



ONA Playbook: Executive Summary

Offices of New Americans

Offices of New Americans (ONAs) are state-level departments that focus on policies, programs, and services supporting immigrant and refugee integration. They work across agencies and sectors to advance inclusion, workforce participation, and community engagement. Today, 24 states form the national ONA State Network which supports bipartisan, statewide approaches to addressing demographic and workforce shifts while recognizing the contributions of immigrants and refugees to state economies and labor force participation.







The Economic Case for Offices of New Americans

States are navigating demographic and workforce changes driven by aging populations, declining birth rates, and ongoing labor shortages. Immigrants are already helping to stabilize local labor markets, accounting for all U.S. labor force growth from 2000 to 2023.¹ In 2024, immigrants represented nearly one in five workers nationwide² and are projected to contribute more than \$7 trillion to GDP over the next decade. When states intentionally align systems to recognize and support this talent, communities benefit through stronger local economies, more responsive health care and public services, expanded business growth, and regional resilience. These conditions highlight the importance of coordinated state-level structures that help agencies understand and respond to evolving community and economic needs.

ONAs as a Part of State Workforce Infrastructure

An ONA serves as a centralized hub within state government for work related to immigrant and refugee inclusion. ONAs commonly collaborate with agencies in workforce development, education, health, human services, and economic development. Immigrant and refugee integration is a key driver of workforce participation and economic growth, helping states fill labor shortages and strengthening communities statewide. By coordinating policies and programs across these areas, ONAs help identify service gaps, improve communication, and support consistent statewide planning.

Core Functions of an Effective ONA

-  **Workforce development and economic growth**
Supporting connections to employment, training, licensing, and credential recognition
-  **Policy advising**
Providing information, analysis, and feedback to state leaders on issues related to immigrant and refugee integration
-  **Language access and equity**
Supporting translation, interpretation, and accessible communication across agencies
-  **Statewide coordination**
Aligning state agencies, local governments, employers, and community partners to streamline programs and reduce duplication
-  **Emergency response**
Helping ensure that immigrant and refugee communities receive timely and accurate information during emergencies
-  **Community engagement and integration**
Maintaining communication with community organizations, stakeholders, and residents to inform program development and identify needs

¹ https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/mpi_immigrant-origin-adults-labor-market-2024_final.pdf

² <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/forbrn.pdf>



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Establishing and Structuring an Office of New Americans

States establish Offices of New Americans (ONAs) through legislation or executive action, balancing durability with flexibility.

- **Legislative:** Establishes an ONA in statute, providing defined authority, continuity across administrations, and clearer long-term sustainability.
- **Executive:** Creates an ONA through executive order or administrative action, allowing for faster implementation and adaptability. This approach sometimes serves as a precursor to legislation.

ONAs may be housed in a governor's office, embedded within an existing agency, or structured as stand-alone entities. Regardless of model, effective ONAs have defined authority, access to executive leadership, and the ability to coordinate across agencies and with external partners.

Funding and Sustainability

States use a range of approaches to fund ONAs, including governor's discretionary resources, agency operating budgets, and grants aligned with integration or workforce priorities. Many ONAs begin with modest budgets and expand their functions over time. Long-term sustainability often depends on clear authorizing language, inter-agency collaboration, and alignment with ongoing funding streams.

Relevance for State Policymakers

ONAs provide a structured mechanism for coordinating state-level work related to immigrant and refugee integration. By improving information sharing across agencies and elevating workforce and demographic insights, ONAs support informed decision-making, resource alignment, and program design that reflect statewide priorities and community needs.



Scan to read our full guide. For questions, technical assistance, or partnership opportunities related to this report or our broader state policy work, please connect with us [here](#).

About WES

World Education Services is a non-profit social enterprise that supports the educational, economic, and social inclusion of immigrants, refugees, and international students. For more than 50 years, WES has set the standard for international academic credential evaluation, supporting millions of people as they seek to achieve their academic and professional goals. Through decades of experience as a leader in global education, WES has developed a wide range of tools to pursue social impact at scale. From evaluating academic credentials to shaping policy, designing programs, and providing philanthropic funding, we partner with a diverse set of organizations, leaders, and networks to uplift individuals and drive systems change. Together with its partners, WES enables people to learn, work, and thrive in new places.