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TIPS TO BUILD & SUSTAIN A LOCALLY WELCOMING INFRASTRUCTURE

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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 enables all immigrants - and all Americans - to thrive and belong.

The tips below offer tangible ways you can help create an equitable and welcoming environment in your community that is sustainable and will lay the groundwork to support current and future residents.

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TIP #1: MOBILIZE

◀Convene 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 to identify needs and priorities, as well as direct how resources are deployed.

NOTE: Multi-sector task forces are always needed, not just in times of crisis. Most communities working toward establishing 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 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 and/or respond to backlash if it occurs? (Resources on this in the messaging section below).

The following list covers some of the topics multi-sector response groups will want to consider as they identify needs and priorities in their community.

- LEGAL SERVICES:** With the unique situation that Afghans arrived under, many are in need of legal assistance including reunifying with family members left behind in Afghanistan and obtaining permanent legal status. Multi-sector Response Groups will want to consider what legal services are available and how they can be coordinated to support Afghans.

***NOTE:** Many jurisdictions across the country are investing in the establishment of legal support programs to provide immigration legal help through trusted community-based organizations at community sites, public health facilities, public schools, and libraries. One such example is [Action NYC](#) which provides free, safe legal services to immigrants through community-based legal assistance organizations.

- HOUSING:** Resettlement agencies have reported significant housing challenges for arriving refugees, particularly as housing prices rise. Multi-sector Response Groups will want to consider what public and private housing programs can support Afghans, as well as how the private sector and individuals can be engaged in identifying and securing housing.

NOTE: Many housing programs, including the Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) programs, may be used to support Afghans and other immigrants and refugees. See this [eligibility status FAQ](#) and this [resource on ERA funds](#).

- HEALTHCARE:** Multi-sector Response Groups will want to engage healthcare partners early to identify opportunities to ensure access to healthcare that is linguistically and culturally appropriate. Groups will want to pinpoint the resources and partners in the community that can ensure healthcare access.
- EMPLOYMENT:** What are workforce agencies doing to prepare to support new arrivals and connect them to employment opportunities?
- LANGUAGE ACCESS:** For services such as housing, how will arrivals be supported in their language (Darsi, Pashto, Farsi) and in culturally appropriate ways? How will resources be identified to support translation and interpretation?
- FOOD ACCESS:** Are food banks prepared to support families? What other organizations and individuals can be engaged to ensure access to culturally appropriate foods?
- COORDINATION:** Who will be coordinating efforts locally? Can volunteers be deployed to support coordination?

- PUBLIC COMMUNICATION: How will diverse leaders in your community reinforce a welcoming narrative to ensure that residents are prepared, questions and concerns are addressed, and shared values are reinforced to proactively address rumors and prevent dangerous narratives from spreading?

Relevant Resources to Create a Multi-Sector Task Force

- [Community Planning Process Guide](#)
- [Building and Sustaining Community Collaborations for Refugee Welcome](#)
- [Engaging Public Sector Stakeholders to Prepare for Welcoming More Refugees](#)

Relevant Resources for the Task Force

- [Switchboard roundup of resources for groups serving Afghans](#)
- [Resettlement Strategies Webinar](#)
- [Webinar recording- New Homes for New Refugees: A Template for Creating a Welcoming Landlord Network in your Community](#)
- [On the Frontlines of the Family Separation Crisis: City Response and Best Practice for Assisting Families](#)
- [How the American Rescue Plan Act \(ARPA\) Can Support Immigrant Communities](#)

TIP #2: SUPPORT

◀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. Be specific about how the funds will be used. Possible uses include translation services, food, and housing.
- 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?

Relevant Resources:

- [How the American Rescue Plan Act \(ARPA\) Can Support Immigrant Communities](#)
- [Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees](#)
- Examples of fundraising:
 - [Afghans in San Antonio](#)
 - [Welcoming Nashville Fund](#)
 - [LA Emergency Crisis Fund](#) (COVID-19 specific)
 - [Boston Resiliency Fund](#) (COVID-19 specific)

◀Engage Volunteers▶

Resettlement organizations provide immediate assistance to resettled refugees. This includes securing housing, cultural orientation training, finding a job, enrolling in school, and much more.

Consider ways you can activate community members to support resettlement agencies such as raising funds, donating goods and services, and volunteering. To find a resettlement organization in your community, click [here](#).

Community sponsorship is another way residents can support Afghan arrivals. The [Sponsor Circle Program](#), run by the U.S. Department of State in partnership with the Community Sponsorship Hub, allows individuals and community groups to directly support recently-arrived Afghans. There may be additional co-sponsorship opportunities available directly with resettlement agencies.

Relevant Resources:

- For more information on sponsorship, visit sponsorcircles.org or welcome.us
- Guide: [Harnessing Volunteer Energy to Support and Welcome Refugees in your Community: Five Tips for Success](#)

◀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 with immigrant or non-immigrant backgrounds, are racially and ethnically diverse, and 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.
- 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 refugees and non-refugee residents to share their stories in local media.

Relevant Resources:

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

TIP #3: ADVOCATE

Elected leaders at all levels of government should also think 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 using some of the policy actions 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 U.S. You can access a sign-on letter [here](#).
- Every year, the President determines the number of refugees the U.S. should admit and consults with Congress. State and local electeds, as well as community members, can partake in advocacy (such as [this](#)) to call on the President to admit more refugees.

◀State Policy Actions▶

- 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 refugees 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](#).
 - Expanding English language learners career pathways [programs](#).
- Create an Office of Equity with staff dedicated to providing resources and driving state policy and program coordination to be inclusive of immigrant needs. [Colorado](#), [New York](#), and [Virginia](#) are a few examples.
- Review eligibility requirements for state benefits and programs such as residency requirements that could exclude recently resettled populations from accessing in-state tuition, housing assistance, and COVID-relief programs.

- [Examine policy options](#) to alleviate housing challenges.

NOTE: For more in-depth guidance on state policy changes, please see the Refugee Advocacy Lab's [Welcoming States, Welcoming Refugees: A Policy Manual for the 2022 State Legislative Session](#).

◀Local Policy Actions▶

- [Get your municipality Certified Welcoming](#). Start by taking a [pre-assessment](#) to see where you stand.
- Join the [Welcoming America network](#)
- Create an Office of Equity with staff dedicated to providing resources and driving local policy and program coordination to be inclusive of immigrant needs. [Albuquerque](#) and [Dallas](#) are a few examples.
- Pass an interdepartmental language access policy.
- Have your mayor sign letters of support similar to [this](#).
- [Examine policy options](#) to alleviate housing challenges.