

Office of New Americans Advisory Board Meeting  
Meeting Minutes  
Wednesday, October 6, 2021  
1:00pm-5:00PM  
Patrick Henry Building – East Reading Room  
1111 E. Broad Street, Richmond VA 23219

**Final Draft**

**Office of New Americans Advisory Board (ONAAB) members present:**

*Hassan Ahmad, Kate Ayers, Hannah Borja, Amelia Castaneda, Jennifer Crewalk, Dr. Fern Hauck, Michael Hoefer, Susannah Lepley, Eric Lin, Djibril Niang, Ahoo Salem, Eva Stitt, Milton Vickerman (via electronic participation), Soyoung Yoon, Juan Santacoloma, Rammy Barbari*

**ONAAB members absent:** *Dora Muhammad*

**ONAAB Ex-officio members present:**

*Paul Berry, Virginia Latino Advisory Board (via electronic participation)  
Mona Siddiqui, Governor's Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and Senior Policy Advisor,  
Office of New Americans*

**Office of New Americans (ONA) and Governor's Office Staff present:**

*Grace Reynolds, Program Administration Specialist, Office of New Americans and Board Administrator, ONAAB*

**Additional Guests:**

*Susan Whyte, Assistant Attorney General and ONAAB Counsel, Virginia Office of the Attorney General*

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**Welcome and Call to Order**

**Eric Lin (Chair)** called the meeting to order at 1:00pm. It was noted that we have quorum

Milton Vickerman is unable to attend due to personal and COVID contact related. He would like to participate remotely.

**Eric Lin: called for motion**

- Fern Hauck moved to allow Milton Vickerman to participate electronically in today's meeting. motion
- Susannah Lepley seconded the motion.
- Board members unanimously voted to allow Milton Vickerman to participate electronically in today's meeting.

Paul Berry is unable to attend due to personal reasons. He would like to participate remotely.

**Eric Lin: called for motion**

- **Michael Hoefer moved to allow Paul Berry to participate electronically in today's meeting.**
- **Mel Borja seconded the motion.**
- **Board members unanimously voted to allow Paul Berry to participate electronically in today's meeting.**

**July 7, 2021, Meeting Minutes Approval**

Kate Ayers called for corrections to the July 7, 2021 meeting minutes. No changes were identified.

**Kate Ayers: Called for a motion**

- **Hassan Ahmad moved to approve the July 7, 2021 meeting minutes with no changes.**
- **Eva Stitt seconded the motion.**
- **Board members unanimously voted to approve the July 7, 2021 meeting minutes.**

**Public Comment**

**Eric Lin called for public comment. No public comment was offered.**

**Chair Report**

**Eric Lin provided a summary of EC activities and ONAAB business since the last meeting.**

- Eric's presentation can be accessed [here](#).
- EC meetings were held on 7/14, 8/11, 9/7 at public libraries
- Individual EC communication was about the report and planning for next year
- Eric had meetings with Delegate Tran and Senator Hashmi
- Eric gave opening comments at Roanoke Language Access Conference
- Engaged with ODEI and ONA regarding support for Afghan Evacuees
- Eric hosted an advisory board chair convening October
- Eric submitted a testimony to the FIOA council supporting electronic meetings for advisory boards
- Eric + EC team worked on drafting the annual report

**Administration Update**

Mona Siddiqui, Deputy Director- Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

- An executive team (Executive Leadership Team on Immigrant Integration) was formed to strengthen the resettlement system and integrate new Americans in the local communities through collaboration across government agencies and localities.

- One role will be to identify the gaps and ensure the systems of support are based on equitable policies and practices. The goal is to prioritize immigrant integration at the highest levels of the government.
- ONA + ODEI- Commissioner Storen and Dr. Underwood are the co-chairs.
- There is a townhall on Friday to introduce the team to the public and to get feedback. Governor Northam and Eric Lin will share comments.
- Eric: Is there funding for this team?
- Mona: No, The first step is to get people in the room together to talk about these issues. Her hope is to develop recommendations in Nov. and Dec. about what the goals would be and what funding would do to help move things forward.
- Mel: Intergovernmental affairs team wants to focus on Afghan resettlement. If you see spaces for this team to work with this group to work with you.
- Mona: We will be including secretariats of each group and including the secretariat of intergovernmental affairs
- Eva: Office of DEI said they would be asking agencies for language access plans- is there an update on this
- Mona: They continue to work on collecting language access plans across state agencies.
- Djibril: Wants to know about the crisis in Haiti. Someone called him to ask if the state is doing anything about the Haitian crisis. There are some people who have family here, so there is a chance that some of the people may end up in Virginia.
- Mona: She does not know much about this situation and asked if the ONA office has had conversations?
- Grace: ONA has been discussing this but would like to discuss more.
- Mona: Let's set up a time to discuss this more, and include the person that Djibril's contact.
- Eric: Is there a timeframe for this committee?
- Mona: Yes. She doesn't know how long it will stay. The goal of the plan is to embed this work inside the agencies. They will give secretariats homework to identify the gaps in the structures and then look at putting Equitable systems in place.
- Eric: Is this part of the strategic plan?
- Mona: Yes, it is something that came out of the ONA strategic plan, but the Afghan crisis was a catalyst for the committee to get it started.
- Ahoo: Thank you for including us in the workforce workgroup meetings. Will there be a future one?
- Mona: Thank you for participating. We have incorporated your suggestions. We are working on a long-term plan, and I hope to provide this to the group for feedback. The deadline is December 1<sup>st</sup>.

## **Office of New Americans Update**

### **Grace Reynolds**

- See Grace's presentation [here](#).
- Grace shared that the state's repatriation plan was put into effect. This activated ONA to step up the Emergency Repatriation Center (ERC) at Dulles. This was a collaboration of lots of local, federal, and state agencies. This operated 24 hours a day from August 16<sup>th</sup> to

September 10<sup>th</sup>. The operations included cash assistance, hotel, onward travel, human needs, and COVID19 vaccines. It is a loan program. They have 30 days from the date of receiving the notice to pay it back. After 30 days, interest is charged. ONA is working on making sure the waivers get approved.

- Most people who came through this way were not citizens. They were mixed families. (Citizen, greencard holders, SIV, Afghans at risk). The families ranged from 5-15 in size, and many times the only citizen was a two-year-old. Grace included a list of numbers that came through the center as of September 10<sup>th</sup>. Mona identified a gap in services for Legal Permanent Resident's (LPR) was quickly identified as federal money could not be used for LPRs. The ERC partnered with the United Way to fill this gap and the Ethiopian Community Development Center acted as case managers. The ERC served 607 and LPR center served 120 in 6 days.
- Estimated Afghan Evacuees to be resettled in VA is 1166 but this may change
- New legislations says that Humanitarian Parolees as potential recipients of Medicaid, SNAP, employment services
- Challenges of the situation: School capacity, constantly changing numbers, access to housing and employment, and lack of required documentation
- Hassan: We need to acknowledge the difficulties of the asylum process- these Afghans will have to go through this process.
- Susannah: Adjustment Act: This would allow an automatic pathway to citizenship and allow them to pass by the asylum process.
- Mel: Our congressional office is trying to get these numbers of who is coming. Where did you get these numbers?
- Grace: The numbers came from the ERC closeout. The state department will not share this information. There has been a barrier in the flow of information, especially for numbers.
- Eric: Is there anything that this board could do to speak to the adjustment?
- Susannah: There is a letter ready to go to Delegate Tran. There are letters to go around it.
- Eric: Can we write a letter to the governor to support readjustment?
- Susan: As long as the board puts together a draft and agrees on the content of the letter.
- Eric: We can put together the elements of the letter down now and then go ahead and vote on it. Everything that is going to be in the letter. We will revisit this at the end of the meeting for MISC.
- Mona: I support sharing a letter, but the fast track to citizenship or readjustment- can be a federal issue. Another barrier is legal counsel for Afghan paroles. They don't have the resources to access legal support for this. There needs to be a stronger infrastructure to support this.
- Eric: Is this something we do as individuals or for the board?
- Hassan: This fits within the parameters of the board. Agencies have set up at Quantico to provide legal assistance on site. Hassan will call and get more information
- Eric: We will revisit this issue at the end and see if there is something we can do.
- Fern: I want to point out the healthcare barriers, especially mental healthcare. I read that the only mental health resources they were getting are COVID. They are not able to go through health departments for screenings.

- Mona: I know that they are being managed by the federal government. There are mental health workers from Afghan descent. This is a recent initiative.
- Eva: How will we support the language needs of Afghans as they navigate the immigration system? Is there a source of funding to support interpreters? Evan can coordinate with the VA Interpreters and Translators association. This is a database of language access providers. This is a nonprofit in VA.
- Eric: it would be helpful as you see these barriers and gaps, it could be good to send it out to the board and tap into our resources (ie. Eva's VA Interpreters and Translators Association)
- Ahoo: My perspective from the Afghan community already here. There doesn't seem to be a lot of information about what is happening in the evacuation.
- Grace: There is a lot of unknown information about the process.

## **Annual Report**

### **Eric Lin**

- I want to share the process of the report: usually each committee gets together, focuses on a few issues, and prepares the information for the report.
- Because of the short time span, we did not have time to do this process.
- One change that must happen is a reformatting of the letter from the chair.
- Michael: I know we want to improve the narrative, but I am concerned about some of the data that we had in the initial data was just one side of the equation (and it was an estimate). For example, we know what was raised in taxes, but we didn't say how much it costs to get there. For us to get a complete picture, we need to talk about both sides.
- Hassan: My work is to expose the anti-immigrant story- It reduces people to line items on a balance sheet. I advocate that we reframe the story as an investment. We should take a principled stance against the framing of refugees/immigrants to be line items on a balance sheet. I would like to try to provide additional context here.
- Eric: What we need to do today is to approve the report, but we can approve it with the understanding that we will make certain changes.
- Susan- The rule is that we have to identify the specific modifications that will be made and the board must be in agreement on them and then vote.
- Eva, Djibril, and Mel agree with Hassan and would like to add more context.
- Michael: I agree- is it an investment. I just wanted to make sure that all sides were represented. We also need to point out the positive impact on our workforce.
- Eric: Hassan and Michael can work together to make the revisions.

### **The following revisions will be made to the report:**

#### *On Page 26:*

- Include the benefits that New Americans have on the workforce
- The references to the costs associated with supporting immigrants will be contextualized as an investment that also has many intangible benefits.

#### *Page 4:*

- Office of New Americans Staff names will be taken off the report (page 4)
- The top part will just say Ex-Officio Members.

*Page 3:*

Correction to the spelling of Hassan Ahmad's last name.

*Page 22:*

Add Hassan Ahmad's name to the immigrant heritage panel.

*Page 16:*

Michael will work with Grace and Seyoum to double check the data for refugees vs. SIV's. Grace and Michael will confirm these numbers. We will remove the refugee bar on the graph and update the paragraph.

- Eric: Any other questions about recommendations or other parts of the report?
- Amelia: Should we have a sheet with all of the definitions of the terms? (Foreign born, TPS, DACA)
- Susan: We must come to an agreement on the definitions of the terms
- Eric: Because of this, Amelia will present definitions and we will come back to it at the end.
- Ahoo: Wanted to make sure that the information about the Afghan situation is still accurate?
- Eric: There are no recommendations for the Afghan, and the information is still up to date.
- Eric: Summarized the changes to the report. We will vote on it at the end of this meeting once Amelia shares these definitions.

Break at 3:15

## **Office of New Americans Advisory Board Vision**

**Mel Borja**

Eric: In the interest of time, we are going to table this to the next meeting.

**Eric Lin: called for motion**

- **Hassan Ahmad moved to move the vision discussion to the next meeting.**
- **Dr. Fern Hauck seconded the motion.**
- **Board members unanimously voted to move the vision discussion to the next meeting.**

## ONA + GFP Committee Reports

### Committee Assignments:

Access to Services	Economic Opportunity	Inter/IntraGovernmental
Amelia Castaneda Smith	Djibril Niang*	Hassan Ahmad
Dora Muhammad	Milton Vickerman	Juan Santacoloma
Fern Hauck	Rammy Barbari	Mel Borja*
Jennifer Crewalk	Susannah Lepley	
Kate Ayers *		
Soyoung Yoon		

## Committee Lead Reports

### *Eva and Ahoo: Language Access*

They created a conceptual framework to help us frame language access conversations.

She recommends that when addressing programs and services:

- Does the program have a language access plan?
- If there is no plan, then we need to support them to develop the plan.
- If there is a plan, is it being implemented and effective?
- Consider interpretation AND translation services

Their next steps are:

- Reach out to Mona to find out about where state agencies are with a language access plan
- Look at the JLARC report
- Look at the guidelines for written translations

Eric encouraged the team to connect with other ONA's to learn about what they are doing. Mona suggested looking at New York's plan.

### *Michael and Milton: Data*

- There are limitations to what data is available. There are some surveys (American Community Survey) out there that do collect information on foreign born, but most of the data is not specific to VA, and there is no long-term longitudinal study on immigration.
- The biggest barrier to data collection is the cost and resistance to collecting the information.
- Michael still wants us to ask him about data, even if it is not available. This will help him track the gaps.
- Eric: Clarified that Milton wanted to be listed as a co-lead and we should copy them both when you communicate with them. When we talk to agencies, please ask them for what data they are collecting. And keep Michael apprised as to what data we can get.

### *Access to Services:*

#### *Amelia*

- We identified the top 6 service areas to address, then addressed the top barriers that we see across all these services. The barriers include: Technology, Education, Healthcare, Housing, social services, transportation independence.

- We decided to focus on 3 categories this year: Technology, Education (k-12 and above), and Healthcare (health, dental, mental).
- Our next steps include:
  - We will create a survey and collect data- how do immigrant communities access information?
  - Identify who we need to talk to?
  - What is the data that is out there?
  - Once we identify the who and what, we will focus on the recommendations.

Ahoo clarified that we are addressing barriers for the whole family, not just individuals.

### *Economic*

#### *Susannah*

- The initial focus of this team will be on building the capacity of the small business administration (entrepreneurs) to serve immigrant communities.
- A common barrier is that immigrants often fail when they try to start a business because they don't know what all it will take to be successful.
- Rammy and Djibril will contact local small business administration offices and Eric will contact the state small business. They will be asking about language access, marketing, and assistance programs.
- A second area they will look at is pathways for becoming professionals- We need to think about small stops along the way because people may need to take breaks to work and support their family while participating in job training programs.
- Eric encouraged committees to reach out to their counterparts on the other advisory boards to see if they are working on the same issues.

### *Inter/Intra Governmental Affairs*

#### *Mel Borja*

Key issues:

1. Immigration assistance
  - a. Pathways to citizenship (Focus on Afghan Paroles now)
2. Local Level law enforcement
  - a. Information sharing
3. Pre-K and K-12 education
  - a. What and where do things need to be expanded; Some examples include: (1) Students with Limited and/or Informal Education (SLIFE) (2) educating families about options, (3) Looking at leadership to see if it reflects the population of their community
4. Vaccination Rates
5. DMV
6. Affordable housing



- Fern: could you talk a bit about naturalization- I am concerned about the issues around this. I would like to know how you will frame this?
- Juan: We need to promote naturalization and educate people about why they need to naturalize.
- Eric: We need to find ways to partner with organizations and encourage localities to work with groups who already provide naturalization support. (educate and promote).
- Susannah- Can we make a recommendation to provide state grants for citizenship rather than just federal grants?

## **Standard Operating Procedures**

### **Eric Lin**

- Election of executive officers: Our code does not mention when we should elect officers. Eric suggests that we add yearly elections and that we do elections at the last meeting of the calendar. This allows us to deliver the report in October and get the new EC started at the start of the new year.
- Fern: This makes sense
- Eric: It means that we will have elections today.
- Does anyone have any questions about the updated Standard Operating Procedures?

### **Eric Lin: called for motion to accept the SOPs with the modifications of annual elections.**

- **Fern Hauck moved to adopt the SOPs**
- **Juan Santacoloma seconded the motion.**
- **Board members unanimously voted to adopt the SOPS with the modifications of annual elections.**

## **Attendance Policy**

- **Eric Lin**
- We must have a quorum to meet, so it is important to have good attendance at our meetings. The attendance policy as written asks that you miss no more than 2 meetings per year. If you miss more than 2 meetings, then the board can request that this person be replaced. If you meet the requirements of electronic participation, this does NOT count as an absence.
- Eric: Any questions about the policy?

### **Eric Lin: called for motion to accept the attendance policy as it is written**

- **Eva Stitt moved to adopt the attendance policy**
- **Mel Borja seconded the motion.**
- **Board members unanimously voted to adopt the attendance policy**

## Calendar

### Eric Lin

- Eric suggests that we make a change that does not limit the number of times we can meet in one year. If we get this technical change in our code, it will not go into effect until July 1<sup>st</sup>.
- Eric shared 2 options; a schedule one with 5 meetings and one with 6 meetings. These 2 options can be accessed [here](#) and [here](#).
- Eric- One benefit of having 6 meetings is that we would have options to do town halls and travel to other parts of the state.
- Eric did an informal vote to see if people preferred 5 meetings or 6 meetings if we could change the code. Eight people voted to have the 5 meetings listed on the calendar (or 4 if it is not approved) and Seven people voted to have 6 meetings listed on the calendar (or 4 if it is not approved)

**Eric Lin: called for motion to approve the 4 or 5 meeting calendar.**

- **Hassan Ahmad moved to adopt 4 or 5 meeting calendars.**
- **Rammy Barbari seconded the motion.**
- **15 out of 16 Board members voted yes to the 4 or 5 meeting calendar while 1 abstained. See voting record below.**

Member	Yes	No	Abstain
Ahmad, Hassan	X		
Ayers, Kate	X		
Barbari, Rammy	X		
Borja, Hannah “Mel”	X		
Crewalk, Jennifer	X		
Hauck, Fern	X		
Hoefer, Michael	X		
Lepley, Susannah			X
Lin, Eric	X		
Niang, El Hadji Djibril	X		
Salem, Ahoo	X		
Santacoloma, Juan	X		
Smith, Amelia Castaneda	X		
Stitt, Eva	X		
Vickerman, Milton	X		
Yoon, Soyoung	X		

## **Elections**

### **Eric Lin**

- Eric reviewed the options for elections: (1) we take new nominations and do a vote (2) ask the current EC if they want to stay on another year.
- Fern: We should ask the current EC--Juan, Susannah, Milton agrees

**Eric Lin: called for motion to nominate the current Executive Committee (EC) to stay on for another year**

- **Juan Santacoloma motions to nominate the current EC to stay on for another year.**
- **Hassan Ahmad seconded the motion.**
- **Board members unanimously voted to elect the current Executive Committee to stay on for another year.**

## **Miscellaneous Board Business**

### **Board Report Approval: Revisit**

- Eric: let's revisit the report. Amelia- will you share your definitions so we can determine if we agree on the definitions?
- Amelia shared the definitions of TPS, foreign born, native born, and first-generation immigrant. She found these definitions on the US census website.
- Michel noted that not everyone would define these terms the same way as the census.
- Kate suggested that we table adding the definitions to this year's report and revisit it for next year when there is more time to come to a consensus on the definitions.

**Eric Lin: called for motion to approve the Advisory Board's report to the governor with the documented changes.**

- **Hassan Ahmad motions to approve the report with the documented changes.**
- **Djibril Niang seconded the motion.**
- **Board members unanimously voted to approve the 2021 Board Report with the documented changes.**
- Eric: Grace forwarded Susannah's letter that can be used to write to state and congressional representatives to advocate for a path to naturalization for Afghan Parolees. Board members can send this out on an individual basis if interested.
- Hassan Ahmad: I would like to propose to send a letter to the governor on behalf of the board to urge state resources be used to supplement the existing immigration support structure at Quantico. In addition, refugee resettlement agencies need funding to increase their capacity to offer access to legal counsel, specifically to Afghani evacuees.

that provides legal access to Afgani evacuees. The reason we will send this letter is that there is a dire need for additional support, volunteer attorneys, and materials. Building this infrastructure would greatly benefit the commonwealth of VA.

**Eric Lin: called for motion to send a letter to the governor on behalf of the board regarding increasing legal support resources for Afghan evacuees.**

- **Hassan Ahmad motions to approve the report with the documented changes.**
- **Susannah Lepley seconded the motion.**
- **Board members unanimously voted to send a letter to the governor regarding the need for increased resources for Afghan evacuees.**

**Closing Remarks - Eric Lin**

- There is a town hall meeting to introduce the Executive Team on immigrant integration this Friday. Grace sent out the flyer.

**Board members unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting and the Chair adjourned the meeting at 5:07PM.**