

# Refugee Council USA

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## **2017 Toolkit: Visits with Local, State, and National Leaders to Welcome Refugees**

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# **The Power of Advocacy**

## **Be an Advocate**

In the face of a humanitarian crisis this vast, it's common to feel powerless – but we are not powerless. There are many ways that we can take action. Developing a relationship and educating your policy makers are necessary steps to welcoming policies and attitudes toward refugees. At a time when the incoming administration, U.S. Congress and state legislatures are discussing policies that would either harm the resettlement program or exclude refugees based on their national origin or religion, policy makers need to hear from their constituents who support refugees. A powerful constituent visit involves impacted communities and allies who join together. Having a team of refugee leaders, resettlement staff, volunteers, employers, faith groups, and other community members who meet regularly is essential in building meaningful relationships with policy makers. It is important that policy makers on all levels understand that 1) their constituents care about refugees, and 2) that refugees are their constituents — they live, work, and contribute in their communities, obtain U.S. citizenship, and vote. As our local, [state](#), and [national](#) leaders consider proposals that will impact refugees, the time is now to urge them to stand with those seeking safety and opportunities to contribute to their new U.S. communities.

## **Your Voice Matters**

Your story as a refugee, staff member, or supporter of refugee resettlement is your most important qualification as an advocate. Talk about the way your community welcomes refugees and the positive contributions refugees make to your community. Refugees, resettlement staff, faith leaders, employers, military veterans, and supportive community members are constituents of local, state, and national elected leaders who regularly make policy decisions that impact refugees. When policy makers know that their constituents care about refugees, they will increasingly vote to support refugee protection and resettlement, as well as productive policies that help refugees. It's important to note that 501(c)3 organizations can confidently educate policy makers about who refugees are and how policy proposals will impact their community. The IRS holds that 501(c)3 organizations can take positions on public policy issues, and that lobbying is acceptable, as long as it is not a substantial part of the organization's work and/or is less than 20% of a non-profit's budget. There are also special permissions for religious organizations.

## **Engaging National and State Elected Leaders**

It is more important than ever that our national and state elected leaders hear that their constituents welcome refugees. At the national and state levels, individuals who oppose refugee resettlement are making their voices heard loudly and frequently to policy makers. These individuals utilize anti-refugee, anti-immigrant, and anti-Muslim rhetoric and draft legislation to engender fear and foster hostile atmospheres for newcomers. Groups like Refugee Resettlement Watch are calling for an end to resettlement altogether. More than [80 bills](#) have been introduced in the U.S. Congress that would dismantle or significantly damage the U.S. refugee resettlement program. In 2015, [31 governors](#) voiced opposition to resettling Syrian refugees and more than [50 anti-refugee proposals](#) were introduced across 19 state legislatures. (Only one of these proposals passed, thanks to everyone's hard work and collective effort.) It is critical that policy makers learn about the importance of resettlement from refugees themselves and supportive community members. We want policy makers to support positive legislation and oppose proposals that would turn our backs on refugees and violate our values of welcome and hospitality.

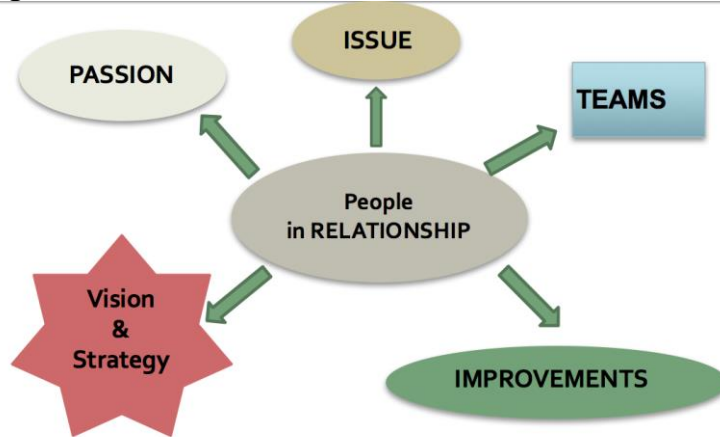
## **Engaging Local Leaders**

Efforts to stop refugee resettlement in certain communities have been gaining traction, making it critical for all of our local policy makers to hear from us and affirm that they welcome refugees. There are positive proposals that our local elected officials can adopt to affirm the importance of resettlement and foster communities of welcome. City, municipal, and other local councils and commissions need to hear that their communities stand ready to help refugees integrate and thrive. Cities and counties across the nation have passed resolutions affirming their identities as welcoming and inclusive communities, ready to accept refugees of all backgrounds, countries of origin, and faiths. Urge your local leaders to adopt welcoming resolutions that extend hospitality to refugees and all newcomers. Organizing community members around a welcoming resolution reflects a core American belief in the dignity of every person, lifts up diversity as a community's strength, and cultivates an environment of inclusion. Local officials can also write supportive public letters to the White House and the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration. For more information on how to mobilize community members and advocate to your local leaders, click [here](#) for a framework for change to make our cities welcoming and inclusive.

## Where to Start: Teambuilding

The art of teambuilding is a critical component to advocacy. Teambuilding brings together diverse voices – such as resettlement staff, refugee leaders, faith leaders, and others – who speak to the importance of welcome and helping refugees integrate and thrive from several perspectives. This is how you can get started in creating and sustaining teams of people who can take action together for change.

### Visualizing Teambuilding



### How Do I Build a Team?

#### Step 1: Internal Assessment

What am I passionate about? Why? What in my life journey has brought about this passion?  
What policy changes (national and local) would you and your community like to see?  
How could I see my community working to be part of bringing that change about?  
What does being an “advocate” mean to you?

#### Step 2: One on One Relationship Building

Face to face meeting in a mutual preferred location  
Intentional conversation, not an interview  
Listening for passion, vision, stories  
Work together to identify other people who would be interested in joining you  
Each agree to reach out to people who your vision and help build / energize a team

#### Step 3: Grow Your Team

Who else might care / be interested?  
Ask each person to reach out to 3-5 more people and have one-on-one meetings  
Set a timeline for a team meeting

#### Step 4: Bring the Team Together

Goal: solid group of 8-20 people  
Create a common vision: what are our hopes and expectations?  
Create an action plan: How do we build toward that?  
Who are natural allies who can be energized into being advocates?  
Identify next steps, ways to engage with policy makers

*For more information on how to engage in organizing and teambuilding, click [here](#).*

*To connect with immigrants' rights organizations and groups countering anti-Muslim bigotry near you, check out the [Fair Immigration Reform Movement \(FIRM\)](#), [United We Dream](#), [National Day Laborer Organizing Network](#), and [Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign](#).*

## Meet with Your Local, State, and National Leaders

### **Who You Are. Why You Care. What You Want.**

It is more important than ever to meet with your local, state, and national leaders to educate them about the vital role that refugees and all newcomers play in your communities. Because the process of change takes time, meetings with policy makers should be viewed as part of a continuing process of gathering information, building relationships, and developing advocacy strategies.

### **Building Power for Refugee Resettlement**

A good time to meet with your Members of Congress and/or their staff is when they are in their states and local offices. Calendars of in-district time can be found at [here](#) and [here](#). Schedules fill up very quickly for these recess periods, so reach out as soon as possible.

### **Steps to Prepare and Organize Your Meeting**

**1. Create an advocacy team:** An ideal team consists of different stakeholder voices such as refugees, case workers, faith leaders, business leaders, military veterans, and community leaders who can all share in the planning, outreach, and coordination of advocacy actions and speak to the diversity of support for refugee resettlement. Convene in advance to discuss current relationships with policy makers, goals and ideas, and to plan the agenda for a successful meeting.

**2. Learn about your elected officials:** Are your Members of Congress on the [Senate](#) or [House](#) Appropriations Committees; [Senate](#) or [House](#) Judiciary Committees; [Senate](#) or [House](#) Homeland Security Committees; or [Senate](#) or [House](#) Foreign Relations Committees? If so, they have jurisdiction over various aspects of the refugee program. Even if they don't sit on these committees, their vote is still very important, and they can still be a champion for refugees. *Note: To find and learn more about your governor, state legislators, mayor, and local officials, click [here](#).*

**3. Have a plan:** Before you enter an advocacy visit, meet with your group beforehand to assign roles:

- *The Facilitator* starts the meeting, introduces the group, explains the purpose for the meeting, and provides time for each person to briefly introduce themselves and their organization and/or connection to refugees, to show that the group represents thousands of community members. The facilitator will also jump in if the meeting goes off-track and redirect the conversation.
- *The Personal Story* is key to every meeting. A refugee should tell their story to show how peoples' lives are changed through refugee resettlement.
- *Specific Issue Points* - It will be helpful to bring handouts copied and linked below. Additional handouts with information on refugees by state can be found [here](#).
- *The Ask for All Leaders* - The critical part when you ask "Will you be a champion for refugee protection and resettlement and oppose any and all anti-refugee proposals?"
- *The Ask for Local/State Leaders* – "Will you champion a welcoming resolution to declare our community a city/state of welcome?" A sample resolution is copied below, and if a resolution is too difficult to pass, they can write a letter in support of resettlement to the White House and Department of State (samples below).

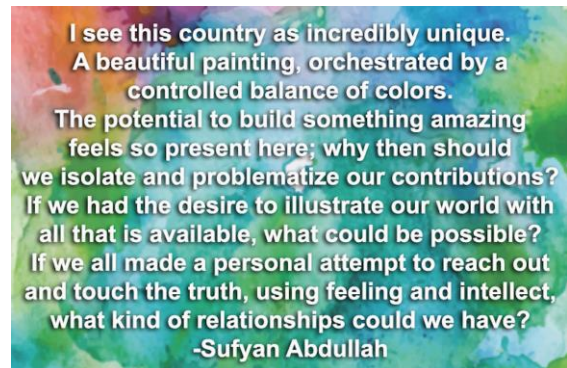
**4. Debrief:** It's important to debrief as a team in a separate location following the meeting. As a group, ask: What did we hear? Did we get what we wanted? How did we work together as a team? What are the next steps? How can you engage this policy maker in the future, perhaps through event invitations, etc.? Share your reflections with your organization's advocacy staff (see last page for contact information).

**5. Follow-up:** Send a thank you email to the staff after the meeting with any information they asked for and any other relevant information you think would be helpful. Inviting the staff and/or official to an upcoming event to meet with refugees is an excellent next step!

## Refugee Resettlement in the United States

### **Who Is a Refugee?**

Over 65 million people are displaced globally, the largest displacement crisis in recorded history, including over 21 million refugees. Under international and U.S. law, a refugee is someone outside his or her own country with a well-founded fear of persecution in that country based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. Available to less than 1% of the world's refugees, resettlement provides safe haven in a third country when no other options for safety are available. Resettlement to the U.S. is available only for those who demonstrate the greatest and most immediate need for protection and takes place after eligible refugees undergo a rigorous security vetting and medical screening process.



### **The History of U.S. Assistance to Refugees**

The United States has a long history of providing protection and assistance to persons facing persecution and fleeing violence. In the aftermath of World War II, the U.S. led the humanitarian assistance and reconstruction effort to help displaced persons, including resettling to the U.S. hundreds of thousands of Europeans displaced from the war, including Jewish survivors of the Holocaust. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the U.S. expanded its commitment to protect vulnerable and displaced persons by funding programs such as those that helped victims of gender based violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo, provided educational opportunities for Bhutanese refugees in Nepal, and helped hundreds of thousands of Sudanese refugees to return home. In recent years, the U.S. has resettled Darfuri refugees fleeing genocide and violence, refugees from Myanmar forced out of their country by ethnic and religious persecution, Iraqi and Afghan refugees who served the U.S. military and government, and many others.

### **Refugee Selection and Security Screening**

The United States decides which refugees to resettle within our borders. The State Department oversees the admission of each refugee to the U.S. after they have been granted refugee status following individual interviews by Department of Homeland Security (DHS) officials, have passed extensive inter-agency security background checks with multiple national security and intelligence agencies, and have passed health screenings. According to national security experts, refugees are the most thoroughly vetted, rigorously screened people to come to the United States. Security screenings involve the State Department, DHS, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Department of Defense, the National Counterterrorism Center, and multiple intelligence agencies. The entire process typically takes 18-24 months, and sometimes longer, before a refugee even steps foot on U.S. soil.

### **Serving Refugees Resettled in the United States**

U.S. funding helps to ensure that the basic human needs of persons fleeing persecution are met while they are displaced, supports permanent solutions to their displacement, and funds resettlement processing to and services in the United States. The State Department provides life-sustaining assistance to refugees and displaced persons, many of whom are residing in countries of first asylum that neighbor their home countries, as well as processing of refugees to the United States. Complementarily, the Office of Refugee Resettlement at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services provides vital services to refugees and asylees, Cuban and Haitian Entrants, Iraqi Afghan recipients of Special Immigrant Visas, and other vulnerable populations like unaccompanied children, survivors of human trafficking, and torture survivors.

## REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

### WHO IS A REFUGEE AND HOW MANY ARE THERE?

Under international and U.S. law, a refugee is someone outside his or her own country with a well-founded fear of persecution in that country based on: (1) race; (2) religion; (3) nationality; (4) membership in a particular social group and/or (5) political opinion.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of the end of 2016 there were over 65 million refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced person—the highest number than at any time on record. Over 21 million are refugees, more than half under the age of eighteen, and 1.19 million in need of resettlement in 2017.

### WHAT IS RESETTLEMENT?

Available to a very small portion of the most vulnerable refugees, resettlement provides safe haven in a third country when no other options for safety are available. Resettlement, the last of the three "durable solutions" for refugees, is only considered when refugees are neither able to return home nor be integrated into the country to which they fled. Resettlement to the U.S. is available only for those who demonstrate the greatest and most immediate need for protection and takes place after eligible refugees undergo a rigorous selection, security vetting and medical screening process.

#### *Did you know?*

*Resettlement provides a life-saving solution for less than 1% percent of the world's refugees, though many more are in need.*

### WHO DO WE RESETTLE?

Each year, the President, after consultation with Congress, determines the processing priorities and sets an annual target number for refugee resettlement for the upcoming year. In Fiscal Year 2016, 84,995 refugees of the 85,000 target were resettled. In September 2016, a determination of 110,000 for Fiscal Year 2017 was set for refugees from around the world, with approximate regional breakdowns as follows:

- 40,000 from the Near East and South Asia
- 35,000 from Africa
- 12,000 from East Asia
- 4,000 from Europe and Central Asia
- 5,000 from Latin America and the Caribbean
- 14,000 unallocated reserve to provide flexibility in emergent situations

### HISTORY OF REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT IN THE U.S.

The U.S. has a proud history of admitting refugees of special humanitarian concern. In the aftermath of World War II, the U.S. Congress enacted the first refugee legislation, providing refuge for over 650,000 displaced Europeans. Since refugee resettlement was codified in the Refugee Act of 1980, the U.S. has provided safety and new beginnings to over 3 million people through its public-private partnership model.

The U.S. has been a leader in refugee protection and resettlement around the world. Resettlement to the U.S. lessens the burden of refugee-hosting countries and encourages other countries to keep their borders open to refugees fleeing conflict and persecution.

### REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT AGENCIES

There are nine national U.S. refugee resettlement agencies with over 350 local offices and affiliates throughout the country that help newly arrived refugees settle into local communities. These organizations receive refugee families at the airport, help them settle into a new home, and provide case management services – including access to medical care, school enrollment, English as a Foreign Language classes, and job readiness and employment services. The services and support provided to refugees are designed to facilitate successful transition to life in the U.S. and help to attain swift self-sufficiency through employment, so refugees receive cash assistance for a very limited period.

## ADMINISTRATIVE AGENCY ROLES IN THE REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT PROCESS

### BUREAU OF POPULATION, REFUGEES, AND MIGRATION (PRM), DEPARTMENT OF STATE:

- Directs U.S. admission policies
- Coordinates the overseas processing of refugees
- Is responsible for the transportation, initial reception, and integration of refugees in the U.S.
- Administers U.S. funding to UNHCR and other overseas programs that assist refugees

### U.S. CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES (USCIS), DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY (DHS):

- Refugee Officers in USCIS' Refugee Affairs Division conduct admissions interviews to determine whether refugee applicants qualify for resettlement
- Manage the security clearance process
- Adjusts status of refugees to permanent resident and citizen

### OFFICE OF REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT (ORR), DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES (HHS):

- Administers federal funding to state and local programs that assist refugees, including social services, English language training, and employment services
- Funds and/or oversees programs for assisting unaccompanied minors, children in detention, asylum seekers, and victims of torture and trafficking

## SECURITY

Extensive security checks are performed by the FBI, Department of Defense, National Counterterrorism Center, Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of State, consisting of:

- Security checks for applicants, including additional checks for certain nationalities
- Examination of biographic and biometric data
- Extensive interviews and many lines of questioning before Department of Homeland Security officials
- Medical screening
- Consultation between a broad array of law enforcement and intelligence databases, including the FBI, DHS, and the National Counterterrorism Center

Only after all checks are completed and cleared is a refugee eligible to travel to the U.S.

*FACT: Since 1975, the U.S. has resettled over 3 million refugees, with annual admissions figures ranging from a high of 207,000 in 1980 to a low of 27,110 in 2002.*

## CONTRIBUTIONS OF REFUGEES

Resettled refugees are eager to give back to the country that has welcomed them and make significant economic and cultural contributions to their communities. Newly-arrived refugees have been the driving force behind the rejuvenation of many cities across the United States -- for example, helping to create jobs and opportunities through small-business development in once-strained rust-belt communities, and helping to reverse population decline. Those granted refuge in the U.S. successfully support their families, pay taxes, and contribute to the country in a myriad of ways. Refugees are employed in a wide range of sectors in the U.S. economy, from the hospitality and food service industry, to the teaching profession, to the fields of engineering, nursing and medicine. Many refugees give back by volunteering as interpreters or mentors to other newly-arriving refugees and immigrants. Albert Einstein, Henry Kissinger, Madeleine Albright, and Sergey Brin, the founder of Google, are former refugees whose accomplishments demonstrate what the U.S. has to gain from welcoming refugees.

*More information and examples: <http://www.rcusa.org/contributions-of-refugees-to-the-us>*

## COMMUNITY WELCOME OF REFUGEES

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program is a longstanding public-private partnership with government funding strengthened by the private resources of nonprofit agencies, community donors, and volunteers. In each city and town where refugees are resettled throughout the U.S., faith groups, neighbors, mentors, employers, businesses, community groups, philanthropies, and local organizations play an important role in helping to foster welcome for refugees every day and in assisting resettled refugees as they start their lives in their new homes and communities.

*More information and examples: <http://www.rcusa.org/community-welcome-of-refugees/>*

## The Rigorous Process of Screening Refugees for Resettlement to the United States

Refugees being considered for resettlement by the United States must pass through a series of security screenings aimed at ensuring they will not pose a security risk, including biographic and biometric checks. The information examined to confirm a refugee's identity is checked against law enforcement, intelligence community, and other relevant databases, including those administered by the National Counterterrorism Center, Department of Defense, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of State, and Department of Homeland Security. If there is doubt about whether an applicant poses a security threat, he or she will not be admitted to the U.S.

### *What is Refugee Resettlement?*

*Resettlement, to the U.S. or one of the other 27 resettlement countries, is the last resort durable solution for refugees who cannot return to their countries of origin and face protection risks in the country to which they fled. It presents a life-saving solution for less than one percent of the world's refugees.*

## **REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT PROCESSING AND SECURITY STEPS**

*Information provided by U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, a Refugee Council USA member.*

**1) Registration & Refugee Status Determination:** The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) registers individuals and collects identifying documents, biographic information, and biometric data. UNHCR or the country of asylum interviews the applicant to determine if the individual qualifies as a refugee under international law. A refugee is someone who has fled from his or her home country and cannot return because he or she has a well-founded fear of persecution based on religion, race, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group.

**2) Referral to a Resettlement Country:** A refugee who meets one of the criteria for resettlement can be referred to one of the 28 resettlement countries, including the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). Refugees do not get to choose where they are referred. Additionally, under legislation passed by the U.S. Congress, Iraqi and Afghan nationals who have been employed by or on behalf of the U.S. government can apply directly to the USRAP without being referred by UNHCR. This process is called the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) Program. All referred refugees and SIV applicants undergo the same rigorous security screening process which, on average, takes 18 to 36 months.

### *UNHCR's Use of Biometrics*

*Biometric checks enhance the integrity of UNHCR registration and contributes to greater accuracy of data. The collection of biometric data helps to mitigate risks regarding identity substitution and assists UNHCR in building a sustained and credible identity of refugees over time, including those referred to the U.S. for resettlement.*

*More information: [to.pbs.org/1YItNdW](http://to.pbs.org/1YItNdW)*

**3) Resettlement Support Center:** A Resettlement Support Center (RSC), contracted by the U.S. Department of State (DOS), conducts a preparatory interview and compiles the refugee's personal data and background information for the security clearance process and the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) in-person interview.

**4) Security Screening - Consular Lookout and Support System:** DOS runs the names of all refugees referred to the U.S. for resettlement through the Consular Lookout and Support System (CLASS), which contains watch-list information.

**5) Security Screening - Security Advisory Opinion:** Certain refugees undergo additional security reviews called Security Advisory Opinions (SAOs). These cases require a positive SAO clearance from a number of U.S. law enforcement and intelligence agencies in order to continue the resettlement process.

**6) Security Screening - Inter-Agency Check:** The National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) conducts an Inter-Agency Check (IAC) on applicants within a designated age range. The IAC is a "recurrent vetting" process; thus, USCIS will be notified of any new derogatory information identified up until the applicant's travel to the U.S.

**7) Security Screening - Syria Enhanced Review:** Syrian refugees referred to the U.S. for resettlement are flagged for an additional security screening (Syria Enhanced Review). Before USCIS schedules an interview with the applicant abroad, Syrian applications are reviewed by a Refugee Affairs Division officer at USCIS headquarters.

- **Fraud Detection and National Security Review:** If USCIS finds certain criteria to be met, the case is referred to the agency's Fraud Detection and National Security Division (FDNS) for further review. This review includes open-source and classified research which is compiled into a report for use by the USCIS interviewing officer.



8) **USCIS In-person Interview:** A highly trained USCIS officer will travel to an embassy or secure processing facility accessible to the refugee overseas to conduct a detailed, face-to-face interview with the applicant as well as accompanying family over age 14. The officer evaluates the applicant's credibility and considers whether his or her testimony is consistent with country conditions, other relevant interviews, and supporting information. Based on the interview and the information in the refugee's case file, the officer will determine whether the individual qualifies for resettlement and is otherwise admissible under U.S. law.

9) **Approval:** If the necessary criteria are met, the USCIS officer will conditionally approve the refugee's application for resettlement and submit it to DOS for final processing. Conditional approvals become final once the results of all security checks and the medical screening have been received and cleared.

10) **Security Screenings – Fingerprints:** With fingerprints and photographs collected by a USCIS officer at the time of the in-person interview (Step 8), USCIS coordinates three biometric checks on the applicant.

- **FBI Screening:** The applicant's fingerprints are run through the FBI's Next Generation Identification System.
- **DHS Screening:** The applicant's fingerprints are screened against the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Automated Biometric Identification System, which includes watch-list information as well as data on previous immigration encounters in the U.S. and abroad.
- **DOD Screening:** The U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) screens fingerprints of refugees within a certain age range against its Automated Biometric Identification System (ABIS). ABIS contains a variety of data, including fingerprint records from Iraq.

11) **Medical Screenings:** All applicants approved for resettlement in the U.S. are required to undergo medical screenings conducted by the International Organization for Migration or a physician designated by the U.S. Embassy. This screening ensures that the applicant does not have any communicable diseases that could pose a public health threat, and, as such, prohibit his or her admission to the U.S.

12) **Matching Refugees with a Sponsor Agency:** As part of the USRAP's public-private partnership, every refugee is assigned to a resettlement agency in the U.S that assists them upon arrival. The agency places refugees with a local office or affiliate that meets them at the airport, sets up an apartment, and assists them with integration upon arrival to the U.S.

13) **Cultural Orientation:** In addition, refugees approved for resettlement are offered cultural orientation while waiting for final processing. This orientation prepares them for their journey to and initial resettlement in the U.S.

14) **Admission to the United States:** Upon arrival at a U.S. airport designated as a port of entry for refugee admissions, a Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officer will review the refugee's documentation and conduct additional security checks against its National Targeting Center-Passenger program and the Transportation Security Administration's Secure Flight program. CBP ensures that the arriving refugee is the same person who was screened and approved for admission to the U.S.

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## Additional Resources

- **White House Infographic: The Screening Process for Refugee Entry into the United States -** [1.usa.gov/1OYqOfD](http://1.usa.gov/1OYqOfD)
- **U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants US Refugee Resettlement Program Refugee Journey Flowchart -** <http://tinyurl.com/hrpjc9q>
- **Letter from former Secretaries of the Department of Homeland Security, Janet Napolitano (2009-2013) and Michael Chertoff (2005-2009), on the security of the refugee program,** November 19, 2015 - [bit.ly/1nfv2nw](http://bit.ly/1nfv2nw)
- **Letter to Congress from 20 Former National Security Officials on the security of the refugee program,** December 1, 2015 - <http://tinyurl.com/qd62mez>

## **SAMPLE LOCAL WELCOME RESOLUTION**

RESOLUTION RECOGNIZING THE CITY/COUNTY OF [NAME] AS A WELCOMING CITY/COUNTY THAT CELEBRATES THE GROWING DIVERSITY OF ITS RESIDENTS AND ACNOWLEDGES THAT REFUGEES, IMMIGRANTS, AND ALL NEWCOMERS ENHANCE THE CULTURE AND THE ECONOMY

WHEREAS, there are more than 65 million displaced people have been forced from their homes, more than any time in recorded history, including over 21 million refugees;

WHEREAS, millions of refugees – regardless of faith or country of origin – are making life and death decisions to flee their homes and neighboring countries because they are unable to access shelter, health care, education, or protection, and neighboring countries have either closed their borders to new arrivals or violence persists in those countries as well;

WHEREAS, resettlement is available to a very small portion of the most vulnerable refugees and provides safe haven in a third country when no other options for safety are available;

WHEREAS, resettlement to the U.S. is available only for those who demonstrate the greatest and most immediate need for protection – such as children traveling alone, female- headed households, victims of torture, the physically disabled, and members of the LGBTI community – and takes place after eligible refugees undergo a rigorous selection, security vetting, and medical screening process;

WHEREAS, the [City/County] of [Name] is home to a diverse population of refugees and immigrants, adding to the economic strength and cultural richness of our community;

WHEREAS, organizations responsible for resettling refugees in our community, as well as numerous other community organizations and religious institutions, have declared their support for resettling refugees in [CITY];

WHEREAS, the [City/County] of [Name] has been an example of a hospitable and welcoming place to all newcomers, where people, families, and institutions thrive and the contributions of all are celebrated and valued;

WHEREAS, cities across the United States have declared themselves to be welcoming to refugees and immigrants, joining a national movement for creating an inclusive community;

WHEREAS, residents of [City/County] of [Name] aspire to live up to our highest societal values of acceptance and equality, and treat newcomers with decency and respect, creating a vibrant community for all to live in;

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY/COUNTY OF [NAME], that the [City/County] of [Name] is hereby declared a Welcoming City, and one that affirms the beauty and richness of our diversity, and one in which all are welcome, accepted, and appreciated.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the [City/County] of [Name] hereby urges other local and state communities to join us in a stronger national effort to resettle the most vulnerable refugees worldwide and help them integrate and thrive.

Adopted this the X day of [Month Year].

## **Other Advocacy Resources**

### **National Sign On Letters Demonstrating Commitment to Refugees**

Letter from 750+ religious leaders in support of resettling refugees of all faiths:

[http://www.interfaithimmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Religious-Leader-Letter-Syrian-refugees\\_Senate\\_01.14.16.pdf](http://www.interfaithimmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Religious-Leader-Letter-Syrian-refugees_Senate_01.14.16.pdf)

Letter from the Evangelical Immigration Table in support of refugee resettlement:

<http://evangelicalimmigrationtable.com/cms/assets/uploads/2015/12/EIT-Syrian-refugee-letter.pdf>

Letter from more than 1,000 rabbis calling on elected leadership to support refugee resettlement:

[http://www.hias.org/sites/default/files/1000\\_rabbis\\_support\\_refugees\\_160115.pdf](http://www.hias.org/sites/default/files/1000_rabbis_support_refugees_160115.pdf)

Statement of Principles on America's Commitment to Refugees from Former National Security Officials:

<http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/sites/default/files/STATEMENT-ON-AMERICAS-COMMITMENT-TO-REFUGEES.pdf>

### **Security Screening and Refugee Processing Backgrounders**

Department of Homeland Security Refugee Processing and Security Screening Fact Sheet:

[https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Refugee,%20Asylum,%20and%20Int'l%20Ops/Refugee\\_Security\\_Screening\\_Fact\\_Sheet.pdf](https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Refugee,%20Asylum,%20and%20Int'l%20Ops/Refugee_Security_Screening_Fact_Sheet.pdf)

Department of Homeland Security USRAP Flow Chart:

[https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Humanitarian/Refugees%20%26%20Asylum/USAP\\_Flow\\_Chart\\_V9.pdf](https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Humanitarian/Refugees%20%26%20Asylum/USAP_Flow_Chart_V9.pdf)

### **State-by-State Resources**

RCUSA State Profiles on Refugee Resettlement: <http://www.rcusa.org/state-refugee-profiles>

Interfaith Immigration Coalition State-by-State Articles and Demonstrations of Welcome:

<http://www.interfaithimmigration.org/2015/12/03/welcoming-refugees-state-by-state-resources/>

### **Additional Advocacy Toolkits**

UUSC Refugee Support and Advocacy Toolkit:

[http://www.uusc.org/sites/default/files/uusc\\_refugee\\_support\\_and\\_advocacy\\_toolkit.pdf](http://www.uusc.org/sites/default/files/uusc_refugee_support_and_advocacy_toolkit.pdf)

Refugees Welcome Toolkit: [http://www.refugeesarewelcome.org/refugees-welcome-toolkit\\_final-8-5-16/](http://www.refugeesarewelcome.org/refugees-welcome-toolkit_final-8-5-16/)

My Neighbor is Muslim Toolkit: <http://lirs.org/myneighborismuslim/>



## TAKE ACTION TODAY: Tell Your Local, State, and National Leaders to Welcome Refugees

**Background:** Right now, as we prepare for President-elect Donald Trump to take office in January, it is more important than ever for **all** of our elected officials to hear that their communities welcome refugees. Refugee resettlement saves lives, encourages other countries to keep their doors open to people needing protection, and promotes regional stability and global security. We cannot turn our backs on the refugees we have pledged to welcome. Nor can we discriminate against individuals based on where they're from or what religion they practice. Refugee resettlement must continue to be a cornerstone of U.S. global leadership.

More than 65 million people have been persecuted and forced from their homes and are seeking safety. As a nation, we must uphold our values of generosity, hospitality and compassion. Our actions must match gravity of this displacement crisis and live up to our welcoming legacy. Please spread the word and have everyone you know share this alert!

### Call your Senators and Representatives: 1-866-940-2439 Tell Them Your Community Welcomes Refugees

Please call the same number three times to be connected with your Representative and both of your Senators.

Here's a sample of what to say: *"I am a constituent from [CITY, STATE], and I urge you to welcome refugees and support the U.S. refugee resettlement program. Resettlement is a core American legacy that extends hospitality and offers a chance for refugees to rebuild their lives in safety and dignity. My community welcomes refugees and I urge you to reflect the best of our nation by supporting refugee resettlement in the United States."*

Feel free to share a personal story about the importance of refugees to you, your faith, your community, your business, etc. Let them know the specific ways that refugees benefit and are welcomed into your community, and why refugee protection is so important to you.

You can also tweet your policy makers: ". [@SENATOR/REPRESENTATIVE](#), my community stands #WithRefugees! Show that #AmericaWelcomes by supporting U.S. refugee resettlement! #RefugeesWelcome"

### Share This Message with Your State and Local Officials!

Your state and local leaders need to hear the same message. Tell them that your community welcomes refugees. To find your governor, state legislators, mayor, and local officials, click here: <https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials>. To tweet your state and local officials, click to find the twitter handles for your [governor](#) and [state legislators](#).

It is more important than ever for **all** our nation's lawmakers to represent the hospitality that communities across the country are demonstrating. Take action today to stand with refugees.

For more tips on how to make your voice heard with Members of Congress, click here: <https://twitter.com/i/moments/798297193559904258>

Please spread the word and send this email to your networks! Follow [@RCUSA\\_DC](#) on Twitter and "like" [Refugee Council USA](#) on Facebook for up-to-date alerts.

## **Sample Letter to Send to Your Members of Congress**

[Date]

The Honorable [Senator/Representative] (find this information at [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov) and [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov))  
[room number] [name of congressional office building]  
Washington, DC [20510/20515]

Dear [Senator/Representative] [last name]:

As your constituent, I urge you to welcome refugees and support the U.S. refugee resettlement program. Resettlement is a strong American legacy that extends hospitality and offers a chance for refugees to rebuild their lives in safety and dignity. Every day, more community members than ever before are volunteering with resettlement offices around the country to help refugees integrate and thrive.

The United States has a long history of providing protection to persons seeking safety from persecution. In the aftermath of World War II, the U.S. led humanitarian assistance efforts to help displaced persons, including resettling hundreds of thousands of Europeans to the United States, including Jewish survivors of the Holocaust. During the Cold War period, the U.S. welcomed refugees from Vietnam, Cuba and the former Soviet Union. Today, we resettle Darfuri refugees fleeing genocide, Bhutanese refugees forced out of their country, Syrian refugees who have fled mass violence and human rights atrocities, Iraqi and Afghan refugees who served alongside the U.S. military, and many other populations in need of lifesaving protection. Refugee resettlement is a public / private partnership that celebrates the hospitality, resilience, and freedom that our communities hold dear.

Refugees are forced to flee their homes because they face persecution on account of their religion, ethnicity, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Over 65 million people are displaced globally, the largest displacement crisis in recorded history, including over 21 million refugees. Resettlement offers a chance for less than 1% of the world's refugees to reach safety in a third country when no other options remain. Resettlement to the United States is available only for those who demonstrate the greatest and most immediate need for protection and takes place after eligible refugees undergo rigorous selection, security vetting and medical screening processes.

The U.S. State Department facilitates the admission of each refugee to the U.S. after they have been granted refugee status and following individual interviews by Department of Homeland Security (DHS) officials, extensive inter-agency background checks with multiple national security and intelligence agencies, and health screenings. According to national security experts, refugees are the most thoroughly vetted, rigorously screened people to come to the United States. The entire process typically takes 18-24 months, and sometimes longer, before a refugee even steps foot on U.S. soil.

[Local agency name] helps refugees who have been resettled in [state] by providing them with the tools of self-reliance: housing, job placement and employment skills, English-language classes, and community orientation. Refugees are resilient, hard workers whose innovative skills have contributed greatly to our state. [Describe positive impacts refugees have on your community—can include examples of refugees creating jobs, starting businesses, opening restaurants, bringing cultural diversity, buying homes, paying taxes, etc.]

Please stand with our community as we welcome refugees. We invite you to come visit our office and meet with refugees [perhaps include event information]. Thank you for your public service, and please contact me if you have any questions about refugee resettlement in our area.

With appreciation,  
[your signature and contact information]

## **Sample Letter to Send to Your State and Local Leaders**

[Date]

[Title] [To find your governor, state legislators, mayor, and local officials, click [here](#)]  
[room number] [name of office building]  
[City, State Zip Code]

Dear [TITLE Last Name]:

As your constituent, I urge you to welcome refugees, support the U.S. refugee resettlement program, and declare our [city/county/state] a “Welcoming City.” I would also urge you to write the State Department to show your support for resettlement. Resettlement is a strong American legacy that extends hospitality and offers a chance for refugees to rebuild their lives in safety and dignity. Every day, more community members than ever before are volunteering with resettlement offices around the country to help refugees integrate and thrive.

The United States has a long history of providing protection to persons seeking safety from persecution. In the aftermath of World War II, the U.S. led humanitarian assistance efforts to help displaced persons, including resettling hundreds of thousands of Europeans to the United States, including Jewish survivors of the Holocaust. During the Cold War period, the U.S. welcomed refugees from Vietnam, Cuba and the former Soviet Union. Today, we resettle Darfuri refugees fleeing genocide, Bhutanese refugees forced out of their country, Syrian refugees who have fled mass violence and human rights atrocities, Iraqi and Afghan refugees who served alongside the U.S. military, and many other populations in need of lifesaving protection. Refugee resettlement is a public / private partnership that celebrates the hospitality, resilience, and freedom that our communities hold dear.

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[Local agency name] helps refugees who have been resettled in [state] by providing them with the tools of self-reliance: housing, job placement and employment skills, English-language classes, and community orientation. Refugees are resilient, hard workers whose innovative skills have contributed greatly to our state. [Describe positive impacts refugees have on your community—can include examples of refugees creating jobs, starting businesses, opening restaurants, bringing cultural diversity, buying homes, paying taxes, etc.]

Our community is home to a diverse population of refugees and immigrants, adding to the economic strength and cultural richness of our community. We have been an example of a hospitable and welcoming place to all newcomers, where people thrive and the contributions of all are celebrated and valued. As cities across the United States have declared themselves to be welcoming to refugees and immigrants, we urge to adopt a resolution declaring [City/County/State] a “Welcoming City,” one in which all are welcome, accepted, and appreciated.

Please stand with us as we welcome refugees and affirm the richness of our community. We invite you to come visit our office and meet with refugees [perhaps include event information]. Thank you for your public service, and please contact me about how we can be supportive of moving a welcoming resolution forward.

With appreciation,  
[your signature and contact information]

## **Draft Letter for Local Officials to Send the White House & State Department**

[Date]

Dear President Trump and Secretary of State [NAME]:

Welcoming refugees shines a light on Americans' most cherished common values. As a community in [CITY, STATE], we believe in the strength of the U.S. refugee resettlement program and welcome refugees from all backgrounds, faiths, and countries of origin. This commitment reflects a core American belief in the dignity of every person, lifts up diversity as a community's strength, and cultivates an environment of inclusion. Resettlement is a strong American legacy that extends hospitality and offers a chance for refugees to rebuild their lives in safety and dignity. Every day, more community members than ever before are volunteering with resettlement offices around the country to help refugees integrate and thrive.

Refugee resettlement is the living embodiment of the religious commitment to "welcome the stranger," a bedrock upon which much of America's strength rests. In our community, churches, synagogues, mosques, and other communities of faith stand in partnership to help refugees of all faiths find safety and hope as they start their lives as new Americans. The United States has a long history of providing protection to persons seeking safety from persecution. In our community, we have welcomed refugees from [describe where refugees in your community have come from and the struggles they faced on their journey to the United States.]

Refugees are forced to flee their homes because they face persecution on account of their religion, ethnicity, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Over 65 million people are displaced globally, the largest displacement crisis in recorded history, including over 21 million refugees. Resettlement offers a chance for less than 1% of the world's refugees to reach safety in a third country when no other options remain. Resettlement to the United States is available only for those who demonstrate the greatest and most immediate need for protection and takes place after eligible refugees undergo rigorous selection, security vetting and medical screening processes.

[Local agency name] helps refugees who have been resettled in [state] by providing them with the tools of self-reliance: housing, job placement and employment skills, English-language classes, and community orientation. Refugees are resilient, hard workers whose innovative skills have contributed greatly to our state. [Describe positive impacts refugees have on your community—can include examples of refugees creating jobs, starting businesses, opening restaurants, bringing cultural diversity, buying homes, paying taxes, etc.]

Please stand with our community as we welcome refugees. We invite you to come visit our office and meet with refugees [perhaps include event information]. Thank you for your public service, and please contact me if you have any questions about refugee resettlement in our area.

With appreciation,  
[your signature and contact information]

\*Your local policy makers will know how to send correspondence to the White House and State Department. Encourage them to also send the letter to your Senators and Representative, and also please share a copy with your agency's advocacy staff, contact information on last page, so we can see how many have been sent and ensure that Administration officials and members of congress see them.

## **Communities of Welcome: Host Refugees Welcome Events**

### **Refugees Welcome Events**

Multiple faith-based groups, resettlement organizations, refugee and human rights leaders, and other supporters are increasingly working in partnership to provide a vibrant welcome to refugees. To stand against unprecedented attacks on refugee resettlement emanating from the politics of fear, we can respond with leadership and compassion. Consider working with your team and community members to host [Refugees Welcome](#) events. A collection of welcome stories can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

For example, sitting down together to share a meal is a timeless tradition that unites across all cultures and religions. The act of communities inviting immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers to join them around the table holds immense meaning and offers a welcoming space to build relationships and learn from one another. This is also a great way to show hospitality and to urge policy makers to support refugee resettlement. The documentary [Welcome to Shelbyville](#) provides examples of how sharing a dinner can break down barriers and transform communities.

### **Spreading the Word on Welcome**

If you are planning an event such as a welcoming dinner, panel discussion, interfaith vigil, or community forum, we encourage you to reach out and invite members of the media. Look online at the local publications or outlets you would like in attendance and search for past articles on immigration or refugees, then consider pitching your event to reporters who frequently cover those issues, or other community issues if there is not a designated immigration reporter.

Consider inviting the editorial director of your local newspaper. By inviting members of the press, you will be able to further share our message of welcoming to a larger audience and also inspire local media outlets to cover refugee issues more frequently in a positive way that highlights broad community support for refugees and resettlement. To invite multiple members of the press to your event, send a media advisory at least two full business days ahead of the event. Ideally, send the media advisory one week before the event and then again the day before your event. Also, follow up with the news desk and with reporters you would like to attend with a personal pitch, sharing the top details and your contact information in case they have questions. Reaching out via email and over the phone helps increase your chance of them attending! Following your event, be sure to send a follow up press release to all outlets in your area, including those who attended, with photos, quotes and a read out of the event's success.



If you are hosting a private event and are not comfortable having media attend or if you would like to share more about your experiences, writing an opinion editorial is a great way to share your experiences with a larger audience. Most opinion pieces are between 500 and 700 words. Sharing the most personal experiences and takeaways you had from the event help connect with the audience and encourage them to take similar action. You can find directions on how to submit an opinion editorial on your local newspaper's website.

### **Resources and Sharing Stories of Welcome**

For resources that help you plan a Refugees Welcome event and for template media advisories, media release form, as well as templates and examples for writing and pitching an op-ed, social media post and graphics, please visit: [http://www.refugeesarewelcome.org/refugees-welcome-toolkit\\_final-8-5-16/](http://www.refugeesarewelcome.org/refugees-welcome-toolkit_final-8-5-16/). Please share your stories of welcome with us by emailing [info.refugeesarewelcome@gmail.com](mailto:info.refugeesarewelcome@gmail.com).



## **Change the Dialogue & Push for Change through Social Media**

Social media is a great way to spread the word about these issues and to get your friends, family, and other community members involved. Using popular social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, we encourage you to post information and pictures of events utilizing the signs found at <https://americawelcomes.us/>, <http://www.refugeesarewelcome.org/>, and using #RefugeesWelcome.

**Facebook and Twitter** are two of the most used social media platforms that can be used to show your support and urge elected officials to do the same. You can find your Senators' and Representatives' Twitter handles here: <https://twitter.com/cspan/lists/members-of-congress/members>. You can find your Governor's twitter handle here: <https://twitter.com/gov/lists/us-governors?lang=en>. Your state legislators' twitter handles are located here: <https://twitter.com/NCSLorg/lists/legislators2/members>.

Sample posts:

- .@REPNAME our community stands #WithRefugees! Show that #AmericaWelcomes by supporting U.S. refugee resettlement! #RefugeesWelcome
- #Refugees bring unique experiences, talents, and skills to our communities. @REPNAME, help protect & resettle #refugees! #WelcomeWorld
- Visited @REPNAME's office to tell him/her to support policies that will welcome #refugees and support welcoming communities. #WelcomeTogether #RefugeesWelcome (picture)
- [Organization name] stands with our neighbors of all faiths. @REPNAME, say NO to anti-Muslim rhetoric! #WelcomeTogether
- Our refugee brothers and sisters make our communities stronger. @REPNAME, vote NO on anti-refugee legislation! #WelcomeTogether #RefugeesWelcome

There is already an incredible awareness on social media around refugee issues. Building off existing campaigns will allow us to connect with an already engaged audience and provide an established platform on which to issue new talking points, news clips, events, and social media graphics to further our message. For more posts on standing against anti-Muslim sentiment, please visit:

<https://twitter.com/S2Scampaign>. Existing campaigns and hashtags include:

- #RefugeesWelcome
- #OpentoSyria
- #WelcomeWorld
- #refugeecrisis
- #WithSyria
- #WithRefugees

Creating a unique hashtag for our campaign will allow us to engage a new audience and track how many people are engaged online with our campaign specifically. Suggested unique hashtags for your campaign are: #United4Refugees

- #United4Refugees
- #Together4Refugees
- #WorkingtoWelcome
- #LovesARefugeFromHate

Through the use of both unique and existing hashtags, our campaign can engage and mobilize both existing and new community partners. Additionally, providing a unique hashtag will provide members of the media to track our campaign's online presence.

### **Sample Refugees Welcome Graphics**

Feel free to also use photos, videos, or graphics from other supporting organizations. It is important to receive permission of all individuals in a photo or video before posting. To download graphics that you can use or share, please click [here](#). Note: Please do not edit these images or crop out the photo credits.

## **Contact Information for Advocacy Staff**

Please feel free to contact the following advocacy staff who represent organizations working with refugees:

- Church World Service: Jen Smyers, [jmyers@cwsglobal.org](mailto:jmyers@cwsglobal.org)
- Episcopal Migration Ministries: Lacy Broemel, [lbroemel@episcopalchurch.org](mailto:lbroemel@episcopalchurch.org)
- HIAS: Liz Mandelman: [elizabeth.mandelman@hias.org](mailto:elizabeth.mandelman@hias.org)
- International Rescue Committee: Kristen Aster, [kristen.aster@rescue.org](mailto:kristen.aster@rescue.org)
- Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service: Ryan Mace, [RMace@lirs.org](mailto:RMace@lirs.org)
- U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops: Matt Wilch, [mwilch@usccb.org](mailto:mwilch@usccb.org)
- U.S. Committee for Refugees & Immigrants: Esmeralda Lopez, [elopez@uscridc.org](mailto:elopez@uscridc.org)
- Ethiopian Community Development Council: Reza Yawari, [ryawari@ecdcus.org](mailto:ryawari@ecdcus.org)
- World Relief: Jenny Yang, [jgyang@worldrelief.org](mailto:jgyang@worldrelief.org)
- Jesuit Refugee Service/USA: Giulia McPherson, [gmcpherson@jesuits.org](mailto:gmcpherson@jesuits.org)
- Refugee Council USA: Shaina Ward, [sward@rcusa.org](mailto:sward@rcusa.org)