

Rescue.org

2024 STATE POLICY GUIDE



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Introduction

Each year the International Rescue Committee (IRC) works closely with state elected leaders to ensure that the communities in which we resettle are welcoming places for refugees and other new Americans. In addition to working directly on policy, we assess introduced legislation through our state tracker and identify new model policies and the trends in legislation—all informing the policies included in this guide. Year to year it has reflected emerging themes such as: resources for refugee-serving programs; reduced barriers for re-credentialing and licensure processes in states; and access to in-state tuition, to name a few. These measures not only help ensure refugees and other newcomers can access pathways to economic self-sufficiency and integrate more smoothly, but they positively impact the broader community as well. States and localities across the country can only benefit from the personal and professional success that a recently arrived individual achieves as they rebuild their lives. This year's state policy and advocacy guide includes new policy themes and some familiar ones—but with nuanced examples as the policy efforts take shape in different states and political contexts.

Recommendations provided are informed by stakeholder engagement and landscaping impacted communities to understand service provision needs, and strategic assessments of the political realities on the ground.

How to Use This Guide

This guide is designed for advocates with any level of experience. Drafting and supporting welcoming policies should be done in coordination with your local resettlement agency and refugee and impacted communities to address the most pressing needs. Each policy theme in this guide includes two sections:

1. **Policy recommendations** that include issue summary, policy drafting best practices, and model policies already introduced and advanced in other states.
2. **Strategic engagement guidance** specific to the political environment of your state, including a checklist of considerations and key targets within legislative committees, and local and national partners.

When reviewing our suggestions for proactive legislation, it's helpful to reflect on some key questions:

- ✗ **Have you assessed how these issues impact new American communities in your state?**
- ✗ **What are your own gaps in knowledge and do you need to consult with a policy specialist to learn more about how to address an issue in your state?**
- ✗ **What is your capacity to engage stakeholders and elected leaders, and advance policy through the legislative process?**

It is important to remember that while we propose model examples in this guide, each state is different, with its own state code, processes and procedures, and regulatory or coalition partners. Perform a detailed review of these components before pursuing policies.

If you have questions about any of the content and recommendations, please contact:
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Select State Examples

Policy Area	State(s)	Details

Part 2: State Budget Investments in Resettlement and Integration

Issue Summary

While the federal government provides pass-through funds for the resettlement program that supports the immediate resettlement and stabilization of newly arrived refugees, state investments can fill gaps in federal funding and maximize long-term integration outcomes. States may establish a general fund accessible to organizations providing services to refugees and immigrants, or may allocate state resources to improve access or outcomes for refugees and immigrants within specific initiatives and programs.

Recommended Best Practices

- ✗ The process of selecting funding priorities for the budget request centers input from impacted communities and service providers.
- ✗ Budget request is data driven and the funding need can be evidenced quantitatively. Developing a formula that breaks down the funding need ensures your budget request is seen as accurately addressing the identified funding gap.
- ✗ The budget request is designed with sustainability and growth in mind. Ideally, a state will carve out a specific and ongoing line item in the state budget that is resourced year over year commensurate to need.
- ✗ The budget request includes requirements for reporting outcomes of the use of resources to the state agency or legislature.
- ✗ If applicable, dispensation is overseen by your state's Office of New Americans/Office of Refugee and Immigrant Affairs or state refugee coordinator, with input from resettlement agencies, service providers and impacted communities.

Alternatives and Compromises

- ✗ Across many states, the funding needs identified by community stakeholders may far exceed a state's available funds. In years where a state may have less funds to invest, advocates are more likely to be successful if they compromise on their ideal funding amount (this can often be viewed or referred

Policy Area	State(s)	Details
General Fund Establishments	New York (2017–2023) Aid to Localities	The New York State Enhanced Services for Refugees Program (NYSESRP) was initially established in 2017. NYSESRP resources are distributed through the State Refugee Coordinator.
Issue Area Specific Allocations	Minnesota (2023) S.F. 360	Appropriates \$1.5 million in fiscal year 2024 and \$1.5 million in fiscal year 2025 to fund the establishment of the Office of New Americans within the Minnesota Office of Employment and Economic Development.
Issue Area Specific Allocations	Oregon (2022) S.B. 1543	Appropriates \$10.5 million to the Oregon Department of Administrative Services for the Universal Legal Representation Fund in 2022, \$10.5 million for the Fund in 2023, and \$4.5 million to the Judicial Department for the purposes of supporting universal representation (providing legal services to people in immigration court).
Extended Case Management	California (2023) S.B. 85	In certain circumstances, would facilitate a process by which recently resettled refugees needing an extension of services could pursue state-resourced extension of federal reception and placement funding benchmarked throughout a 360-day period.

Advocacy Checklist

- Contact your state budget office to ensure you understand the timeline, procedures and roles of responsibility that are specific to your state. The National Association of State Budget Offices' 2021 report on "[Budget Processes in the States](#)" can also provide a helpful starting point.
- Understand and take into consideration your state's overall budget health and budget forecast for the next budget cycle.
- Research budget priorities communicated by the governor or legislative leadership and identify any potential alignment with your own priorities.
- Assess the political opportunity and potential risk of requesting state funds in your political context. Do you have a demonstrated history of the state being open to policy that supports refugees and immigrants? Review the history of the state's previous budget allocations related to refugee or immigrant communities.
- Assess the strength of your relationships with entities involved in the budget process across state government to identify your likeliest budget champion.

Options for Political Environments

Red Option: Advocates may consider securing funding that supports the implementation of legislation related to workforce development outcomes. Instead of pursuing state-level funding, consider opportunities at the county or municipal level.

Purple Option: Work with the relevant state agency to pursue inclusion in the state agency's proposed budget; reinforce the agency request or submit your budget request via the legislature or governor's office based on their respective political alignment with the request. Consider a two-year approach wherein the fund is established and state resources are allocated in subsequent budget cycles.

Blue Option:

State Examples

Policy Area	State(s)	Details
Establishing a Municipal Office	Seattle (2012) Ordinance 123822	Establishing Seattle's Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs.
Establishing ONA Within a State Agency	Colorado (2022) H.B. 21-1150	Vested the ONA with the authority to convene diverse stakeholders in order to implement a statewide strategy for successful integration. In 2023, H.B. 23-1283 transferred the State Refugee Coordinator's office from the Department of Health and Human Services under the Office of New Americans, consolidating and aligning both departments.
Establishing ONA Within a State Agency	Delaware (2023) S.B. 44	Establishes an ONA within Delaware's Department of State and requests \$543,620 in annual funding for personnel and operating costs.

Advocacy Checklist

- Connect with the [ONA State Network](#) for technical support on creating the office.
- Compile information about existing immigrant and refugee populations and their contributions, and identify gaps and opportunities that a statewide ONA can help meet.
- Establish clear benchmarks, deliverables, projects, responsibilities and powers for the ONA. Be ready to prepare the case as to why an ONA is necessary in addition to already existing state agencies that serve refugee and immigrant residents.
- Review ONAs from other states to identify a structure/mandate appropriate for your context as well as to develop a correlating budget request reasonable for establishing the ONA and hiring staff.
- Research if your state previously attempted to pass legislation that would establish an ONA. If so, understand why the measure was unsuccessful and determine how the advocacy approach could change in order to ensure success.

Options for Political Environments

Red Option: House the ONA within a workforce-related state agency and prioritize economic integration; consider a multi-year effort that establishes the ONA first and allocates funding in subsequent years; emphasize benefits of increasing efficiency across state agencies.

Purple Option: The alignment of either the governor or legislature may determine whether you pursue an ONA via executive order or legislation as well as whether it is housed in a state agency or the governor's office; ensure broad geographic/political representation at the table.

Blue Option: House the ONA within the governor's office; fully fund the ONA for staffing needs and programmatic implementation; provide a mandate to oversee other state agencies' implementation of language access and other newcomer-related plans.

Anticipated Committee Targets

Budget and Appropriations Committees; Health and Human Services Committees; Committees related to the department in which the ONA will be housed.

Coalition Building/Partner Targets

American Immigration Council (AIC) ONA network; members of impacted communities and ethnic community-based organizations; resettlement agencies and organizations providing services to refugees and immigrants; impacted community members; Chambers of Commerce and business coalitions.

Workforce Inclusion and Opportunity

Issue Summary

Across the U.S., refugees, immigrants and other new Americans play a vital role in local workforces—making up 17.1% of the U.S. workforce—filling critical needs, opening businesses and contributing to the success of communities across the country. However, the skills, training and education of these newcomers are often underutilized, and opportunities to build new skills can be limited.

For individuals who previously worked in credentialed professions—health care workers and educators, for example—the process to re-credential and return to a career can be inaccessible in terms of available retraining opportunities, guidance from state regulatory agencies, time and financial resources, and opportunities to demonstrate that their skills meet U.S. standards. Available solutions to address these obstacles include reducing requirements on applications for professional licensure; publishing guidance on pathways to professional credentialing for internationally educated individuals; and expanding opportunities for newcomers to demonstrate that their skills meet U.S. standards.

Individuals outside of credentialed experience, such as those looking to change careers or build new skills to meet local workforce needs, face barriers to finding skill-building and career mobility opportunities. Opportunities for intervention for career paths that do not require an occupational license, existing skill recognition, skill building, and opportunities for career advancement can be addressed through opportunities for vocational training, experiential learning opportunities, occupational English language classes and access to in-state tuition (see page 15).

Recommended Best Practices

- ✗ Advance policies related to occupational credentialing that create or increase opportunities for newcomers to demonstrate that their existing skills meet or are substantially similar to U.S. standards (licensure by endorsement; increase accepted English language or credential evaluation methods).
- ✗ Provide opportunities for internationally trained individuals in certain credentialed professions, such as health care, to obtain U.S.-based, hands-on experience to meet credentialing requirements and prepare for entry into the U.S. workforce.
- ✗ Eliminate unnecessary occupational credentialing barriers like immigration status requirements for professional licensure.
- ✗ Increase training and education opportunities for newcomers to build skills that meet vital workforce needs; invest in programs—such as experiential learning, workforce training, apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships, and vocational English classes— that help build needed occupational and language skills.
- ✗ Consult with relevant industry professionals for contextualization, feedback and endorsement of policies.

Alternatives and Compromises

Legislative efforts may not always be possible. When that is the case, advocates should consider pursuing administrative solutions and targeted interventions that address specific occupations or industry needs.

- ✗ Consider engaging the governor to assess options regulating the application of executive Workforce Innovation and Opportunity (WIOA) funding to programs that specifically serve immigrants and refugees.
- ✗ Iow a dedicated resources to training recently arrived refugees to secure commercial driver's licenses and employment in trucking and transport.

- ✗ Pennsylvania's Department of State invested in a survey that asked new Pennsylvanians to share information about language access, education, employment, licensure and barriers they had experienced related to occupational licensing. The 2021 survey resulted in several policy recommendations.

State Examples

Policy Area	State(s)	Details
Experiential learning	Colorado (2022) <u>S.B. 22-140</u>	Creates several new programs to increase access to learning, skill-building opportunities and employment by closing the digital divide and reducing language barriers.
Temporary licensure	Michigan (2023) <u>S.B. 162</u>	Allows individuals licensed as a school counselor in another country to be granted a temporary school counselor license if they meet all requirements for a permanent credential.
Grant program	Maine (2023) <u>L.D. 1169</u>	Creates the Foreign Credentialing and Skills Recognition Grant Program Fund.
Published guidance on pathways and English-language exams	Oregon (2023) <u>S.B. 849</u>	Requires the professional licensing boards to provide culturally



Options for Targeted Political Environments

Red Option: A study to understand the state's current and anticipated workforce needs, and the underutilization of immigrant and refugee talent. This helps to frame the issue through an economic lens with a specific focus on the role newcomers can play in filling critical workforce needs and contributing to the state's economic success.

Purple Option: Policies that address regulatory obstacles to re-credentialing and promote increased understanding and recognition of skills, experience and training obtained outside of the U.S.

Blue Option: Policies that create opportunities for skill building and occupational language acquisition through training, grants or other programs targeted at internationally trained individuals.

Legislative Committee Targets

Committees involved with workforce and credentialing typically include Business & Labor Affairs, Commerce, Economic Development, Regulated Industries, Industry & Labor, Economic Growth, and Education. For initiatives that require funding, Appropriations Committee outreach should also be prioritized.

Coalition Building and Partner Targets

In addition to working alongside impacted immigrant and refugee populations, the following targets should be considered:

- ✗ For work related to occupational credentials or licenses, targets should include occupational licensing boards or regulatory agencies, occupation-specific societies, and professional groups. Additionally, private, non-profit and government agencies that support workforce development for individuals seeking an occupational credential or license should be consulted.
- ✗ General workforce inclusion and opportunity work should include workforce development boards, job readiness training programmatic staff, local workforce centers or other entities supported through federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity (WIOA) funding, higher education and vocational training institutes, and relevant employer groups or associations.



Policy Area	State(s)	Details
Alternative High School Programming	Colorado (2023) S.B. 23-003	Creating a pathway for new Americans in Colorado who are over the age

- ✗ Incorporate requirements to publicize the new legislation at institutions of higher education to increase awareness amongst college applicants.
- ✗ Partner with institutions of higher education to ensure policies are implemented.
- ✗ Build accountability mechanisms into legislative language by establishing appeals processes for students who are wrongfully denied in-state tuition residency.

Alternatives and Compromises

- ✗ Pursue a multi-year approach where target populations are included year on year by updating the state code.
- ✗ Consider partnering with the state’s Board of Regents or university advisory board to create administrative pathways for new Americans to access in-state tuition rates.

Select State Examples

Policy Area	State(s)	Details
In-state Tuition	Utah (2023) H.B. 102 Vermont (2022) S. 283	Allows refugees, and other resettled populations to access in-state tuition upon arrival.
Tuition Rate Accountability	New York (2023) S. 6129	Establishes accountability mechanisms if a student feels that in-state tuition access was wrongfully denied by an institution of higher education.

Advocacy Checklist

- Research your state’s current policies on [in-state tuition](#) with the Higher Ed Immigration [“Portal to the States.”](#)
- Connect with impacted community members, service providers and higher education institutions to assess need and understand the challenge. Verify if the challenge is residence and/or immigration status.
- Identify if this is a policy or regulatory change. In some states, the state’s Board of Regents can determine which populations qualify for in-state tuition. Collect enrollment data to ensure parity.
- Assess if you should develop an inclusive policy or a piecemeal approach with a multi-year strategy.

Options for Targeted Political Environments

Red Option: Consider a multi-year strategy that gradually expands access to immigrant populations.

Purple Option: Consider a broad expansion of in-state tuition residency waiver to include refugees, humanitarian parolees and special immigrant visa recipients.

Blue Option: Incorporate language in the policy that establishes and resources publication of these rates. Create a reporting mechanism for those who might be wrongfully denied access to seek review of their claim.

Anticipated Legislative Committee Targets

Education Committees and Appropriation Committees.

Coalition Building and Partner Targets

Higher education institutions (especially community colleges), workforce development centers, and job readiness providers like resettlement agencies; State Board of Higher Education or Board of Regents; [IMPRINT Coalition](#); and the [Presidents Alliance for Higher Education and Immigration](#).

