

Cuc T. Vu
Mayoral Nominee for Director
Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs
Confirmation Questions and Answers
2014

1) *What are your major goals for the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs over the next four years?*

To help Seattle become a leading City on immigrant integration by implementing the Mayor's Five Point Plan:

- Expand citizenship programs and services
- Create career pathways through ESL and computers training for the most limited English-proficient immigrants and refugees
- Improve access to City programs, services and resources through ethnic media engagement
- Enhance public safety for immigrant and refugee communities through a Refugee Women's Institute to train emerging refugee women leaders to use City services and advocate with Seattle Police Department for themselves, their families and their communities
- Implement a language access program to improve the City's ability to engage its immigrant and refugee residents

To collaborate with other City departments and identify areas for innovation or improvement as they relate to serving immigrant and refugee communities.

2) *What do you see as the primary challenges facing the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs in the next four years?*

- Bandwidth and resources are key challenges. This is a function of being a small office with the responsibility of creating and implementing programs while also working across many City departments on issues impacting immigrant and refugee communities. Expanding the staffing and budget from 2 FTEs to 7 FTEs by Q1 of 2015 gives us the ability to implement the Five Point Plan as described above. Given the breadth of the needs of immigrant and refugee communities, however – from education, housing, transportation and healthcare to public safety, for example – we need to be at and are asked to be at many tables to provide our expertise on these issues and more. We have to prioritize and re-prioritize every day to meet short-term and long-term priorities, as well as handling the crisis of the day and ensuring progress towards programmatic goals.
- To ensure that City departments are continuing to prioritize immigrant and refugee communities and are looking at the issues through an RSJI lens even as OIRA grows.

3) How do you plan to ensure that councilmembers and council staff receive the information needed from your Department to make policy and financial decisions?

We have a collaborative approach to our work and are very responsive to requests. We intend to engage councilmembers and their staff in the same way.

4) What do you see as the most critical emerging needs in Seattle's refugee and immigrant communities?

Overall, OIRA's Five Point Plan addresses many of the needs in Seattle's refugee and immigrant communities. In addition, I believe that housing and homelessness, transportation, and unemployment are additional and significant issues for immigrant and refugee communities. Fewer immigrant and refugee families are able to afford to live in the Seattle area. Those who do are disproportionately in low-income housing. Affordable housing must be part of the City's development plans.

Although we recognize that public transportation is largely in the jurisdiction of King County, the need for a City solution is necessary because good public transportation goes hand in hand with affordable housing. Immigrant and refugee families who are moving further north and south of Seattle need a reliable and affordable transportation infrastructure to help them connect their homes and their jobs.

Immigrant and refugee communities also struggle with high levels of unemployment and underemployment. Current investments in the ELL and citizenship initiatives will begin to target this problem, but there is considerable more work to do – for example, efforts to improve workforce equity need to consider the most vulnerable members of the labor market – those who have very limited English proficiency, and those who have limited access to on-line job portals.

We're also aware that immigrant and refugee businesses are struggling and we hope to partner with OED in this area.

5) How do you see the role of the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs in the community? How do you envision the Office engaging the public?

OIRA's role is to serve the City's immigrant and refugee communities. We do that by delivering programs and services that increase the integration of the City's immigrant and refugee communities into the civic, linguistic, economic and cultural life of Seattle. We also work collaboratively with other City departments and provide policy and program expertise to achieve equitable outcomes. We engage the public through the Immigrant and Refugee Commission and actively identify talent from immigrant and refugee communities for the array of City leadership roles on task forces, commissions, boards and councils.

Our full-time Community Relations Liaison is also helping us keep our eyes and ears close to the community. This allows us to hear emerging issues first-hand from the community. We also intend to expand our work with ethnic media and improve communication between immigrant and refugee communities and the City.

6) *As a small office with the responsibility of facilitating and coordinating work across many City departments related to issues impacting refugees and immigrants, how do you envision being effective and what strategies would you use to be successful in achieving this objective?*

As Director, I'm keenly aware of the challenges of having a small office and serving a constituency that is nearly 20% of the City's population. Every day we have to prioritize and re-prioritize to make sure that we are giving balance to short-term and long-term goals and objectives. If we work smartly, we can be effective. That means leveraging ethnic media to reach living rooms, church pews and soccer tournaments. It also means leveraging relationships with community-based organizations that serve immigrant and refugee communities. And it means working collaboratively with all City departments. In my first month on the job, I have been intentional in meeting with heads of other departments to identify areas of work to improve the lives of immigrants and refugees in our City. Between now and December, I will meet with external stakeholders to learn about their priorities and will take their feedback to consistently evaluate how we can do our work better.