the outstanding product that it is.

Community Advisor/Ambassadors – In several counties there are community advisor programs where neighborhood residents are giving training on County or City programs along with some leadership training. The goal is that they will then go out and become ambassadors in their communities. According to the Arlington County website, the “Neighborhood College” is a free eight-session program that takes place every year. Participants learn how various County departments operate and what services the county government provides, as well as gain and sharpen communication, coalition-building and networking skills that will help them become more effective community activists and leaders. Fairfax County also has a similar program called “the Visit Fairfax Ambassador Program” which is specifically targeted to employees in the hospitality field. Ambassador training is offered to any Fairfax County hospitality employee. These sessions have a curriculum designed to educate county hospitality employees on how to enhance the overall Fairfax County visitor experience. Twice a year Ambassadors travel around the County on a free tour to visit the sites learned about in the training. They then can share this information with county residents and visitors when they come. Prince Georges County, Maryland used a similar type of approach when getting resident feedback and engagement during the process to develop the County’s new vision “Envision Prince Georges”. Residents were trained how to go into the community and gather feedback in the countywide public engagement and collaboration effort.
In order for the community advisor program model to be effective all of these counties have dedicated staff and resources to oversee and manage the program. They are also available to provide guidance to participants. Volunteer instructors are recruited to come teach modules of information to participants. Classroom space is usually donated. Participants receive a substantial workbook that is a resource on county information.

Community Events – There are many of these in the region that provide excellent opportunities to conduct outreach to targeted populations. Many of these are annual and have participation in the thousands. Some of the largest in the area include:

- “Chinese New Year Festival” which is held annually (January/February) in Washington, DC’s China town area. It includes a large parade and performances.
- “Cinco de Mayo Festival” which is held annually in May and includes activities and food and is geared toward families. This festival which is Mexican in origin also holds a “Latin American Family Reunion “on the national mall.
- “Fiesta Asia” is an annual street fair held in May for Asian Pacific Heritage Month is part of a city sponsored program “passport DC”. This event is unique in that host a multicultural marketplace and showcases Asian art.
- “Pan African Festival” held annually in Silver Spring Maryland celebrates the culture of all African countries and features a dance competition and performances.
- “Festival Latinoamericano” is an annual festival held in March for Hispanic Heritage month in Arlington County. It has a large contingent of community organizations and has many activities and performances. Arlington has one of largest El Salvadoran and Peruvian populations in the country which are represented here.

A major benefit of these festivals is the large attendance and that they are culturally specific thereby giving agencies the ability to target specific communities. Participation may also be scheduled on a regular annual basis. A draw-back is that resources would have to be designated to translate outreach materials. In addition, staff would need to attend the event and possibly work at a table designated for community organizations (many times there are rental cost attached) or to circulate amongst the crowd.
MWCOG Immigrant Affairs Office - This would be a department with a specific purpose of conducting research on immigrants and programs serving immigrants in the region. Regional contributions would fund the staff needed to operate the department. The department would also sponsor a monthly meeting of service providers, localities and advocates. The mission of this group would be to work in partnership to identify areas of need and ways to address them. Annually the department would produce and make available reports on immigrant issues. This would be particularly useful when determining regional impacts from new legislation such as upcoming immigration reform. This office would also be instrumental in the team’s recommended solution.

Regional Consolidated Web Portal - Websites can be quickly updated with information targeted towards immigrants and can be sent out to other service providers, governments and non-profits. All of the information that would normally be printed in a newsletter or passed out at a community event can be posted on the site. It can act as a hub to facilitate interacting and servicing the immigrant client.

There are several examples of effective regional websites that do a good job at this. Currently George Mason University has established Connect Northern Virginia, a new website that helps bring together businesses, government agencies, nonprofits, and the broader public in an effort to strengthen the region. According to the website, “Connect Northern Virginia, is an example of cross-sector collaboration, will help facilitate more partnerships by linking together the region’s businesses, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations.” There are over 100 businesses, government, and nonprofits participating. The website has many topic areas in support of the goal of addressing the communities many areas of need. Some of the topics include: communities, issues and initiatives, maps, data and organizations, research materials and classified ads. While the site is not completely up and running, as it was just recently launched, it is easy to use and has comprehensive information and links.

The website seems to have addressed the issue of cost in that it has many sponsors and advisors. The fact that it is housed at George Mason University shows that there are many resources to administer the site. The one drawback of this site and many others that were researched is that they are not regional in the sense that what is being proposed would target Washington, Maryland and Virginia. Immigrants do not see borders and therefore, they want service providers that are versed in programs and resources that are available to them throughout the jurisdiction.
Recommendation

Out of all the four possible solutions, we believe felt that the regional website portal would be best able to meet the criteria identified, specifically in the areas of cost, administration, ease of use and accessibility. Service providers would be able to utilize the web portal in many ways that provide substantial benefit for immigrants and the other targeted stakeholders in the region.

Implementation

A regional portal was determined to be the best solution to meeting the criteria identified, during our research. The first step to implementing this regional portal would be to register a domain name with a friendly, easy to remember name. A couple of suggestions that are currently available for registration include: www.mwconnect.org and www.regionconnect.net. These domain names can be purchased and registered at site such as www.godaddy.com with a $ 3.99 annual registration fee.

After registering the domain name, there are several options for moving forward with creating this new regional portal. Our team determined that a committee should be established through the Council of Governments to ensure that the collection and dissemination of information is equitable throughout the region. Because COG acts as a regional portal for local governments to connect with one another, it makes sense to have COG provide the “Steering Committee” oversight for the creation of this new resource.

When a portal is created, it must be hosted and it must be managed. The hosting of a portal is where the site “lives”. The options are to sit on web servers in a local jurisdiction, entity such as COG, at a Cloud provider or at a local university. All of these hosting options are viable solutions and each must be considered for the cost effectiveness both in the overall hosting as well as the staffing required to maintain the resource.

One option for hosting this new portal would be for it to be hosted by a local government or at the Council of Governments. This would require web expertise, by either the local entity or COG, as well as the necessary hardware and software associated with setting
up the portal. One benefit of providing such a solution, where it is hosted locally or by COG, is that the portal would be local and could be easily maintained by any of the local jurisdictions that already have a web presence. Additionally, this model is already in place as Fairfax County hosts a number of websites that are used by the region as part of the National Capital Region Network (NCRnet). The detriment of this solution is that it will require area local governments to contribute to hosting and management of the portal and that would require some administrative oversight by the Steering Committee that is created at COG to oversee this new portal.

A second solution would be to develop a portal as a sub-site of the existing Connect Northern Virginia. As stated above, Connect Northern Virginia is an example of cross-sector collaboration that will help facilitate more partnerships by linking together the region’s businesses, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations. The benefit of creating this new portal, as a sub-site under Connect Northern Virginia is the structure for the portal has already been developed and this would be an extension of the existing site. Connect Northern Virginia is already being hosted and managed and, therefore, the costs associated with adding this new functionality to the site would be fairly simple compared to creating an entirely new portal.

The detriment to using Connect Northern Virginia is that the purpose of that site is to create partnerships in Northern Virginia and this does not address the more regional need for immigrants living in the Metropolitan Washington area. Although this could be a first step, if funding cannot be identified for a more holistic approach, this would not be the ideal solution as our team feels that this will not address the regional needs of our immigrant populations.

A third solution would be the hosting and management of a portal by a company that could host this solution in the “Cloud”. This solution would allow a Steering Committee to identify the overall structure of the portal, and then work with a provider, such as www.civicplus.com or www.visioninternet.com. Both of these companies provide webhosting and management services for local governments. The benefits of working with a hosting and managed services provider are that they will actually do the development of the portal, the hosting of the portal and the management of the portal; no local resources need to be utilized to do the actual development of the portal. The detriment to using this type of a solution is the cost. There are both the upfront costs of developing the portal as well as the ongoing, monthly costs associated with the hosting and the management of the portal. The cost would have to be weighed against the cost
for regional resources to host and manage a portal. After careful analysis, it might be determined that although there are upfront and ongoing costs with this solution, it may actually be the most cost beneficial due to the amount of time and effort required to host and manage a portal.

There are many possibilities for implementing the portal solution for the region. If this solution is determined to be viable, a domain name should be registered and a committee should be formed at the Council of Governments. The options for implementation could then be reviewed and explored by the COG committee to determine the most cost beneficial as well as easiest to host and manage for the region. Ultimately, the success of this portal will be the ease of use regarding the content management solution of the portal as well as the ability for the portal to push and pull information from social media sites. Any solution considered should be carefully analyzed to ensure that these important components are fully reviewed and explored for functionality.

**Conclusion**

Based on research and interviews conducted with service providers, a variety of jurisdictional approaches appeared to be effective but siloed as they are not being shared throughout the region.

Common themes included:

- Immigrants are a large, growing and important segment of the population and need to be actively engaged to become integrated and highly contributing members of the community.
- Resources are being dedicated to establish trust and communication with the immigrant community.
- Engaging immigrants ensures that they contribute more actively to the community which enhances the community for all.
- Immigrant communication needs to be tackled regionally and collaboratively as it is currently nonexistent, ineffective and inaccessible.

In an effort to tackle the themes deduced from our research, the team considered many alternative solutions. Each one was analyzed with developed criteria that included: cost, feasibility, maintenance and ease of use in mind. The goal was to make a recommendation that provides real benefits for those serving the immigrant community, eliminate duplication of efforts and produce a sustainable mechanism for collecting and
disseminating information. We heard what service providers had to say; they need a consolidated, up-to-date, easy to use, and available two-way information vehicle to assist them in solving the problems presented by immigrant communities.

Flyers and dissemination of hard-copy information might work for a specific event for a specific location, but it is quickly outdated, presents difficulties in delivery and is expensive. They also do not tackle the regional approach that is needed. The Community Ambassador Model (CAM) offers huge benefits as it works closely with specific immigrant communities and is very hands on. However, the CAM is still a very siloed approach and does not resolve the issue of regional sharing of information. We believe that using a web portal provides the optimal solution because:

- Information is relatively easy to update and share.
- It is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- It can accept information feeds from other sources and push information back.
- It can be used by all service providers.
- Service providers can share their experiences and best practices for the benefit of all.
- Although focused on immigrants, the web portal could be used by all of the region’s population.
- It could be a support mechanism for on the ground efforts like CAM.

In a time when local governments have seen a shift toward doing more with less, providing a resource like the web portal enhances staff efficiency. Solutions and approaches to immigrant issues would now be easily accessible via the web portal allowing service providers to implement lessons learned by other providers. Another major benefit would be the web portal's ability to publish upcoming major events of interest to the entire region.

Immigration reform is coming. The web portal would be a major player in making sure the region is ready by publishing information on the details of the reform bills and providing the necessary data to service providers. As local governments, the responsibility falls to us to address the needs of all our residents and be prepared to address the trickle down effects resulting from immigration reform.

In fact, local government has an obligation to provide and make sure all services are available to its residents. Local service providers are working alongside government to meet immigrants’ needs, but are, for the most part, working alone and without the benefit of information regarding what other jurisdictions are doing to manage the issues. Our recommended regional solution addresses this problem head on. As is the case for most residents, immigrants’ lives, needs, and opportunities are not bound by jurisdictional borders. They see one, Metropolitan Washington region in which they live,
work and play. We believe the establishment of the regional web portal will make it easier for service providers and local governments to support immigrants’ ability to contribute to and profit from the many strengths of our region. This greater involvement can play a role in creating stronger jurisdictions, a stronger region, and a better quality of life for all residents.
SOURCE LIST

Connecting Service Providers to Engage the Region’s Immigrants

Team 3

October 21 2013

Interview List

1. Immigration professionals by subject matter expertise:

Hispanic/Latino Community

- Casa de Maryland
- Del. Joselyn Pene-Meylnck
- Sen. Victor Ramirez

African Community

- Sara Zullo – Ethiopian Community Development Council

Asian/Indian Community

- Amy Trang - Fairfax County Agency on Aging

Immigrant Communities

- Karla Silvestre, Director - Montgomery’s County’s Gilchrist Center for Cultural Diversity
- Deborah Coram, Manager Civil Rights – Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority
- Corrine Remy, Workforce Compliance Officer, Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority
- Ann Ulmschneider – Fairfax County Multicultural Programs and Services, Fairfax County Schools
- Dar Al Hijrah Islamic Center – Northern Virginia
- New York City Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs
- Liberty’s Promise
- Fatima Shama – Immigration Affairs Commissioner, New York Mayor’s Office
Websites

- FCPS.edu\cco\fam
- Fccps.edu\cco\fam\resorces\publications\index.stml
- http://www.fallschurcva.gov/
- http://www.nyc.gov/immigrants
- http://www.nyc.gov/integration
- http://www.nyc.gov/weareny
- http://www.nyc.gov/gateway
- http://www.nyc.gov/nycitizenship
- http://www.princegeorgescountymd.gov/sites/socialservices/Pages/default.aspx
- http://www.wmata.com/about_metro/
- http://ssc.rrc.dc.gov/ssc/site/default.asp
- http://www.longbeach.gov/health/fss/

Publications

- http://www.inforum.umd.edu/mdimmigration/content/md_immigration_commission_finalreport.pdf
- http://nationalhispanicleadership.org/agenda/
- http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2004/02/demographics-singer
- http://cra.gmu.edu/pdfs/research_reports/recent_reports/PopulationChangeintheWashingtonMetropolitanArea.pdf
- Top 10 arguments for Immigration Reform, Pauline Hovey, Catholic Herald, May 2-8, 2012