

New African Immigrants Commission
Advocacy. Access. Self-Sufficiency.
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New African Immigrants Commission

BYLAWS

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Preamble

The mission of the New African Immigrants Commission is to advocate for the self-sufficiency of sub-Saharan African people in Ohio.

Article 1 Statutory Authority of the Commission

The Ohio New African Immigrants Commission is hereby created by the Ohio General Assembly and exercises powers and responsibilities in accordance with the provisions of the Ohio Revised Code 4112.31 & 4112.32. These bylaws have been adopted for the purpose of regulating the affairs of the commission and the conduct of its business pursuant to the Enabling Act.

Article II Name of the Commission

Pursuant to Ohio Revised Code 4112.32, the commission shall be referred to as the “New African Immigrants Commission,” or “African Commission,” or hereby also referred to as NAIC.

Article III Commissioners

The Commission shall be composed of 11 members, appointed by the Governor with consent by the legislature for three-year terms each. Upon legislative change, members are not compensated for service, and shall make decisions as a body. The commission shall create and empower committees at its discretion to carry out designated functions. Qualifications for appointment as a commissioner shall include: US citizenship or Permanent Resident status and legal residency in Ohio. Upon appointment, commissioners must undergo confirmation procedures including the oath and background check. Ethics and other relevant training must also be completed within 30 days unless otherwise agreed upon by the Chair. The Commission shall elect among its members a Chair, Vice Chair, Recorder and any other position as the commission sees fit. Each Commissioner serves in the elected position for a term of 1 year and is eligible for reappointment by a majority vote of the Commissioners. The vote for the elected positions will be held at the October meeting each year. The Commission shall complete and release an annual report of its work on a timeframe and date agreed upon by the Commission.

Article IV Duties of the Commission

Pursuant to Ohio Revised Code 4112.31, the Ohio New African Immigrants Commission is charged with the following:

- (A) Gather and disseminate information and conduct hearings, conferences, investigations, and special studies on problems and programs concerning sub-Saharan African people;
- (B) Secure appropriate recognition of the accomplishments and contributions of sub-Saharan African people to this state;
- (C) Stimulate public awareness of the problems of sub-Saharan African people by conducting a program of public education;
- (D) Develop, coordinate, and assist other public and private organizations that serve sub-Saharan African people, including the conducting of training programs for community leadership and service project staff;
- (E) Advise the governor, general assembly, and state departments and agencies of the nature, magnitude, and priorities of the problems of sub-Saharan African people;
- (F) Advise the governor, general assembly, and state departments and agencies on, and assist in the development and implementation of, comprehensive and coordinated policies, programs, and procedures focusing on the special problems and needs of sub-Saharan African people, especially in the fields of education, employment, energy, health, housing, welfare, and recreation;
- (G) Propose new programs concerning sub-Saharan African people to public and private agencies and evaluate for such agencies existing programs or prospective legislation concerning sub-Saharan African people;
- (H) Review and approve grants to be made from federal, state, or private funds that are administered or subcontracted by the commission;
- (I) Prepare, review, and approve an annual report;
- (J) Serve as a clearinghouse to review and comment on all proposals to meet the needs of sub-Saharan African people that are submitted to it by public and private agencies;
- (K) Apply for and accept grants and gifts from governmental and private sources to be administered by the commission or subcontracted to local agencies;
- (L) Monitor and evaluate all programs subcontracted to local agencies by the commission;
- (M) Endeavor to assure that sub-Saharan African people have access to decision-making bodies in all state and local governmental departments and agencies;
- (N) Establish advisory committees on special subjects as needed to facilitate and maximize community participation in the operation of the commission;
- (O) Establish with state and local governments and private business and industry relationships that promote and assure equal opportunity for sub-Saharan African people in government, education, and employment.
- (P) Create an interagency council of all state departments and agencies.

Article V Commission Objectives

The objectives, in adherence with the statutory responsibilities of the Commission, shall be adopted by the commission to:

Advocate for the sub-Saharan African people in Ohio to decision-makers such as the Governor, general assembly, state agencies, and local governments on matters that impact sub-Saharan African people by proposing and reviewing legislation, reprioritizing existing programs, creating programs, and issuing reports.

Connect sub-Saharan African people with state agencies and programs, sub-Saharan African community organizations, organizations serving sub-Saharan Africans, and entrepreneurs across the state by hosting meetings and events, ensuring access to decision-making bodies, and promoting statewide communication.

Impact sub-Saharan African communities and businesses positively by applying and accepting grants, monitoring and evaluating subcontracted programs, conducting trainings, highlighting successes, and engaging in meaningful partnerships to increase the quality of life for all sub-Saharan African people in Ohio.

Article VI Commission Focus Areas

To increase the efficiency of the Commission, the goals will be encapsulated in the work done in the following areas:

Economic Impact: Maximizing the economic contributions to the State of Ohio and beyond

Ohio African Resource: Ensuring access and linkages to diverse resources

Public Policy & Education Bureau: Facilitating social, educational, and civic stability and integration.

The commission shall acquire the service of interns as staff for commission work under written guidelines.

Article VII Committees of the Commission

The standing committees created by the commission are:

Education and Cultural Affairs Committee
Social Services and Outreach Committee
Workforce and Business Development Committee
Health and Wellness Committee
Legal Services Committee

Education and Cultural Affairs Committee

- a) Plans, organizes, schedules, and implements cultural programs and events;
- b) Provides staff assistance to commissions, committees and other organizations;
- c) Prepares recommendations on cultural program development and implements programs through liaison with community groups, educational organization/ institutions, libraries and governmental agencies;
- d) Develops and coordinates a wide variety of cultural programs and events to increase community interest and involvement;
- e) Works with Commissioners, African immigrant organizations, volunteers and others to develop, promote and implement cultural exhibits, activities and programs;
- f) Facilitates and organizes events, dialogues, and discussions that explore the identity of African peoples, intended to support community-building and showcasing the value of multiculturalism;
- g) Promote appreciation and awareness for the rich multiculturalism of the African Immigrant community;
- h) Coordinates workshops in cooperation with local artists, educational organizations and community groups;

Social Services and Outreach Committee

- a) Implements outreach and awareness programs through partnerships and collaboration with other community organizations, service providers and human service agencies.
- b) Informs African community organizations and new African immigrant individuals and families of available resources
- c) Conducts field research to assist in establishing goals and activities;
- d) Coordinates and/or performs various public relation activities prepares speeches, scripts, exhibits, films, newsletters, and press releases to publicize programs and activities of the commission
- e) Works with African immigrants - individuals and families- along with other service providers to ensure access to basic needs of food, shelter, and clothing.

Health and Wellness – Preventative Committee

- a) Promotes a culture of physical, psychological, and emotional well-being for members of the African Immigrant Community by providing activities and support that will result in healthier lifestyles.
- b) Facilitates wellness communication through various online resources, workshops, and events.
- c) Offers programs that encourages physical activity, emotional well-being, mental health, and healthy eating habits.
- d) Recommends to the Commissioners possible community events that the New African Immigrant Commission should consider promoting/participating in

Workforce and Business Development Committee

- a) Works with the Ohio Job and Family Services- Office of Workforce Development.
- b) Provides the community more information on the Workforce Investment Act and local administrative contacts.

- c) Encourages and engages African youth in programs for employment, civic engagement and participation, leadership, and social integration, while providing the platform for interactive discourse on issues pertaining to African immigrant youth.
- d) Educates and inspires African immigrant youth about government activities, entrepreneurship, community engagement services.

Legal Services Committee

- a) Assists the African immigrant community with access to free or/and affordable legal support by creating a legal liaison board that provides answers and redirects to legal questions, information on individual's legal rights and responsibilities, and describing available options.
- b) Promotes conflict resolution and conflict prevention programs in the community.
- c) Encourages African immigrants to enroll in affordable legal plans as well as seek out legal aid volunteers that can provide free legal counselling to community members
- d) Suggests to African immigrant community members to seek the assistance of an attorney for representation in courtroom appearances and suggesting resources for finding an attorney.
- e) Organizes programs and speakers on legal issues of interest to the African Immigrant community. This may include bringing members of the legal profession to speak at community events, conducting workshops, and disseminating brochures on common legal problems.

The commission shall change, discontinue, and/or add ah-hoc special committees at its discretion by majority vote at a Commission meeting.

Committee members shall serve for an initial two-year term, renewable for one-year terms as approved by the Chair.

All committees shall elect a chair, and any other officers as needed, renewable at Chair's discretion, and with the goal of ensuring that members are taken from communities statewide. Each committee shall have at least 1 commissioner member, approved by the Chair of the Commission.

The Commission Chair, or a designee, shall be a non-voting member of all committees.

The Commission shall be the final authority on all recommendations offered or decisions taken by committees.

Committees shall not, unless otherwise directed by Chair, speak on behalf of the Commission.

All members of the Committees are approved for service by the Commission Chair but any community member may apply or be recommended by a Commissioner.

Article VIII Commission Meetings and Engagement

- a) All meetings of the Commission shall be subject to the Open Meetings Act, with no less than one-week prior notice to interested parties and constituents. Public access to the meeting place shall be ensured. A majority of the Commission members must attend each meeting.
- b) Commission meetings shall be the third Thursday of every other month starting in February 2018. Agendas shall be sent to the Commission by the Recorder with the meeting notice, unless otherwise temporarily changed by the Chair.
- c) The six statutorily mandated meetings will be included in a Meeting calendar posted on the Commission's website. These six required meetings will be held at the Riffe Building, in Columbus, Ohio.

- d) Additional Committee meetings shall be held at the discretion of the Committee Chair, and notices will be sent in accordance to the meeting bylaws of the commission.
- e) Meeting minutes shall be sent out to the Chair, and all Commission members, and made available to the public no more than 2 weeks after meeting; the same rule shall apply to minutes of committee meetings, which are kept by the Committee recorder.
- f) Special meetings shall be called by the Chair as needed with no less than 24-hour notice to Commissioners and interested parties, including media outlets. Notice of special meetings must include the purpose of the meeting, and the topics discussed at the meeting are limited to the topics specifically listed in the notice. Emergency meetings require immediate notice to media outlets, Commission members, and other interested parties, including the time, place, and purpose of the meeting, and the meeting topics are limited to those listed in the notice. The same rules of minutes will apply to these meetings. All members of the Commission are expected to regularly attend the meetings, with no more than two excused absences in a calendar year. If a Commission member is absent from three consecutive meetings, the Commission Chair shall provide notice to the governor's office regarding the Commission member's absenteeism.
- g) Members of the Commission will be effective, committed, and engaged in the work of the Commission. The Commission hereby adopts guidelines for accountability to include attendance, participation, and exemplary accomplishments in committees, special tasks and recruitment of partners.
- h) Any person can request to be added to the list for notice of Commission meetings.

Article IX Communication Plan

- a) At the end of the calendar year, the Admin Clerk/Intern drafts a proposed Commission Meetings and special events calendar of the upcoming year to be reviewed and approved by the Chair.
- b) Scheduled dates of meetings are posted on NAIC website under "Commissioners Meeting Calendar," and the Intern will assist the Chair with conference room reservations for each of the Commission meeting dates.
- c) One to two weeks prior to a board meeting, the Admin Clerk/Intern assists the Chair and to collect data from Commissioners and each Committee to compile the monthly reports for the Commission. Admin Clerk will send out previous meeting minutes as well as assist the Chair and Recorder with sending out the agenda for the upcoming meeting. The Admin Clerk/Intern contacts each Commissioner to confirm attendance for an upcoming meeting.
- d) Once the agenda is approved by the Chairperson, the Recorder drafts the Board Meeting Announcement and, upon approval by the Chairperson disseminates the announcement to all members of the Board, media, community leaders, etc. Following the announcement, the Recorder provides to the Commissioners the agenda for the meeting, the monthly reports, and the minutes, to be reviewed by Commissioners for suggested changes.
- e) On the day before and day of a board meeting, the Admin Clerk/Intern uses the Commission Meeting Checklist to complete any follow-up tasks discussed during the meeting.
- f) The Chair, Recorder and Admin Clerk/Intern will also communicate with Commissioners regularly to remind Commissioners and confirm completion of annual tasks such as financial disclosure filing and ethics training.

- g) The Chair will provide notification to Commissioners of the appointment of a new Commissioner.
- h) The Chair will periodically invite Commissioners to attend events in their area in which NAIC is participating.
- i) All official office communication with Commissioners is overseen by the Chair.
- j) Admin Clerk/Intern will assist the Chair with tracking completion of Ethics and Public Meetings Training via an internal log; any certificates awarded to Commissioners for completed training or professional development is filed in their personnel folders.

Article X Media Policy

In every instance where NAIC engages with the media, we want to:

- Enhance and protect the reputation, credibility and positive image of NAIC and its Commissioners
- Speak with a single, consistent voice that is focused on NAIC's mandate and charter
- Ensure that our point of view is represented accurately, candidly and in a timely manner
- Demonstrate the highest standards of honesty and ethics in everything we do.

NAIC Spokesperson protocols

- a) Only the Commission Chairperson is authorized to speak with the news media as an official representative of the Commission. From time-to-time, based on the subject matter and individual expertise, other Commissioners may be authorized to address the media in New African Immigrants Commission affairs in lieu of Chair. This will be done only after consultation with and counseling from the Chairperson.
- b) Individual Commissioners may be approached by the media for comment on an issue. If the Commissioner chooses, he or she may address the issue as an individual Commissioner, but not as the official spokesperson for the Commission itself. Official statements about the Commission or its policies can only come from the Chair of the Commission. If a Commissioner is planning to attend a meeting or other event where the media is expected to be present, it is suggested he or she contact the Chairperson for counseling and guidance regarding possible media interactions. Any media contact by an individual Commissioner should be immediately reported to the Chair with a brief description of the topic and what was said. The Chair will in turn provide notification and content of the interview to all other Commissioners.
- c) When contacted directly by the news media, any Commission representative should defer to the Chair of the Commission prior to making any public statement. For routine inquiries, where public facts or predetermined statements have been previously authorized by the Chairperson, the Recorder may respond directly to the media using those materials. If the Recorder or Chair's designee has any reason to believe the scope of the interview may expand beyond such pre-approved materials, he or she should consult with the Chair before engaging in the interview.
- d) If a "routine" media interview expands into a new topic or issue that does not have pre-approved talking points, the Commission representative should not provide answers or provide speculative responses. He or she should politely decline to respond and promise to get back to the reporter with the most current and appropriate response. The Commission representative should then contact the Chair of the Commission for consultation and help to formulate the official response of the Commission.

- e) All Commissioners should immediately be informed of any media interview with appropriate background information conducted by the media.

Maintaining media lists

The office, with the assistance of all Commissioners, will maintain a complete, accurate and up-to-date data-base of media contacts including phone numbers, fax numbers, e-mail addresses and mailing addresses.

This list should cover all major media across the state. This data base will facilitate quick action in the event that NAIC has to disseminate information or follow up with a specific reporter.

This list should include the date(s) of such contact, telephone call-back data (for correction purposes), the topic of conversation and any other relevant information to help guide future relationships with that individual and his or her organization.

Press Releases

The Chair will oversee the preparation and distribution of press releases to the news media. The purpose of such releases will be to ensure a broad general awareness and understanding of events and information of interest to NAIC constituencies. All such press communications, including personal background calls and visits to the media, will be preapproved by the Chairperson of the Commission and in conjunction with other Commissioners as appropriate.

Media monitoring

Following an interview, the participant should monitor the news outlet involved to ensure the accuracy of the report. If obtainable, a copy of the report or article should be sent to the Recorder for distribution to all Commissioners.

If there are inaccuracies or errors in the report, Chairperson and others Involved should confer on whether a strategic response, if any, is necessary or appropriate.

Commissioner Reviews

These policies and protocols should be reviewed with all new volunteers, employees and new Commissioners as they accept appointments to NAIC. These materials should be reviewed periodically to remind all Commissioners and Committee members of the expectations placed on them when dealing with the news media.

NAIC Media Guidelines - Instructions for "entry points"

All NAIC personnel who could be in a position to answer calls or inquiries should be trained on how to log calls and directed to contact the Chairperson if such a call is received.

Unless otherwise directed, these entry-point individuals should be instructed not to make statements on behalf of NAIC. If pressed by the caller or visitor to make a statement, they should be instructed to say politely:

"I am not the appropriate person to comment on this situation. I would be happy to take your name and number and have the appropriate person call you back as soon as possible."

In addition, entry-point individuals should remember:

- To be friendly and courteous.
- That the camera or tape recorder may be rolling...so, they don't do or say anything they wouldn't want broadcast or published.
- Find out why the reporter is calling.

- Get all appropriate contact data.
- Establish the deadline the reporter is working under.
- Set no expectations for a response if that is impossible, i.e., the Chair is traveling, or unavailable until after the deadline passes, contact the Chairperson as quickly as possible.

Article XI Public Records Policy

The Commission believes that openness and transparency are important to keep the community and the Commission’s stakeholders informed and connected to the work of the Commission. The Commission is adopting this policy to help ensure full compliance with the Ohio Public Records Act. All records of the Commission are public unless they are exempt from disclosure under state or federal law. All exemptions to openness are to be carefully construed and any denial of public records in response to a valid request must be accompanied by an explanation, including legal authority, as outlined in the Ohio Revised Code. If the request is in writing, the explanation must also be in writing.

Upon receipt of a public records request, or any document or correspondence that appears to be a request for the records of the Commission, the Commission shall promptly record the date of receipt of the request and notify the Chair and the Recorder of the Commission.

Section 1. Public Records

This office, in accordance with the Ohio Revised Code, defines “records” as including the following: any document—paper, electronic (including, but not limited to, email) or other format—that is created or received by, or comes under the jurisdiction of, a public office that documents the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations or other activities of the office. All records of the Commission are public unless they are specifically exempt from disclosure under the Ohio Revised Code.

Section 1.1—It is the policy of the Commission that, as required by Ohio law, records will be organized and maintained so that they are readily available for inspection and copying (see Section 4 for the email record policy).

Section 2. Evaluating the Request

Each request for public records should be evaluated for a response using the following guidelines:

Section 2.1—Although no specific language is required to make a request, the requester must at least identify the records requested with sufficient clarity to allow the Commission to identify, retrieve and review the records. If it is not clear what records are being sought, the records custodian must contact the requester for clarification and should assist the requester in revising the request by informing the requester of the manner in which the Commission keeps its records. Although the requester may designate the format that such documents into a format that is not within the ordinary scope of its normal record-keeping function or normal capability. Additionally, the Commission is not required to create records that otherwise did not exist.

Section 2.2—Public records are to be available for inspection during regular business hours, generally, Monday through Friday, 8:30a.m. to 5:00p.m., excepting holidays. Public records must be made available within a reasonable period of time, although there is no statutory definition of this time period. “Prompt” and “reasonable” take into account the volume of records requested, including the time and resources needed to make them available; the proximity of the location where the records are stored; and the necessity of any legal review of the records request.

Section 2.3—Each request should be evaluated for an estimated length of time required to gather the records. Routine requests for records should be satisfied immediately if feasible to do so. Routing requests include, but are not limited to, meeting minutes (which are available after the Board has reviewed and approved the minutes at the next meeting of the OCHLA Board of Commissioners), budgets, salary information, forms and applications, personnel rosters, etc. If fewer than twenty (20) pages of copies are requested or if the records are readily available in an electronic format that can be emailed, or downloaded easily, these should be made as quickly as possible.

All requests for public records must be either fully responded to or acknowledged in writing by the Commission within three (3) business days following the office’s receipt of the request. If a request is deemed to be significantly beyond “routine,” such as seeking a voluminous number of copies or requiring extensive research, the acknowledgement must include the following:

Section 2.3a—An estimated number of business days it will take to satisfy the request.

Section 2.3b—An estimated cost if copies are requested.

Section 2.3c—Any items within the request that may be exempt from disclosure.

Section 2.3d—Any denial of public records requested must include an explanation, including legal authority. If portions of a record are public and portions are exempt, the exempt portions are to be redacted and the remainder released. If there are redactions, each redaction must be accompanied by a supporting explanation, including legal authority for its exclusion as a public record.

Section 3. Costs for Public Records

Those seeking public records will be charged only the actual costs of making copies. Actual costs include:

Section 3.1—The charge for paper copies is 5 cents (\$.05) per page.

Section 3.2—The charge for downloaded computer files to a compact disc is \$1.00 per disc.

Section 3.3—There is no charge for documents emailed.

Section 3.4—Requesters may ask that documents be mailed to them. They will be charged the actual costs of the postage and mailing supplies.

Section 3.5—The Commission will not charge, under any circumstances, for an employee’s time to complete the records compilation or for sending the documents.

Section 4. Electronic Mail

Electronic mail (“email”) is simply one format for the creation and storage of a document. Documents in electronic-mail format are records as defined by the Ohio Revised Code when their content relates to the business of the office. It is, therefore, the content, rather than the format, that defines whether a document is a public record. Email documents are to be treated in the same fashion as records in other formats and should be given the same records retention schedules.

Section 4.1—Records in private email accounts used to conduct public business are subject to disclosure, and all employees or representatives of this office are instructed to retain their emails that relate to public business (see Section 1, Public Records) and to copy them to their business email accounts.

Section 5. Failure to Response to a Public Records Request

The Commission recognizes the legal and non-legal consequences of failure to properly respond to a public records request. In addition to the distrust in government that failure to comply may cause, the Commission’s failure to comply with a request may result in a court order for the Commission to comply with the law.

Article XII Amendment Process

The bylaws are subject to amendments only with a quorum of the commission. Regulations governing the process of amendment are at the discretion of the Chair and a majority of the existing commission.