

OIRA: Supporting Seattle's Immigrant and Refugee Communities

January 2026

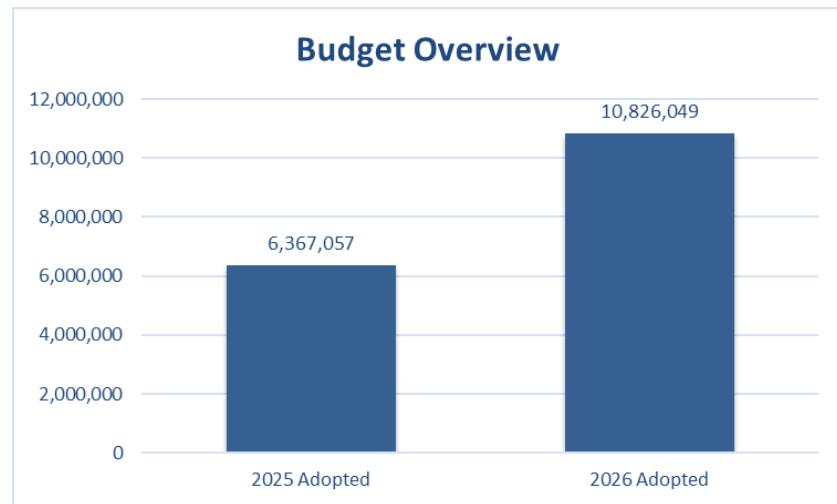


Seattle
Office of Immigrant
and Refugee Affairs

Overview

The mission of the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs is to improve the lives of Seattle's immigrant and refugee communities through policies, programs, services, and community engagement.

Our office budget is mostly backed by the General Fund, but also consists of Payroll Expense Tax and State and local grant funding.



Office Programs

Legal Defense
Network (LDN)

Ethnic Media Program

New Citizen Program
(NCP)

Language Access
Program

Ready to Work (RTW)

Immigrant Safety and
Access Network
(ISAN)

WA Migrant & Asylum
Seeker Support (WA
MASS) Project

Immigrant Rapid
Response



Legal Defense Network

Overview: Provides legal representation for low-income Seattle residents, students, and workers in immigration detention, facing deportation, or at risk due to immigration status.

Services include removal defense and filing for immigration relief and permanent status.

Goal: Increase access to legal services to protect immigrants and refugees from deportation, ensuring they can remain safely in their communities.





- **Overview:** Provides free naturalization services to low-income immigrants and refugees through case management and full legal representation throughout the citizenship process.
- **Goal:** Increase access to legal services and other supports to help low-income immigrants and refugees who have high barriers to naturalization become US citizens.

New Citizen Program

Ready to Work Program



Overview: A classroom-based program that offers English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes (Levels 1-4), culturally competent case management, digital literacy skills training, and other employment training.

Goal: Help low-income immigrants and refugees build English, digital, and job skills to achieve economic stability.

Language Access Program

- **Overview:** Collaborate with City departments to ensure that residents speaking languages other than English can access the information and services they need, and that the City is able to effectively serve them. **Seattle invests \$1.2-\$1.3M annually in language services.**
- **Goal:** To ensure every City resident can access city services and information, regardless of the language they speak



Immigrant Safety Access Network

Overview: Created as a result of Executive Order 2023-01, ISAN provides direct cash assistance to immigrant and refugee victims and their families impacted by violent crime or sudden death.

Goal: To help decrease the burden of the impacts of gun violence and sudden death on our immigrant and refugee communities.



WA Migrant and Asylum Seeker Support Project

- **Overview:** A state-led pilot program designed to address urgent housing and support needs for newly arrived migrants and asylum seekers who are not eligible for federal resettlement services.
- **Goal:** Provide emergency housing as individuals and families transition into State housing resources.



Rapid Response Program

Established in March in response to direct community feedback and identified gaps in existing service.

Services offered in partnership with 8 non-profit organizations:

- **Legal Education:** Know Your Rights & Information Sessions
- **Limited Legal Services:** Family Safety Planning, Legal Consultation and Application Support, Deportation Defense Hotline
- **Advocacy & Coordination:** Rapid Response Collaborative Table, Outreach, and Convening of Public Funders



WASHINGTON IMMIGRANT
SOLIDARITY
NETWORK



Northwest
IMMIGRANT
RIGHTS
Project

LCYC

Legal Counsel for
Youth and Children



A blue-tinted aerial photograph of the Seattle skyline, featuring the Space Needle and the Columbia Center, with Mount Rainier visible in the background.

Supporting Immigrant Communities & City Departments



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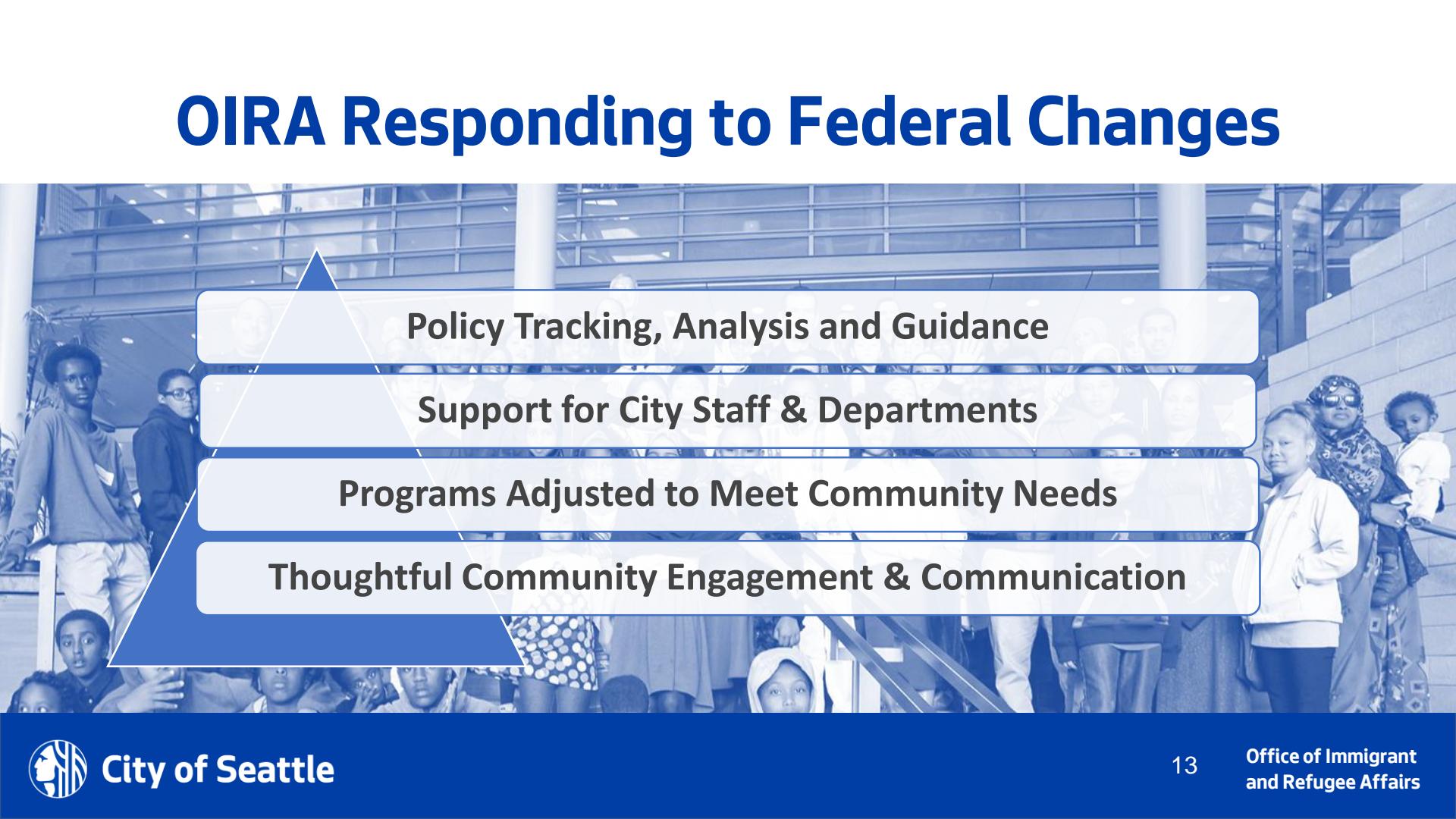
2025 Council-led Mid-Year Investment

In the mid-year supplemental budget, Council amended the Adopted Budget, adding one-time funding in the amount of \$300,000 to OIRA.

OIRA launched 2 Request For Proposals (RFPs) in September 2025 for the purposes of Community Education and Legal Representation for Unaccompanied Minors. Resulting in:

- 13 contracts with Community Based Organizations to provide 23 Community Education events.
 - Amigos de Seattle, Catholic Community Services of Western Washington, Concord International Elementary PTA, Eritrean Association in Greater SEA, Interim Community Development Association, Kandelia, Khalsa Gurmat Center, Korean Community Service Center, Literary Source, Oromo Cultural Center, Refugee Women's Alliance (ReWA), Somali Community Services of Seattle, and Somali Health Board.
- 2 contracts with legal providers to provide full representation for unaccompanied minors.
 - Kids In Need of Defense (KIND) and Legal Counsel for Youth and Children (LCYC).

OIRA Responding to Federal Changes



Policy Tracking, Analysis and Guidance

Support for City Staff & Departments

Programs Adjusted to Meet Community Needs

Thoughtful Community Engagement & Communication



Immigrant and Refugee Commission

- **Overview:** Advises the mayor, city council, and city departments on immigrant and refugee community needs, concerns, and access to services and resources. The Commission shall consist of 15 members, with 7 members appointed by the City Council and 8 members appointed by the Mayor.
- **Current status:** the board is in the process of re-starting once new member appointments are made.
- The first-round of recruitment and application review was just completed following internal OIRA review. 37 applications were reviewed in this first-round and we are in the process of scheduling interviews with top applicants.
- **Next Steps:** In response to CM Rinck, CM Solomon and Chair Rivera's SLI, OIRA will have a report updating Council on the Commission by May 1, 2026.

Support for City Staff & Departments

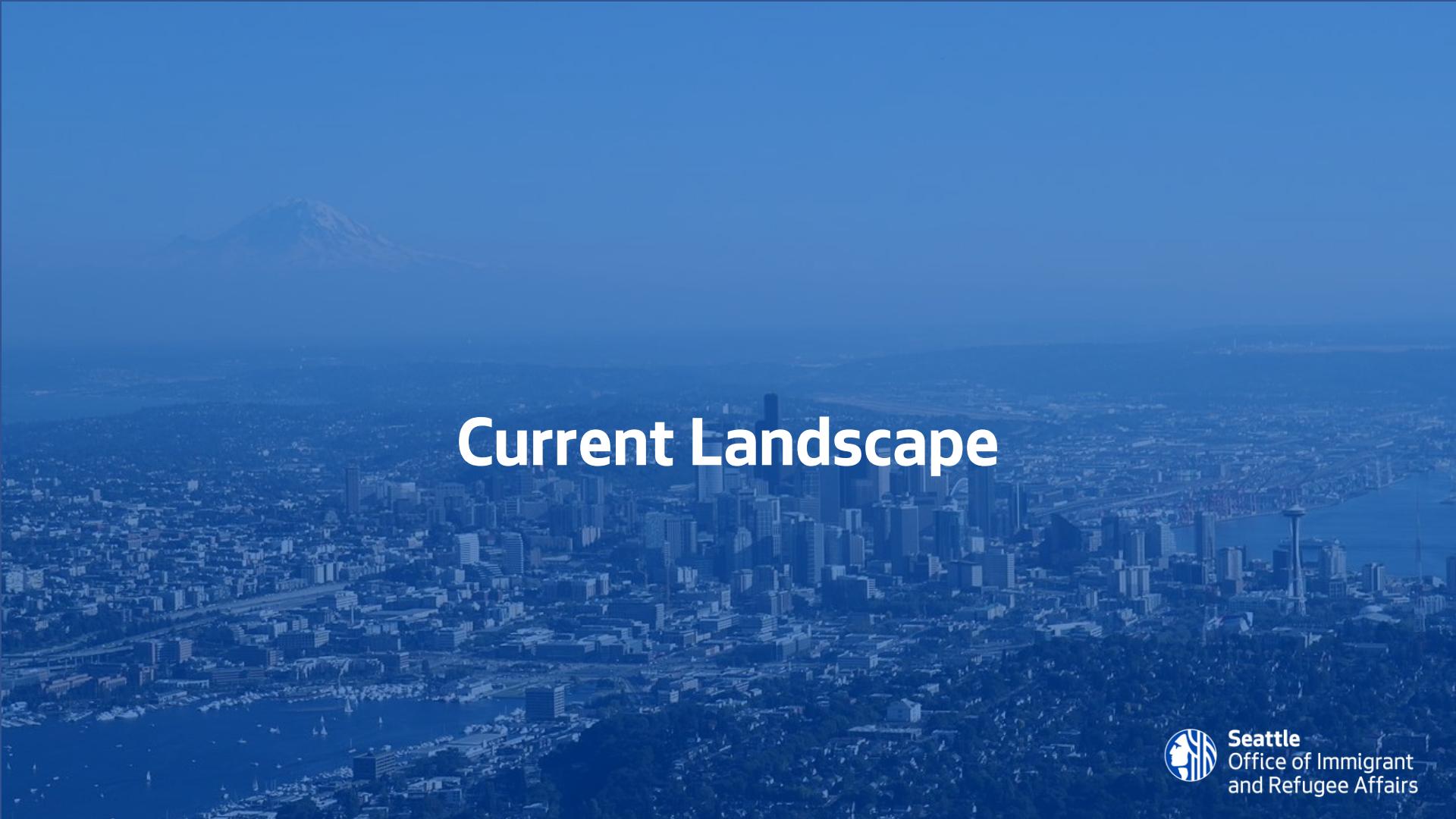
- **9 Trainings on city-wide protocol on immigration enforcement and creation of internal training video**
- **Hosted 2 information sessions with over 1,000 participants**, in partnership with NWIRP
- **Organized a One Seattle Community Resource Fair**
- **3 Know Your Rights Trainings** for business owners and workers
- **2 Know Your Rights Trainings and information sessions** focused on Somali and Afghan communities
- Hosted **weekly open office hours** to support City Departments



Community Engagement

Our approach centers transparency, accessibility, and partnership—meeting communities where they are and responding to their evolving needs.

- Hosted virtual policy info sessions and Know Your Rights trainings in January, March, and April, November and December. Led in-person service provider training at Seattle Public Library in April.
- Ongoing presence at monthly community events and resource fairs.
- Regular engagement with partner organizations to strengthen coordination.
- Convened Mayor's Roundtables with community leaders in January, August and December.

A wide-angle, aerial photograph of the Seattle skyline at dusk or dawn. The city is densely packed with buildings of various heights, including several skyscrapers. In the far distance, the snow-capped peak of Mount Rainier is visible against a hazy sky. The water of Elliott Bay and the Space Needle are on the right side of the frame.

Current Landscape



Seattle
Office of Immigrant
and Refugee Affairs

Snapshot: Federal Immigration Landscape in December and January

Across the country, immigrant families are facing rising fear and uncertainty driven by:

- Travel ban
- Indefinite pause on immigration applications
- Immigrant visa ban for 75 nationalities
- Indefinite pause on asylum
- Re-review of refugee status granted under Biden administration
- Increased immigration enforcement, detention, and deportations
- Fraud rhetoric targeting immigrants' use of public benefits

Seattle Trends in Immigration Enforcement

- Nearly 2,000 people in Washington have been arrested since January 2025
- Q1 2025: 8 verified ICE activities in Seattle and 40 in King County
- Q2 2025: 5 verified ICE activities in Seattle and 50 in King County
- Q3 2025: 10 verified ICE activities in Seattle and 42 in King County

This data was collected by our Rapid Response partner, WAISN, and does not cover all the city of Seattle.



2025-26 Legal Challenges

- A rapidly evolving legal landscape has increased challenges for communicating with detained clients. Decreases in federal funding and changes to government practices have prolonged detention, forcing some clients to choose deportation rather than pursue relief to avoid further detention.
- Many citizenship appointments are being canceled at a time when changes to the naturalization process are making it harder for permanent residents to become U.S. citizens.

Opportunities To Get Involved

- Many of the organizations we contract with—such as **ACRS, WASIN, NWIRP, KCSC, El Centro de la Raza, ReWA, and others**—offer volunteer opportunities; visit their websites or social media pages to learn how you can support immigrant and refugee communities.
- OIRA shares regular updates, resources, and event information through our monthly newsletter and on social media, stay connected to stay informed.
- In moments of uncertainty, **it's critical to combat the chilling effect by seeking out accurate information, following trusted local organizations, and sharing resources within your networks.**
- Your time, your voice, and your action can make a real difference. Make sure you stay engaged and help build a more inclusive Seattle.

Questions?