

WELCOMING  
AMERICA



CITIES for ACTION



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CITIZENSHIP



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ARE AMERICA

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## TIPS TO BUILD & SUSTAIN A LOCALLY WELCOMING INFRASTRUCTURE

**Welcoming communities are stepping up to welcome Afghan evacuees.** This is a unique moment to ensure that Afghan arrivals can thrive, while also reinforcing the narrative and infrastructure that enable all immigrants - and all Americans - to thrive and belong.

The four tips below offer tangible ways you can help create an equitable and welcoming environment in your community.

### #1. Mobilize a Multi-Sector Response Group

The purpose of a multi-sector rapid response group is to leverage resources in a community to quickly respond to urgent needs. For this group to be effective, it should include cross-sector leaders with access to diverse resources. Group members should include immigrants/refugees, and the organizations that represent them, who are able to identify needs and priorities and direct how resources are deployed.

**Example:** In September 2018, Cities for Action and the Lumos Foundation issued a joint report, [\*On the Frontlines of the Family Separation Crisis: City Response and Best Practice for Assisting Families\*](#), outlining how local governments stepped up in the midst of the family separation crisis, with case studies from New York City, the City and County of Los Angeles, and San Antonio. One of the central lessons of the report was that “local governments were able to respond swiftly because they had staff and offices dedicated to immigrant affairs. Staff had the expertise, *partnerships*, and policy knowledge to help coordinate local responses.”

**NOTE:** Multi-sector task forces are always needed, not just in times of crisis. Most communities that are working to establish truly welcoming communities have task forces that regularly meet to address gaps and coordinate efforts. In fact, these sorts of “welcoming task forces” have been driving forces behind strategic plans, policy change, and coordination of resources in communities like Boise, Detroit, and Pittsburgh. While a rapid response network may be critical at this moment, we encourage you to find ways to ensure mobilized groups are sustainable beyond crises.

Questions to consider as you form and convene your group:

- Which leaders in the community can easily access resources relevant to welcoming refugees?
- How can you ensure refugee residents participate in the rapid response group? This may include adjusting the time or location of the meeting, providing language access, or other activities to ensure the group itself is inclusive and welcoming.
- What role can your community play in welcoming evacuees and supporting refugee resettlement, whether or not Afghans will be settled in your community?
- Who is the best convener for this group and what support can you provide?
- Do any groups already exist that you can join or leverage contacts and support for?
- Which partnerships might you be able to help create to address the needs identified by the community?
- What existing resources might you be able to leverage to support these needs?
- Is there the potential for backlash in your community? If so, how might the group mitigate the possibility of backlash and/or respond to backlash if it occurs? (More on this in the messaging section below).

### Relevant Resources

- [Community Planning Process Guide](#)
- [Building and Sustaining Community Collaborations for Refugee Welcome](#)
- [Resettlement Strategies Webinar](#)
- [Engaging Public Sector Stakeholders to Prepare for Welcoming More Refugees](#)
- [Webinar recording- New Homes for New Refugees: A Template for Creating a Welcoming Landlord Network in your Community](#)

## #2. Create a *We Welcome Fund*

A *We Welcome Fund* can be a way to raise and distribute the resources needed to support refugees, immigrants, and service providers, both in the current moment and for the long haul. Community foundations, United Ways, and other local philanthropies can be critical partners in *We Welcome Funds* galvanizing and engaging corporate and individual supporters and attracting national resources. Locally owned businesses can also play a critical role by matching individual and public sector funds.

Pressing needs identified by organizations supporting Afghan evacuees include funding to cover housing costs, legal assistance, cash assistance, linguistic support, and scaling up community programs -- such as those that provide mental health services -- to serve new clients. These may be priorities for your *We Welcome Fund*, but it is most important that the design and distribution of grants be informed directly by refugee residents. The needs of Afghans and other immigrants will be long-term, so consider setting up your fund in a way that will support welcoming in your community, long after the initial crisis.

Questions to consider as you set up your *We Welcome Fund*:

- What will be the specific mission of your *We Welcome Fund*? This should be guided by the needs and priorities of refugee residents and refugee serving organizations.
- How will you involve refugees in your grantmaking decisions, and what will the process need to look like in order to ensure refugees are included?
- How can you engage community residents in donating to the fund?
- Which public/private investments can your community leverage?
- What role will local government play?

#### Relevant Resources:

- [Best practices guide for setting up a legal defense fund](#). (Although this guide is focused on legal defense funds, the guiding questions may be helpful to those considering setting up a *We Welcome Fund*.)
- [Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees](#)
- Examples of COVID-19 fundraising from mayors' funds:
  - [LA Emergency COVID-19 Crisis Fund](#)
  - [Boston Resiliency Fund](#)

## #3. Share Messages of Welcome

This is a unique moment to shift the narrative by reinforcing welcoming as a core value of your community, not only for Afghan evacuees but also more broadly. Focus on how communities are willing and able to welcome immigrants and refugees, and how neighbors, parents, and business owners who came as immigrants and refugees are vital contributors to communities.

Consider ways that you can lift up welcoming voices in your community -- both established leaders and the broader public. When building your activity or campaign, bring in community members whose immigrant or non-immigrant background, racial and ethnic diversity, and identity represent the diversity in your community.

Some ideas to get you started:

- Take a look at this [resolution template](#) that you can adapt for your city or county. For guidance on getting your resolution passed, Amnesty International has developed this [useful toolkit](#). You can also have your community issue a [welcoming statement](#).
- Share [“I am a Welcomer” signs](#) with museums, libraries, businesses, and other organizations in your community.
- Participate in [Welcoming Week](#) by hosting an event, signing a proclamation or participating via social media with a message about the importance of being a welcoming community with the hashtag #WelcomingWeek2021.
- If a local resource hub does not exist, create a webpage ([like this](#)) where agencies, organizations and people wanting to engage, can get involved. Encourage elected officials to share this in their newsletters and public facing materials.
- Pair refugee and non-refugee residents to share their stories in local media.

### Relevant Resources:

- [Welcoming Week Toolkit](#)
- [Reframing Refugees: Messaging Toolkit](#)
- [Neighbors Together Toolkit](#)
- [We Are All America \(WAAA\) Afghan Rapid Response Communications Toolkit](#)
- [Welcoming Refugees in Rural Communities toolkit](#)
- [Groups in Austin voice support for a resolution welcoming Afghan refugees](#)

## #4. Change Policy

Elected leaders at all levels of government should also begin thinking about policies that ensure newly arrived families are welcomed into their communities. The challenges that our new Afghan neighbors face are often experienced by many immigrants. With the current focus on welcoming and many leaders asking what they can do, now is the time to elevate policy changes that will not just assist Afghan evacuees but immigrant communities at large.

When making proposals for change, consider timelines to stagger your activity. In municipalities and at the federal level, you can work to advance new policies all year. However, many states only have brief congressional sessions at the start of the calendar year. Begin conversations now with elected leaders on the policy options offered below.

### Federal Policy Actions:

- Show your support for a fully established New American Task Force. Activating the Task Force is one avenue to facilitate a coordinated intergovernmental response to the resettlement of Afghan evacuees arriving in the USA. You can access a sign-on letter [here](#).
- [Encourage the federal government to admit 125,000 refugees.](#)

### State Policy Actions:

- Ask state leaders to show their support [by signing this letter](#) to the Biden Administration asking them to welcome at least 125,000 refugees in the coming year.
- Ask state leaders to review language access policies. They may need to consider broadening them so that all members of the community can access relevant information without fear of misunderstanding/misinterpretation. This is particularly relevant in [education environments](#).
- State leaders should consider ways to support newly arrived Afghans in accessing work that is self sustaining. This can include:
  - Workforce Studies to assess and fix barriers to entry for internationally trained professionals such as this [program to address healthcare shortages](#).
  - Expand English Language Learners Career Pathways [programs](#).
- Encourage state leaders and Governors to consider [creating an Office of New Americans](#) to streamline the support systems for Afghans and other immigrants.
- Expand eligibility for state supports including SNAP and Medicaid.

**Local Policy Actions:**

- Ask local leaders to show their support [by signing this letter](#) to the Biden Administration asking them to welcome at least 125,000 refugees in the coming year.
- Have your mayor sign this [letter of support](#).
- [Get your municipality Certified Welcoming](#). Start by taking a [pre-assessment](#) to see where you stand.
- Pass a [resolution like this one](#) or make a [welcoming statement](#).
- Pass an interdepartmental language access policy.
- Review the [Welcoming Standard](#) to see a list of local policies and programs communities should have in place.