



Commission on Immigrant Affairs

Recommendation Number: 20190429-5A1: Immigrant Affairs Office

Brief Title

Create an Immigrant Affairs Office with at least one full time staff person

Describe the Issue

We have heard from the community, including in our community budget forum, that immigrant and refugee communities are underrepresented in policy and budget discussions. Additionally, immigrant service providers at our budget forum described having no knowledge of the various City services, grants, and programs available to the immigrant community in Austin. The decentralized nature of these programs within the City government is creating a barrier to access for immigrant community members.

We need an office with a city staff person who can identify how the immigrant communities are affected by city policies, how well they are served by city services, and identify gaps in service. We also need a person who can direct outreach efforts to the immigrant communities. A person in such a position can provide some oversight of city services and outreach to immigrants, help ensure there isn't duplication, and coordinate what is now a disjointed effort to reach immigrants. Such a person can also ensure that as federal immigration policies change, such as the upcoming change on public charge rules, and as state policies change, such as with the implementation of SB4, City departments are aware of such changes and can tailor their policies accordingly.

Every major city in Texas has an Immigrant Affairs executive and/or department. As a volunteer commission, we have tried to take on that role, but it's not an adequate approach. As we meet only once a month, we cannot timely respond to emergencies, such as how to coordinate with other Texas cities on an immigration influx. We cannot participate nationally in policy discussions, as with urgent calls to action by Cities United for Action, of which Austin is a member. As such, Austin is not a sufficient part of the national discussion.

While Austin may need more than one person to staff an Office of Immigrant Affairs, as many cities around the country have full offices, at this time we are recommending at least one full-time staff person who can then inform the Commission on Immigrant Affairs and the City Council on the needs of the department.

Data

There are over 70 languages spoken in Austin. The City has identified 7 most spoken languages other than English as priority languages. Immigrants account for approximately 19%

of the city's population. Immigrants in Austin come from all over the world and are diverse in race and ethnicity, languages-spoken, education-level, and employment skills. Over 61% of our foreign-born individuals in Austin come from Latin America, while 28% come from Asia, 6.8% from Europe and 3.3% from Africa. (U.S Census, American Community Survey 2010-2017)

In 2016, immigrants in Austin earned around \$8.1 billion, contributed \$2.1 billion in state and federal taxes, and spent around \$6.1 billion on the local economy (New American Economy, Map the Impact: Austin, <https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/city/austin>)

The City Council in 2018 directed the City Manager to review Immigrant Affairs Offices in other cities across the nation, and to determine how Austin can most effectively do the same.

Recommendation to Address Issue (increase efficiency, effectiveness, and equity):

We recommend that the City of Austin create an Immigrant Affairs office, with at least one full-time staff member. This office would act as a central location for information about city services and programs that are available to immigrants. It would also be tasked with outreach to the various immigrant communities to build trust, and collect feedback about the City and how its programs and departments are serving the immigrant community. This would increase efficiency by creating a "one-stop-shop" for community members and for departments who have questions/concerns about how their services and programs are being accessed by immigrants in Austin, and help avoid any duplication of services. It also would make City services and programs more effective by ensuring that immigrant community members are aware of those services and programs and creating a direct line for feedback regarding their experiences with said services. An Immigrant Affairs Office would increase equity by ensuring that the voice of a vulnerable population is elevated, and it would also catch the city up with the other major cities in Texas who are already serving their immigrant communities through an established Immigrant Affairs office.

Strategic Outcome 1: Government that Works for All

- Condition of City Facilities and Technology
- Satisfaction with City Services
- Public Engagement and Participation
- Equity of City Programs and Resource Allocation

Strategic Outcome 2: Safety

- Fair Administration of Justice

Strategic Outcome 3: Health

- Accessibility to quality health care services
- Accessibility to quality parks, trails, and rec opportunities
- Food security and nutrition

Strategic Outcome 4: Culture and Lifelong Learning

- Quality of cultural venues, events, programs, and resources
- Appreciation, respect and welcoming of all people and cultures
- Honoring and preservation of historical and ethnic heritage

Strategic Outcome 5: Mobility
Accessibility to transportation choices

Strategic Outcome 6: Housing availability and affordability
Ability to improve your home

Date of Approval: 4/29/19

Record of the vote: Unanimous on an 8-0 vote, Glenn Rosales, Samuel Adair, Walid Kobrosly, and Nasario Jaimes not present

Attest: Connie H. Gonzales

