Report of the Integration Working Group

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Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR)
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Executive Summary

In June 2006, the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) announced that an Integration Working Group would be formed to review and provide limited analysis of the process of integration of refugee populations into local communities throughout the U.S. This decision coincided with the creation of The Task Force on New Americans by President Bush’s Executive Order # 13404 on June 6, 2006, tasked to strengthen the efforts of federal, state, and local agencies to help legal immigrants embrace the common core of American civic culture, learn our common language, and become fully Americans. The creation of the Integration Working Group is an effort to grapple with a definition of integration, to identify indicators that are present when newcomers identify themselves as “integrated,” and to consider both immediate and long-range actions to more fully support the integration process.

ORR requested that the Institute for Social and Economic Development (ISED), a technical assistance provider working under a cooperative agreement from ORR, develop a work plan to staff, facilitate, and manage the development and processes of an Integration Working Group, and to produce an interim report for the January 2007 Consultation.

The work began with a “desk study” of integration literature resulting in an annotated bibliography for use by the members appointed to serve.

The Integration Working Group (IWG) of refugee service experts was chosen and charged to:
- develop a working definition of integration
- identify indicators of integration
- identify which services appear to facilitate integration
- offer examples of types of best practices
- make recommendations to ORR about ways to support integration

The IWG developed a consensus working definition of integration:

Integration is a dynamic, multidirectional process in which newcomers and the receiving communities intentionally work together, based on a shared commitment to tolerance and justice, to create a secure, welcoming, vibrant, and cohesive society.

Participants agreed on the following indicators of integration: health/well-being; language; economic opportunity; civic values/participation/engagement; education; housing; social connections; and belonging/safety. Best practices of effective integration were identified by the Working Group for areas closely mirroring the indicators.
The following recommendations were made regarding how ORR can best encourage effective integration of refugees:

1. Include integration language in all ORR Grant Announcements.

2. Review discretionary grant programs offered in the Standing Announcement, ensuring that they promote integration.

3. Establish the Department of Health and Human Services as the lead federal agency for integration.

4. Consider expanding ORR’s Discretionary Programs because they allow flexibility and creativity as supplements to core funding.

5. Focus on integration in the areas of employment, English language acquisition, health, housing, and civic engagement.

6. Focus technical assistance providers to support integration as an intentional process leading to civic engagement and citizenship.

7. Seek and fund pilot programs such as the Building the New American Community project.

8. Develop an initiative to support professional recertification and credentialing for qualified individuals.

9. Identify and share best practices through a survey of States, mutual assistance associations (MAAs), and voluntary agencies (Volags).

10. Identify lessons-learned, including case studies, from communities in which integration appears to be working well and where there are challenges.

11. Study the effect of ORR policy and funding initiatives to promote integration over a three to five year period.

12. Refine/develop/disseminate an action model to be used for other immigrants and marginalized populations.

13. Seek broader collaboration with non-federal entities such as private foundations, businesses, financial institutions, and national entities such as the United Way.
I. Introduction

The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), created by legislative action in the Refugee Act of 1980, is the chief entity responsible for the resettlement and integration of refugees arriving in the United States. Housed within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) as part of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), ORR participates in the development of policy and program both reflecting and shaping the interests and concerns of ACF and DHHS.

The idea of an internal review of integration practices and affects was first conceptualized by the Assistant Secretary of DHHS, Wade Horn, and later reflected by then ORR Director, Nguyen Van Hanh at the FY2006 Annual Consultation. However, it was under the current ORR Director, Martha Newton, that ORR announced the development of several working groups to be broadly comprised of representatives from all facets of the refugee resettlement process in the U.S. One of the working groups was tasked with the responsibility of analyzing the process of integration of refugee populations into local communities throughout the U.S., a matter of key interest to ORR and to those in attendance at the 2006 Consultation.

ORR’s decision to proceed with the development of an Integration Working Group (IWG), coincided with the creation of The Task Force on New Americans by President Bush’s Executive Order # 13404 on June 6, 2006, to strengthen the efforts of federal, state, and local agencies to help legal immigrants embrace the common core of American civic culture, learn the English language, and become fully American. The Task Force is centered in the Office of Citizenship within the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) at the Department of Homeland Security. Task Force members include the heads of the Departments of Homeland Security (chair), State, Treasury, Defense, Justice, Agriculture, Commerce, Labor, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, and Education. Agency heads can designate a representative from their respective agencies “at no lower level than the Assistant Secretary or its equivalent.” Department of Homeland Security Secretary Chertoff designated Dr. Emilio Gonzalez, Director of USCIS, to serve as Executive Secretary of the Task Force. ORR/ACF, as a member of the Task Force’s Technical Committee, is coordinating the technical response on behalf of HHS. ORR, by virtue of its role in The Task Force on New Americans, is poised for a unique contribution in shaping national integration policy.

In June of 2006, ORR requested that the Institute for Social and Economic Development (ISED), a technical assistance provider working under a cooperative agreement from ORR, develop a work plan to staff, facilitate, and manage the development and processes of an Integration Working Group, and to produce a report for the January 2007 Consultation.

II. Purpose and Scope

In the years following the terrorist attacks on the U.S., there has been concern that both the refugees coming into the U.S. and the communities that welcome them should be able to feel safe and secure. Conditions which could contribute to any sense of marginalization should be improved and, where possible, eliminated. So-called “home grown terrorist” incidents in England, France, and Spain have alerted us all to the notion that we must do everything possible
to ensure that newcomers to the U.S. have every opportunity to become integrated into society in a manner that enriches both the community to which they arrive and the newcomers themselves.

ORR is uniquely qualified to engage the subject of integration, drawing as it does, upon the experiences of refugees themselves and the thousands of people who work with refugees in states, counties, resettlement offices, ethnic communities, ESL instruction, employment services, education, housing, and health care. The creation of the Integration Working Group was a proactive decision: an important effort to grapple with a definition of integration, to identify indicators that are present when newcomers identify themselves as “integrated,” and to consider both immediate and long-range actions to more fully support the integration process.

The following report is the beginning of a process – a process that is rich with promise both for the U.S. Resettlement Program and as a model for the integration of other immigrants into the U.S. The Resettlement Program, by nature of its legislative mandate, is built upon a fully engaged collaboration within the U.S. government; a collaboration with authority for different functions divided among the Department of State, the Department of Homeland Security (these functions were formerly in the Department of Justice), and the Department of Health and Human Services. These three entities must also work with other federal departments, such as Education, Labor, Justice, and Housing and Urban Development. They must also work with states and local communities to plan for the resettlement of refugees. The process of refugee resettlement is a fully integrated process, relying heavily on the private sector for fulfillment. In fact, the strength of the public-private effort in refugee resettlement is an historic feature in the U.S. where national resettlement agencies and their local affiliates seek and welcome assistance from local civic organizations, ethnic community based organizations, churches, temples, and mosques. At the grassroots level, thousands of individuals welcome newcomers by providing shelter, food, clothing, transportation, English tutoring, and friendship. These collaborative efforts and the lessons learned, particularly at the local level, can serve as a model for the development of a national integration policy and a road map for integration efforts.

III. Research that Informed the Process and Product

The research sources that informed both the process and the product of the integration project included a literature review and a working group.

A. Literature Review

ISED conducted a “desk study” of the integration literature i.e., existing resources were gathered as opposed to new data being collected. Several methods were used to identify potentially relevant articles, papers, and technical reports. First, ORR staff members made recommendations. Next, working group members identified relevant reports. At the same time, ISED conducted a web search by focusing on key words such as “refugee integration” and “integration.” Through the web search, specific technical reports were obtained and links for U.S., Canadian, and European research centers that concentrated on integration issues were identified.
Based on this effort, a fairly exhaustive list of recent reports was compiled. The majority of the materials were published in the last four years and the oldest report was from 1999. A preliminary conference call was held with ORR to share early observations and ask ORR for additional recommendations for new materials. ISED began reading the materials and drafting brief written summaries of each document. Once this activity was completed, ISED team conference calls were held to discuss the various resource materials and make a final determination about which resources to include in the annotated bibliography.

1. Development of an Annotated Bibliography

The annotated bibliography served two purposes: (1) to compile a vast array of materials into a more succinct, more digestible size and (2) to provide a common foundation for the working group. Since working group members already had extensive familiarity with the topic of integration, the annotated bibliography served as a handy-reference for the latest thinking in the field.

A final selection of the most helpful, relevant materials was included in an annotated bibliography (the summary of the annotated bibliography is included in Appendix A of this paper). Materials were gathered from the United Kingdom, Sweden, other member countries of the European Union, Canada, and the United States.

Materials featured in the annotated bibliography:

- grappled with different understandings of integration as a concept
- proposed a definition of integration
- dissected integration into smaller, more understandable elements or indicators
- proposed a framework for understanding integration.

An early draft of the annotated bibliography was reviewed by ORR and ISED, resulting in modifications to the document. The final version of the annotated bibliography and a four-page summary was sent to all working group members, selected technical assistance providers, and ORR’s federal partners on October 17, two weeks before the November meeting.

2. Framework for Understanding Integration in the US

Based on the review of the literature, there are particular concepts that can be helpful in understanding integration. The framework of concepts includes: (a) common characteristics of integration definitions, (b) indicators of integration, and (c) pathways that may lead to integration.

**Common characteristics of the various definitions of integration.** A clear message from the literature is that there is no single, generally accepted definition of integration. As one author wrote, “Integration is a chaotic concept—a word used by many but understood differently by most.”\(^1\) The conceptual analysis of various definitions helps identify broad domains or areas that could inform an understanding of indicators of integration.

Of the dozens of definitions reviewed, the common characteristics of integration are:

- dynamic or active process
- two-way process
- considers both the newcomers and the arriving community
- on-going activity
- it is both an individual process and a community process
- happens along a continuum

Notably, the literature differentiates integration from multiculturalism, acculturation, and assimilation.

- **Multiculturalism** is defined in the dictionary as “the doctrine that several different cultures (rather than one national culture) can co-exist peacefully and equitably in a single country.” Some policy analysts argue that multiculturalism can undermine cohesion and the sense of community and that multiculturalism has cost implications because every law and policy is tailored to “special interests.”

- **Acculturation** is defined as a “process through which refugees/immigrants are expected to learn the cultural patterns of the country of immigration, e.g., its language, cultural values, and practices.” Some authors point out that some observers criticize the concept for assuming that the receiving society is culturally homogeneous and that immigrants must relinquish their own ethnic group culture to integrate successfully. The dictionary definition of **acculturation** is “the adoption of the behavior patterns of the surrounding culture.”

- **Assimilation** is defined as “incorporating immigrants and refugees into the receiving society through an often multi-generational process of adaptation.” Some authors explain that the initial formulation of assimilation posited that both immigrants and the host society adapt to each other, but the term has come to be associated with immigrants’ relinquishing their linguistic and cultural characteristics in order to become part of the economic and social structure of the mainstream. The dictionary definition of **assimilation** is “the social process of absorbing one cultural group into harmony with another.”

**Indicators of integration.** A second aspect of our framework is the issue of indicators. In this context indicators are considered the markers or signs that a person or a community is integrated. In looking at the various indicators of integration across multiple research reports, the common indicators are:

- Learning English
- Employment
- Housing
- Education
- Health
- Shared values

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Pathways that may lead to integration. The literature also addressed the pathways that promote integration. These pathways interact dynamically, each with the power to reinforce or weaken progress in the other areas. Immigrants and the receiving community can work together through these strategic pathways to provide resources and opportunities and leverage the human capital that immigrants bring. These pathways can also serve as a means to assess whether integration is taking place successfully.

Some of the most frequently discussed pathways in the literature are:

- Legal status
- English-language training for adults and children
- Credential recognition and assistance with meeting professional and trade licensing requirements
- Higher education opportunities
- Youth training and development services
- Civic-participation training and opportunities for involvement in the wider community
- Health care and well-being
- Adequate and affordable housing
- Communitywide planning
- Equal treatment and opportunity
- Social and cultural interaction
- Personal safety and stability
- Cultural understanding

B. Working Group Process

In addition to the literature review, the working group proved to be a vital source of information, largely because ORR succeeded in convening an impressive group of experts in the field of integration. A list of the Integration Working Group participants is included in Appendix B.

1. Selection of Members and Their Role/Function

Potential members were selected by ORR from state and local refugee programs, organizations that conducted or funded research on integration, mutual assistance associations (MAAs), and voluntary agencies (Volags). The common factor among all experts was that they have personal or professional experience with integration issues and/or resettlement issues.

The Director of ORR appointed nine people to the Integration Working Group. Each person was individually telephoned by ORR to invite them to participate. All nine people accepted ORR’s invitation.
The purpose of the IWG was to participate in a face-to-face meeting and develop a working definition of integration, identify indicators of integration, identify which services facilitate integration, offer examples of best practices, and make recommendations to ORR about ways to support integration. In the weeks after the meeting, IWG member were asked to review written products, provide comments on a web-board, and participate in conference calls.

2. Consideration of Other Participants and Their Role/Function

ORR believed it was important to invite two federal partners to participate in the working group meeting: (1) Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and (2) Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. Each selected a representative to attend the meeting. These two partners were selected because they are actively involved in various steps of the resettlement process. These partners are not members of the IWG but are considered resources. ORR believed it was essential that these two key partners be aware of the work that ORR is doing in the area of integration as well as for ORR to learn about the particular initiatives of the partners.

Representatives from the Spring Institute, Mercy Housing, RefugeeWorks, and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) were also invited to participate in the process. These technical assistance providers are not members of the IWG but are considered resources to the IWG. Their role was to represent their field of expertise in the discussions—English language acquisition, housing, employment, health, and mental health.

In the weeks after the meeting, these other participants were also asked to review written products, provide comments on a web-board, and participate in conference calls.

3. Consultations/Meetings/Conference Calls

In planning for the IWG meeting, conference calls were held with ORR staff members. Before the actual IWG meeting, ISED held a conference call with working group members to discuss the purpose of the working group, the specific responsibilities of being a member, the timeline, and the expected product from the integration project.

On November 2 and 3, 2006, ORR hosted and ISED facilitated a day-and-a-half meeting of the IWG. All 9 IWG members, 4 ORR technical assistance providers, and 1 federal partner attended. Throughout the day-and-a-half, 12 ORR staff members participated in the meeting. After the meeting, notes from the meeting were prepared and distributed to everyone who attended.

C. Working Group Product

1. Working Definition of Integration Adopted by the Group

The objective of the IWG was not to determine an ultimate definition of integration – but to reach some level of agreement on a “working definition” of integration. The purpose in having a working definition was to assist in the work by having a ready reference and a common
understanding of what was meant when participants referred to “integration.” For the purposes of the report the consensus definition is considered to be the working definition. As implied by the word, consensus, not all working group members may consider this to be the best possible definition.

**Consensus working definition:**
Integration is a dynamic, multidirectional process in which newcomers and the receiving community work together intentionally, based on a shared commitment to tolerance and justice, to create a secure, welcoming, vibrant, and cohesive society.

This definition was posted on an on-line web-board to allow IWG members the opportunity to consider the definition generated at the IWG meeting. IWG members were encouraged to weigh-in with their opinions and propose refinements. Following are definitions that emerged from the on-line discussion. These do not represent a consensus but are included to accurately reflect the process.

Second posting with edits on the first definition:
Integration is a dynamic, multidirectional process in which newcomers are incorporated into society in a manner that ensures that both newcomers and the receiving community have a sense of belonging and ownership.

Third posting with edits on the second definition:
Integration is a multidirectional process in which newcomers are welcomed and incorporated into society in a manner that ensures that both newcomers and the receiving community have a sense of belonging and ownership.

2. **Indicators Identified by the Working Group**

The second task of the working group was to identify the various indicators of integration. In this context indicators are considered the markers or signs that a person or a community is integrated. The question posed to the IWG was “In what areas of a person’s life or a community do we look to see if integration is present?”

The entire IWG generated a list of 33 possible indicators. The large group divided into three smaller groups which were charged with the task of identifying the 10 indicators that should have the highest priority. The results of this activity are summarized in the following table.
### Ten Indicators of Integration
#### As Identified by Sub-Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. English Language Acquisition</td>
<td>English language skills</td>
<td>Economic self-sufficiency, including understanding financial systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Legal Status Citizenship</td>
<td>Civic participation/engagement</td>
<td>Civic engagement, including citizenship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Economic self-sufficiency (financial literacy)</td>
<td>Immigration status</td>
<td>Language acquisition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Self-declaration of “sense of belonging”</td>
<td>Employment, economic self-sufficiency, financial literacy, access to financial institutions</td>
<td>Educational achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Navigation of the system (including health care, education, transportation, law enforcement)</td>
<td>Attainment of affordable, safe housing and access to transportation</td>
<td>Asset building, including ethnic owned businesses and homeowners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Quality interaction with the mainstream</td>
<td>Personal safety, physical &amp; mental health</td>
<td>Access to health care and a sense of well-being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Educational achievement</td>
<td>Educational achievement based on age—K-12, high school graduation</td>
<td>Strong social connections (of both the immigrant community and the receiving community or neighborhoods; including sports activities, inter-marriages, etc)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Homeownership</td>
<td>Professional achievement—certification, training, accreditation</td>
<td>Adoption and ownership of common civic values, as supported in the Constitution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Civic engagement, representation in decision making bodies/leadership development/community organizing</td>
<td>Values and beliefs, welcoming community</td>
<td>Individual sense of belonging and a harmonious community (includes safety, security, and mobility)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Laws, policies, and resources that support integration</td>
<td>Laws and policies supporting integration</td>
<td>Access to affordable and quality housing in multicultural neighborhoods</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In examining the three lists of indicators it is readily apparent that there are eight areas that appear on each list. These are:

- health/well-being
- language acquisition
- economic opportunity
- civic values/participation/engagement
- education
- housing
- social connections
- belonging/safety
The issue of legal status was considered and noted as an “essential factor of integration.” Although this does not apply to refugees and other legal immigrants, the lack of legal status is a significant impediment to integration. Any discussion of integration of newcomers in a broader context must address this issue.

3. Areas for Best Practices Identified by the Working Group

A third task of the working group was to identify areas of best practices for each of the 10 indicators. The IWG was asked to consider which particular services, policies, or funding streams lead to integration. The areas for consideration are:

- **Employment and economic self-sufficiency**—offer vocational training programs, job upgrades, longer and more intensive pre-employment programs, financial literacy courses attached to a financial institution, job recertification for professionals, microenterprise, Individual Development Accounts (IDAs). Develop and diversify employer networks, support ethnic chambers of commerce, and facilitate access to loans and mortgages.

- **Civic engagement and citizenship**—examine New Americans partnerships and initiatives, community colleges including citizenship prep as part of ESL, capacity building for ethnic organizations, and leadership training for ethnic civic leadership development.

- **English language acquisition**—offer workplace ESL programs, intensive (15-20 hours a week) courses, involvement of local education organizations, and examine Annie E. Casey Foundation’s work on best practices in this field.

- **Educational achievement**—offer community-based adaptation programs in schools, IDA/asset building programs for post secondary or vocational education, trained adult ESL instructors, parent involvement strategies, increased federal scholarships, expanded pre-school and childcare/early childhood learning.

- **Health care access/sense of well-being**—offer cultural competency training of community health care providers, interpreters, nutrition and access to healthy food, promoting healthy lifestyles, culturally appropriate mental health services, and psychosocial groups (e.g., art or dance therapy). Consider as health partners, local partnerships, State government, volags, and MAAs.

- **Welcoming community**—engage MAAs, Volags, employers, government agencies, putting a hand out toward people to create a welcoming community for new arrivals.

- **Ethnic representation**—encourage ethnic representation in health, law, education, local government, state legislature, and national government.

- **Quality interaction with the mainstream**—build strong social connections and neighborhoods, inter-group coalition building/collaboration/celebrations, cultural celebrations, and ensure that receiving community professionals have the resources to work with newcomers.

- **Sense of belonging**—lack of discriminatory city laws, diminished hate crimes or conflicts, positive media, fair representation of various voices, increased crime prevention.

- **Housing**—expansion of Section 8 housing, IDA/asset building especially for homeownership, and building strong neighborhoods.
• **Community Orientation**—provide community orientation content that is multi-stage (i.e., basics, intermediate, and advanced).

These are early best practice ideas regarding service, policies, and funding streams that support integration. More work is needed to conduct a comprehensive review of the field.

### IV. Recommendations of how ORR can Support Integration

The Refugee Act of 1980 clearly identifies economic self-sufficiency as one of the most important outcomes expected in refugee resettlement efforts. The legislation rightly stresses economic self-sufficiency and English language acquisition, both of which have been the hallmarks of success in a nation of immigrants. The American sensibility, despite its extraordinary generosity to newcomers, requires of its participants self-reliance and hard work. This primary goal has contributed to the success of refugees who have been accepted into the United States. An unspoken goal is that refugees who become self-sufficient will become part of the fabric of their communities: will become Americans, will be well-integrated as earlier immigrants. But, based on the research and reading of the Integration Working Group, we know that employment/self-sufficiency, while a key to integration, is not the only indicator.

It is this overarching and appropriate concern with self-sufficiency (generally defined as ineligible for cash assistance) that has driven the refugee resettlement program and primary funding initiatives. In addition to self-sufficiency as a major management focus, ORR can and must also actively manage to achieve resettlement conditions that will intentionally support integration. In every funding initiative, ORR must ask “how can this effort support integration of the newcomer into the fabric of the receiving community and how will it encourage the receiving community to welcome newcomers?” In the way that ORR now tracks employment as an indicator of self-sufficiency, ORR will need to work with stakeholders to expand the set of indicators/outcomes to be tracked in order to better measure whether a resettlement site and its programs support a positive environment for integration.

The Integration Working Group offers the following recommendations for ORR’s consideration.

### A. Short-term Recommendations

1. **Include integration language in all Grant Announcements.** For many years, ORR promoted collaboration among service providers by including language in its grant announcements which encouraged collaboration. ORR can include language in future announcements which instructs applicants to demonstrate how their proposals will actively promote integration. The most effective way to ensure that new grants promote integration is to include the topic in the evaluation criteria used to award new grants.

2. **Review discretionary grant programs offered in the Standing Announcement, ensuring that they promote integration.** ORR should review its discretionary grant programs to ensure that all solicit programs which promote integration. For instance, the current standing announcement, category 1, for Preferred Communities funding says: “ORR is interested in
providing resources for national voluntary agencies to cover the costs of changing community placements so that refugees are placed where they have the best chance for integration.” The intent was that Volags would look for placement sites in their networks where all the indicators of good integration are present and would use the additional temporary funds to enhance services so that free cases may be placed in these “preferred communities” as opposed to communities where new arrivals may face a tighter job market, higher housing costs, inadequate transportation options, and fewer services. This strategy fits well into a renewed emphasis on integration with new outcome indicators required in addition to employment.

Additionally, ORR might consider developing a discretionary program category which addresses the issue of integration as it relates to secondary migration. Despite Department of State placement policies, the efforts of Volags and the ORR Preferred Community program, refugees move where they will. The primary targets of secondary migrants are areas where others from their own country, region, tribe, and culture have settled. Other target sites include those where newcomers perceive there to be job opportunities. ORR policies and programs related to secondary migration must be flexible enough to change quickly in order to address such situations as the movement of Somalis to Lewiston, Maine and the migration of Somali Bantus to Ohio.

The standing announcement could be revised to include time limited funding to accommodate the needs for sites that are heavily impacted by secondary migration, whether or not these sites currently have Volag presence. These grants could be awarded to local social service coalitions, MAAs, Volags, or to the State. Such a funding mechanism may help alleviate distress of local government and social service agencies while supporting integration of these newcomers who have chosen new communities. In this case, the grant announcement should also require a plan for services that support the integration of refugees into the life of the chosen community.

3. **Establish DHHS as the lead federal agency for integration.** DHHS, and ORR specifically, have the most expertise and program service experience related to work with the foreign-born of all domestic federal programs. Because of this, and because of its mandate to help refugees establish new lives, ORR is uniquely situated to test integration strategies and to establish best practices which can be used in the programs of other federal departments and agencies. ORR should be adequately funded in order to effectively fulfill this role. In The Task Force on New Americans meetings with other federal agencies, ORR can take the lead by developing and recommending a national policy on integration, by offering effective integration models, by collecting, compiling, and disseminating best practices, and by seeking to become the federal conduit for funding to support integration efforts in the United States.

As a logical leader in the federal government’s integration efforts, ORR might initiate collaborations between itself and other departments to promote effective integration. Examples of seemingly logical collaborative partners include the Departments of Education, Labor, State, Justice, Housing and Urban Development, and Homeland Security.
4. **Consider expanding ORR’s Discretionary Programs.** The discretionary grants programs, offered through the Division of Community Resettlement, may represent ORR’s best opportunity to directly impact integration. Through these grants, ORR shapes local refugee services provided throughout the country, while impacting the policies of states, counties, ethnic community based organizations, and local voluntary agency affiliates. Examples of these creative programs include Ethnic Community Self-Help, the Employment Subsidy Program, IDAs, Microenterprise, Preferred Communities, and Unanticipated Arrivals. While it is true that many local refugee services are funded by states with money from ORR, these programs are generally targeted to basic services such as case management, refugee cash and medical assistance, employment services, and ESL and have less flexibility to support creative programming.

5. **Focus on integration in the areas of employment, English language acquisition, health, housing, and civic engagement.** The literature review related to integration indicates an agreement among experts that there is a short list of core factors which effect integration: employment, health, language acquisition, housing, and civic participation. If integration is to transpire, these core factors must be addressed. Thus, ORR should continue to support these core services, heeding the nuances which studies and practical experience have indicated are important. (For example, the Integration Working Group opined that English acquisition is enhanced by: workplace ESL; real life contexts; short-term, intensive courses; newcomers’ centers/programs; schedules/opportunities that are convenient; in-home tutors; and residential-based classes.)

6. **Focus technical assistance providers to support integration as an intentional process leading to civic engagement and citizenship.** All of ORR’s technical assistance providers, regardless of their areas of expertise, should be expected to have a comprehensive overview of ORR’s policy and program initiatives related to integration and the progress toward citizenship. Each person working in TA provision should have, in addition to expertise in their field, the skills to articulate to clients and non-clients how their area of expertise best promotes integration.

7. **Seek and fund pilot programs such as the Building the New American Community project.** ORR should establish and enhance a focus on integration in the core programs it funds—employment, English language acquisition, health, and civic engagement—and it should simultaneously try new programs which approach integration in new ways. ORR has long been in the forefront of seeking, developing, and funding innovative new strategies. Building the New American Community, funded over a three year period from 2000-2003, is a good example of a pilot that began to look at the integration of refugees into three communities. Building on the successes and learning from the challenges of this effort, it may be time to refine models and pilot new methods.

8. **Develop an initiative to support professional recertification and credentialing for qualified individuals.** The literature review undertaken for the ORR Integration Working Group, as well as the Working Group itself, indicates that newcomers become better integrated when

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5 These grants have often allowed Mutual Assistance Associations and ethnic community based organizations to enhance their organizational capacity – a key factor in the ability to better serve newcomers.
they are able to reach their employment potential. Refugee service providers continue to seek ways to help well-educated professionals find ways to use their education and training, knowing that their self-esteem will suffer and their long term opportunities will diminish the longer they must work outside their professions. Support for recertification by ORR can help doctors, engineers, attorneys, and other professionals reach their potential in a timely manner. The first steps should be to identify successful local efforts (best practices) in this field, develop service models that ORR can support through, grant awards, and then track the outcomes of these pilot projects. Implementation of this initiative may require a change in regulations.

B. Longer-term Recommendations

1. Identify and share best practices through a survey of States, MAAs, and Volags. During the day-and-a-half meeting with the Integration Working Group, some best practices for achieving refugee integration surfaced. In order to do justice to the important task of identifying best practices, however, a systematic, thorough process is warranted. ORR should conduct such a survey before finalizing any policy or grant decisions related to the promotion of integration. The upcoming Consultation can be used to review some of the best practices identified by the Working Group as an introduction to the announcement that a more comprehensive survey will be undertaken in which ORR encourages all providers to participate.

2. Identify lessons-learned, including case studies, from communities in which integration appears to be working well and where there are challenges. ORR should identify locations in which integration has worked well and locations in which integration has been more challenging. The studies should be done primarily through site visits which include interviews and focus group discussions with refugees, service providers, the local United Way, local government, and mainstream community members.

Among the locations which might be considered for such studies are cities in states mentioned in a recent report by The Century Foundation as “gateway states” such as North Carolina, Iowa, Georgia, Minnesota, and Nebraska. Also for consideration might be cities known to have large concentrations or heavy influxes of new arrivals such as: Dearborn, MI; Long Beach, CA; Columbus, OH; Lewiston, ME, and Fresno, CA. Lessons learned and best practices may be compiled and widely disseminated.

3. Study the effect of ORR policy and funding initiatives to promote integration over a three to five year period. ORR should develop effective methods and tools to measure the effectiveness of its new policies and grants meant to promote integration. The ability to determine the effectiveness of its efforts will allow ORR to better serve refugees, find public and private partners to join in its effort to promote effective integration, and secure adequate funding to do its work in the future.

4. Refine/develop/disseminate an action model to be used for other immigrants and marginalized populations. As the only federal agency charged with facilitating the integration of newcomers in our country, ORR is uniquely positioned to use the knowledge it obtains through the refugee integration initiative to inform other institutions at the local,
national, and international levels. As the review of the literature on integration demonstrates, other countries are keenly interested in learning of methods which work. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees frequently hosts international conferences which invariably include sessions on integration. Lessons in effective integration are of interest to the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration at the Department of State, to Citizenship and Immigration Services, as well as to agencies within the Departments of Education, Justice, Labor, and Housing and Urban Development.

5. Seek broader collaboration with non-federal entities such as private foundations, businesses, financial institutions, and the United Way. Private and public sectors in the United States have an interest in effective integration. The integration woes of France, Spain, and Britain have created an awareness of how important and how often elusive it is to build communities where all individuals can enjoy full participation and where they judge themselves to be valued within their communities. Of all the issues that ORR addresses, integration is both timely and compelling. And it is therefore likely to attract principals as partners in the effort to create safe, secure, and stable communities.

One possibility of partnership is to seek community foundations to support studies to determine the effectiveness of integration in their geographic areas. Another possibility, once best practices have been documented for ORR, is to partner with foundations and other funding entities to support the implementation of the practices in more communities. Developing a working relationship with Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees (GCIR) may prove to be a forum for dissemination of information and the results of best practices studies.

V. Conclusion

The Integration Working Group was tasked with a short term review of current practices in integration and the development of a report to be presented at the Consultation in January of 2007. ORR will review the recommendations and prioritize its options for possible implementation. Should ORR decide to move forward on some of the long term recommendations, it will need to develop priorities and action plans to guide the processes over the next several years.

All participants of the Integration Working Group wish to thank ORR for convening this group, their commitment to this important work, and their unceasing good will.
Appendix A: 
Integration Annotated Bibliography
Summary of Integration Themes

Please note: We offer this as a summary of the major themes presented in the annotated bibliography. This is not a comprehensive summary, but a summary that highlights issues, concepts, and common themes. The more detailed annotated bibliography is available online at www.ised.us.

1. Some Proposed Definitions of Integration

An individual or group is integrated within a society when they:
- achieve public outcomes within employment, housing, education, health etc. which are equivalent to those achieved within the wider host communities;
- are socially connected with members of a (national, ethnic, cultural, religious or other) community with which they identify, with members of other communities and with relevant services and functions of the state; and
- have sufficient linguistic competence and cultural knowledge, and a sufficient sense of security and stability, to confidently engage in that society in a manner consistent with shared notions of nationhood and citizenship.


Integration is a dynamic, two-way process in which newcomers and the receiving society work together to build secure, vibrant, and cohesive communities. We utilize the term “integration” rather than “assimilation” to emphasize respect for and incorporation of differences, the importance of mutual adaptation, and an appreciation of diversity.


Integration is a process that involves an entire community, not just its newest members. Integration is also a long-term practice built on the daily two-way interactions between refugees/immigrants and receiving communities.


Immigrant integration is conceptualized as a “comprehensive framework for addressing immigrant resettlement over a long-term period.” Resettlement or integration is a two-way street, a mutual and dynamic process between the immigrant family and the receiving community. Broad principles of immigrant integration include the following:

For the Receiving Community
- The process of integration is mutual, dynamic, and on-going
- Integration creates environments that help immigrants feel they belong
Receiving communities work to eliminate racism and discrimination
Relationships between community members are strengthened

For Immigrants or Refugees
- Integration is a highly individualized experience—no one pattern fits all newcomers
- Immigrants adapt to a new lifestyle without losing their own identity
- After arrival, immigrants are able to contribute to their new community as soon and as fully as possible
- Immigrants themselves must commit to building a new life in their new community

For Both
- Immigrants and receiving community members have a stake in strengthening their community
- Immigrants and receiving community members can expect the process of integration to shape their community in religious, cultural, and political ways


2. Indicators of Integration

The authors (Zetter, Griffiths, Sigona, & Hauser, 2002) propose four clusters of indicators which focus on processes rather than precise measurable variables:
- Citizenship domain - processes and instruments of citizenship
- Governance domain - governance, administration and civil society
- Functional domain - social and economic participation
- Social domain - ethnicity, cultural identity, social networks and social capital

The authors (Ager and Strang, 2004a) propose four domains within the framework of integration with 10 specific indicators:
- Means and Markers=employment, housing, education and health
- Social Connections=social bonds, social bridges, and social links
- Facilitators=language & cultural knowledge and safety & stability
- Foundation=rights and citizenship

Downs-Karkos (2004) identifies these as indicators of integration as well as factors affecting integration:
- Learning English
- Education
- Employment and Economics
- Health care
- Parenting and Family Roles
- Laws, Civic Participation, and Citizenship
- General Community
- Discrimination
3. Mechanisms or Approaches That May Lead to Integration

In the Building the New American Community report (2004), the key services that need to be available to newcomers in order for them to become quickly established in the US are discussed. These are:

- English-language training for adults and children
- Credential recognition and assistance with meeting professional and trade licensing requirements
- Strong vocational/professional skills development and upgrading courses
- Higher education opportunities
- Youth-training and development services
- Civic-participation training and opportunities for involvement in the wider community
- Health care
- Adequate and affordable housing

Strategic pathways serve both as a tool for facilitating integration and as a means to assess whether integration is taking place successfully. They interact dynamically, each with the power to reinforce or weaken progress in the other areas. Immigrants and the receiving community can work together through these strategic pathways to provide resources and opportunities and leverage the human capital that immigrants bring. The pathways are:

- Communitywide planning
- Language and education
- Health, well-being, and economic mobility
- Equal treatment and opportunity
- Social and cultural interaction
- Civic participation and citizenship


In Ager and Strang’s research (2004b) respondents’ identified three general factors that contribute to integration:

- Safety and stability
- English language skills
- Advice and cultural understanding

Downs-Karkos (2004) cites several strategies for advancing integration including, public policy, working with mainstream institutions, strengthening immigrant-serving organizations, the general public’s role, family/peer network of immigrants.

What can community institutions do to make immigrant integration a faster, smoother, less painful transition for immigrant families and for the broader community?

- Address the issue of immigrant integration holistically and comprehensively
- Begin by bring groups together, creating links and building coalitions
Report of the Integration Working Group

- Provide opportunities to share stories and develop relationships between newcomers and more established residents
- Dispel myths and provide information about community resources
- Provide language access (i.e., translation and interpreter services), as well as emphasizing English language proficiency
- Encourage immigrant-serving organizations to partner with mainstream institutions
- Encourage both local governments and businesses to become involved in integration work
- Emphasize leadership development and training
Appendix B:
Integration Working Group List of Participants

Integration Working Group Members
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