



GUIDE TO COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP

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Additional resources

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GET THE FACTS

25.9M

There are 25.9 million refugees in the world, and over 50% are under the age of 18

1%

Less than 1% of refugees will ever have access to resettlement as a durable solution

18K

The U.S. may admit up to 18,000 refugees in 2020, as determined by President Trump

40K

The U.S. holds nearly 40,000 asylum-seekers and immigrants in over 200 detention facilities



WHAT IS THE STATE OF THE WORLD?

Every day, all over the world, people are forced to make the most difficult decisions of their lives – they are forced to flee their homeland to escape persecution and torture or other severe human rights abuses, armed conflict, and horrific violence. Many have no option but to seek resettlement in a new country they can call home, or to make a dangerous journey to request asylum or other forms of humanitarian protection directly.

But governments around the world aren't doing enough to help. The Trump administration has implemented a series of discriminatory and restrictive policies, starting with the Muslim, African, refugee, and asylum bans; severe cuts to refugee admissions; extreme vetting; border programs pushing people out and back to Mexico and other places where they would face danger; and the arbitrary and prolonged detention of children, families, and adults. These U.S. policies have not only choked refugee resettlement worldwide and created a border crisis of the administration's own making, but have also had dire consequences for tens of thousands whose lives hang in limbo.

Now, as we face a global crisis from the COVID-19 pandemic, our daily lives are filled with anxieties, concerns, and new challenges. These feelings of uncertainty may be felt even more intensely by refugees and asylum-seekers who are particularly at-risk, with tens of millions displaced in crowded camps, shelters, and uncertain housing in urban settings, without access to adequate health services, testing, and care to support themselves and their families.

To make matters worse, the Trump administration has closed the U.S.-Mexico border, effectively banning and abandoning people seeking safety

here, and continues to hold many asylum-seekers in the U.S. in detention facilities where they cannot practice physical distancing and conditions have been well-documented to have substandard medical care, inadequate basic hygiene, and overcrowding.

Further, refugee resettlement globally and here in the U.S. has been temporarily suspended in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving refugee populations in need of a permanent home in continued limbo.

Refugees, asylum-seekers, and asylees who recently arrived in the U.S. before this crisis may not yet have ties to their community to help them navigate these times of uncertainty as they rebuild their lives in new homes. This is where we can help.

We all want to live in a world where we look after each other, and everyone is treated with dignity, respect, and fairness.

Those seeking safety want the same thing any of us would want if we were in their shoes. Together, we can respond with compassion and respect for people arriving in the U.S. seeking safety.

Your support for refugees and asylum-seekers is more critical than ever, and there are ways you can offer welcome and comfort during this time from your homes virtually. The global reach of COVID-19 shows how we are all connected. It's during crises like this that something new can emerge – we close down demonization and anger and decisively replace it with empathy and kindness through virtual community sponsorship and other actions of welcome and support.

People may need to be physically distant at the moment, but we are united. Together, we will get through this.

WHAT IS AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL USA DOING?

As one part of its advocacy to protect refugee rights, find safe pathways for people seeking safety, and create welcoming communities, Amnesty International is working globally to establish, strengthen, and promote community sponsorship programs worldwide.

Amnesty International USA is part of this global community of activists working to establish community sponsorships to support refugee resettlement, asylum-seekers, and asylees in our communities.

This toolkit will help guide you in the various ways you can engage in community sponsorship through, including virtual engagement as we practice physical distancing due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of the activities, such as organizing your sponsorship group, fundraising, and connecting with a local refugee/asylum-seeker/asylee service provider are done pre-sponsorship, so we encourage you to use this time apart to prepare yourself and your group for in-person community sponsorship when we are able to come back together.

In a time when the Trump administration seeks to dehumanize refugees and asylum-seekers and build physical and invisible walls to their path to safety, community sponsorship is a powerful rebuke of these policies.

Join us in building a movement of tangible welcome and support by becoming a community sponsor and activist for the program!

AIUSA is taking its role as a watchdog for human rights seriously, especially as the

world faces this global pandemic. Follow www.amnestyusa.org/covid19 to see how you can take action to protect the human rights of all people.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP?

Community sponsors are guides, advocates, and friends to refugees resettled in the U.S. and people seeking asylum here or granted asylum already (otherwise known as asylees).

Technically speaking, community sponsorship is a commitment to provide financial support and/or in-kind contributions, and certain volunteer services to an arriving or previously arrived refugees, asylees, asylum-seekers, and other forcibly displaced populations.

All resettlement is local, so sponsorship is an opportunity for the community to be involved directly in providing these newcomers with initial financial assistance and the direct services, guidance, and mentorship needed to support them in their integration. It also allows groups in locations that are not near resettlement agency affiliates to welcome refugees, asylum-seekers, and asylees to their communities.



SO, WHAT DO COMMUNITY SPONSORS ACTUALLY DO?

Community sponsors play a vital role in the integration of newcomers as a powerful expression of welcome to their new home.

Sponsors often meet refugees upon their arrival at the airport, creating a positive lasting impression for people who may be uncertain of what awaits them at this juncture of their journey to safety and a new home.

They may then accompany the family to a home that they have helped to furnish and prepare in advance.

For example, one Amnesty group of community sponsors came together to collect furnishings for a newly arriving family and spent a day setting up and decorating the apartment for the family.



Throughout the sponsorship period, typically between three to twelve months, sponsors provide additional support in partnership with the local resettlement agency that may include help with English language learning, transportation to job interviews or doctor's appointments, helping explain local public transportation, and most significantly, just being a friend and a neighbor.

But this is just one example.

Community sponsorship activities vary by the sponsoring group, location, and the needs of the resettlement agency and family or individual.

VIRTUAL COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP: WHAT ABOUT IN TIMES OF PHYSICAL DISTANCING DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC?

Like so many of us in our work and personal lives, we are adapting community sponsorship to a world of physical distancing, virtual spaces, and protective measures. Welcoming and support doesn't stop – it's just communicated through different channels!

Your support for refugees, asylum-seekers, and asylees through community sponsorship is now even more necessary, **and there are ways you can offer welcome and comfort during this time from your homes.**

For example, you could send them letters or gift cards for supplies such as groceries through postal mail, or set up video calls between yourself and a newly arrived family or individual. Such actions can help foster a sense of community and combat social isolation, while also being an opportunity to assist with English language practice and share local community resources. It can also serve as an important way to communicate the latest information about your community's response to COVID-19. There are many other ways to engage in community sponsorship virtually and from your home highlighted in this toolkit, particularly p9-10.



WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP?

In a time when this administration seeks to dehumanize refugees and asylum-seekers and to allow cities and states to deny them safety, community sponsorship is a tangible rebuke of these policies. Community sponsors have the power to form direct relationships with newcomers, advocate for refugees and asylum-seekers to have greater access to resettlement and asylum, and demonstrate that they are not only welcomed, but also embraced by their new neighbors. They have the power to create a real sense of home for refugees, asylum-seekers, and asylees and to fast-track their path in putting down roots in their new community.

HOW CAN AMNESTY GROUPS ENGAGE IN COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP?

If you're interested in learning more about community sponsorship, email refugees@aiusa.org and the Consultant for Community Sponsorship (CSC) will contact you to help you figure out your next steps! Community sponsorship information is also available to the general public through [Refugee Council USA](#) (RCUSA), a coalition of which AIUSA is a member, where you can search opportunities by zip code and download overviews of resettlement sites near you.

First, how do I get involved?

Your location and proximity to a resettlement site are the main factors that determine the likelihood of sponsorship, as each refugee agency structures sponsorship differently. The CSC (refugees@aiusa.org) can guide you through the initial stages of connecting with a local resettlement site, organizing your group, and other preliminary steps.

Field organizers or member leaders in your area can help you connect to other local groups who are considering sponsorship and would benefit from partnering with student groups like you!

The most common types of sponsorship activities address the specific needs of the refugee family, such as helping with English language studies and school lessons, answering questions about their new community (where the library or hospital is, how public services work, etc.), just to name a few of the questions people living in a new country with new systems and responsibilities might have.

Some activities that Amnesty groups could be especially helpful with:

- Fundraise and/or gather household items to furnish an apartment for a newly arriving family
- Assist with decorating and setting up an apartment for a newly arriving family
- Create a “welcoming committee” to greet refugees at the airport upon arrival
- Act as school guides, mentors, tutors, and language partners for kids in the family

We can help you to figure out what's possible! Because – even in a moment of physical distancing – welcoming and supporting people seeking safety is what each of us can do.



Second, can student groups participate?

Absolutely. The involvement of Amnesty student groups with members under the age of 18 may be different than that of other Amnesty groups, due to legal requirements around age and legal liability.

Sponsorship is possible for groups under 18, but may require the involvement of adults to provide transportation to more creativity in the type of activities you engage in and how.

But, most importantly, all people no matter what age can support community sponsorship efforts to welcome refugees, asylum-seekers, and asylees in their community and support them in building a new home.

Third, what does community sponsorship look like while physical distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic?

In considering any of the following activities, please take seriously the safety recommendations in your community to slow and prevent the spread of COVID-19.

*** BEFORE A FAMILY OR INDIVIDUAL ARRIVES:**

In collaboration with the resettlement office (and with the help of adults in your community for those under 18):

- Set-up an Amazon Wish List for donations for an arriving family or individual, and ask people in your communities to ship those items to the resettlement office. Contact the resettlement office for a list of what the family or individual may need for their home.
- Order welcome meals for an arriving family or individual from a local restaurant offering delivery, especially if the restaurant is refugee- or immigrant-owned, to also support local businesses during this difficult time. Check in with the resettlement office for any allergies or other food restrictions.
- Make welcome cards for an arriving family or individual. Mail them to the resettlement office so the caseworker can give them to the family or individual upon arrival. Contact the resettlement office for languages you could consider writing the cards in, in addition to drawings and messages in English.

- Set up an online backpack and supplies drive and send them to resettlement offices so that when schools open, the arriving child(ren) have the supplies they need. Check in with the resettlement office to confirm what those supplies may be.

- [Elementary Classroom Supplies](#)
- [Secondary Classroom Supplies](#)
- [Backpacks](#)

- Do the schools in your community have uniforms? Consider hosting an online school uniform collection drive and send the donations to the office for kids in the family once they are able to attend school. Check in with the resettlement office to confirm what the arriving student(s) may need.

- [Uniforms](#)

*** POST-ARRIVAL:**

In partnership with the resettlement office (and with the help of adults in your community for those under 18):

- Set up video calls on Skype/WhatsApp/Zoom/etc. between yourself and the family or individual. If the family you are assisting has children, also set up a way to communicate over a video or call platform for peer-to-peer socializing. You can help the family or individual with practicing English while ESL classes are closed, and it can help ease their cultural adjustment. Set a scheduled time (every other day or weekly) when you will meet so the family or individual knows they can count on you.
- Create cards with art and pictures and send them via snail mail to the family or individual you are sponsoring. Children especially enjoy getting mail. Consider languages you could write the cards in, in addition to drawings and messages in English.

- Phone calls! Have a phone call together to boost spirits.
- Order fresh groceries (fruits, vegetables, rice, bread, milk, eggs, etc.) and have them delivered to the family or individual's home, or, order a culturally appropriate meal from a locally refugee- or immigrant-owned restaurant and have it delivered to the family or individual. Make sure to consider any allergies or other food restrictions.
- Consider donating bikes or outdoor equipment and toys (sports balls, hula hoops, chalk, etc.) to children in the family you're sponsoring, so they can go outside and get exercise. Consult with the resettlement office on how to best send these items.
- Does the family you are partnered with have a computer? If not, see if a donated one can be located and given to the family to support online learning for students while schools are out of session.
- Collect or order a box full of creative activities for children and have it shipped to the home. For example: watercolor paints, crayons, washable markers, paper, stickers, etc.

Adapted from Church World Service's Immigration and Refugee Program

Have a question or want more information about sponsorship? Email refugees@aiusa.org.





Fourth, how can I turn my sponsorship into advocacy?

Your elected officials represent and are rightly influenced by you and your neighbors – their constituents. So make your voices heard!

Sponsorship makes you and the refugees, asylum-seekers, and asylees in your community uniquely poised to be powerful advocates with your local elected officials through the lens of your personal experience.

If they know that refugee resettlement and meaningful access to asylum matters to you, they're more likely to be on the side of supporting newcomers in their community and state and may even help fight the administration's attempts

to vilify refugees and asylum-seekers, ban them, or reduce the number of who can resettle here and rebuild their lives in safety.

To learn more on how you can engage in advocacy opportunities, see our resources below on ways you can advocate and email refugees@aiusa.org to connect with us directly!

HOW DOES AMNESTY SUPPORT COMMUNITY SPONSORS?

Through bi-weekly calls every two weeks with the Consultant for Community Sponsorship (CSC), Amnesty provides a support system and space with opportunities to connect together with other groups who've engaged in community sponsorship and who are interested in community sponsorship. Email the CSC at refugees@aiusa.org for more information on how to participate in these calls and for additional tools and resources.

Amnesty International USA is also a member of Refugee Council USA (RCUSA), a diverse coalition advocating for just and humane laws and policies, and the promotion of dialogue and communication among the government, civil society, and those who need protection and welcome. Along with RCUSA, Amnesty's community sponsorship complements a larger nationwide initiative to establish community sponsorships to support refugee resettlement, asylum-seekers, and asylees in our communities.



WHAT IF I'M NOT PART OF AN AMNESTY GROUP?

Start an Amnesty International Local or Student Chapter if your community or school doesn't already have one! You can find chapters on our website. Local and student chapters conduct advocacy and educational outreach around our campaigns – including the *I Welcome* campaign for refugee and migrant rights. Email us at fieldorganizingteam@aiusa.org (regarding interest in local groups) or youth@aiusa.org (regarding interest in student groups) on how to join or create a chapter.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

We have created many community sponsorship tools and resources to help you and encourage you to share them with your group as you think about participating in sponsorship.

- 1 [COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP EXPLAINER](#)
- 2 [COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP & ADVOCACY](#)
- 3 [COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP & ALLYSHIP](#)
- 4 [TALKING WITH RESETTLED REFUGEES](#)
- 5 [HOW TO TRANSFORM YOUR COMMUNITY INTO A MOVEMENT](#)
- 6 [FUNDRAISING GUIDE](#)
- 7 [COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP FAQs](#)

COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP

EXPLAINER

Community sponsorship is a unique form of engagement that pairs AIUSA members like you with refugees arriving to the U.S. or asylum-seekers and asylees in the U.S. to give them a warm and supportive welcome. In partnership with your local resettlement agency (RA), you may assist with activities like greeting the refugee at the airport, securing their initial housing, setting that housing up with the furniture and household goods that they'll need to start their lives in the U.S., taking them to initial appointments, helping them to improve their English and find employment, and showing them around their new community.

As a community sponsor, you will serve as a guide, advocate and friend to an arriving refugee, asylum-seeker, or asylee; gain a better understanding of the refugee and asylum experience both overseas and in the U.S.; and become a more powerful advocate.

While community sponsorship looks different depending on the site and case sponsored, there are some things that you should keep in mind:

HOW TO BEGIN

Find your group. To serve as a community sponsor, you may need to be part of an established community group. This could be your Amnesty group, a house of worship, or other community group. If you are not part of an established community group and are interested in community sponsorship, email us at refugees@aiusa.org and we will help to connect you with a group with which you can work.

Indicate your interest and learn more about your local community sponsorship program. Let us know if you are interesting in community sponsorship by emailing us at refugees@aiusa.org. We will provide you with information about your local community sponsorship program and answer any questions you have. When you feel ready, we will connect you with your nearest participating resettlement agency.

Organize your group. You will want one to lead to serve as Coordinator and point of contact for the resettlement agency. You can get other organizing advice and tools by emailing us at refugees@aiusa.org.

Raise the money needed.

Make certain that you raise your financial and in-kind resources after communicating with your partner resettlement agency as it may take some time for the family or individual to arrive.

Financial Commitment

\$0 – \$15,000

The financial resources required to sponsor a case vary based on a number of factors including: requirements of the partner RA, size of the family being assisted, cost of housing, and the in-kind resources that you're able to pull together.

Time Commitment

3 – 18 months

Like the financial commitment required, the time commitment also varies by site; however, a majority of offices request a six month commitment that declines over time. This means that the month prior to and following the individual or family's arrival will likely be the most intensive.

The goal of community sponsorship is to support them in becoming self-sufficient as quickly as possible. This means that all of the support provided should decline over time.

** While we are practicing social distancing to prevent the spread of COVID-19, use this time to prepare and follow the steps above.*



COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP AND ADVOCACY



The federal government and the current administration have made it harder for refugees and asylum-seekers to join you as a neighbor. We have seen unparalleled attacks on the resettlement and asylum infrastructures and on refugees, asylum-seekers, and asylees themselves. **But you can do something about it.**

Call or write your elected officials today and tell them you support resettling refugees and welcoming asylum-seekers in your community, and are prepared to commit your time and money to do so but can't, because refugee arrivals are being delayed with needless bureaucracy and a low ceiling for refugee admissions and because asylum-seekers are effectively blocked from entering the country or stuck in immigration detention.

- You can locate your Members of Congress [online](#) or by providing your zip code to the Capital Switchboard (202-224-3121).
- Need some inspiration? [Visit our blog](#) to learn more about effective letter writing.
- Don't forget that your state and local elected leaders have a voice in this process too. Write your governor. Write your mayor. Write your state legislator. Visit the [Common Cause](#) website to identify everyone who represents you, from the president to county executives. They all need to hear the same message. Just use the same message you sent to your Member of Congress and change the address. It's that simple.

Call, write, and tweet at the President and tell him the same. He is the one with the power to change this. He needs to hear from you that communities across the country welcome refugees and asylum-seekers. You can send a message through [any of the resources listed on this website](#), but Twitter is also a great way to connect.

Sign up to be part of our [Congressional advocacy network](#), and find opportunities to lobby your Members of Congress – both in-district and in DC!

Make sure to tell us what you've done so far! Fill out this [debrief form](#) to share with us what you've done to advocate for welcome so that we can amplify and empower your work.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL** 

COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP AND ALLYSHIP

Community sponsorship pairs refugees, asylees, and asylum seekers in need of financial, in-kind, and volunteer support with groups of individuals willing to provide that support. It is a relationship managed by a local resettlement agency with experience in refugee resettlement, available community resources, and cross-cultural communications.

Allyship is core to being an effective community sponsor and advocate. Here are a few things to keep in mind:

SELF-AWARENESS

Understand your culture and biases:

- We often are not fully aware of our own culture because it is obscured by its obviousness. But what is “normal”, “appropriate”, and “respectful” to one person may not be that way for others. We tend to judge and interact with the world by our own standards and the first step to being an ally is to uncover your own background and perceptions of the world and appreciate that they are a result of your upbringing, experiences and context.

Be aware of your position in relation to the other person based on a number of different factors:

- In your role as a community sponsor, you hold a certain amount of power and privilege due to the fact that you are in a position to volunteer, organize with your group, and have access to resources and ways to making your voice heard. As the saying goes, with great power comes great responsibility, so follow the community sponsor guidelines provided to you by your local resettlement agency to ensure you are fulfilling your role appropriately. Also be aware that the people you sponsor or advocate with may recognize and respond to your position and power in different ways.
- If you are a documented citizen or resident in the U.S. and have never been a refugee or asylum-seeker, your legal status in this country and your experience of safety and security is likely to be very different from people who have had the experience of being displaced. You may not personally fully understand this fundamentally different framework, but being aware of this difference can help to increase your sensitivity and openness to learning about others’ experiences.
- You may also hold other types of privilege, due to certain aspects of your identity, socio-economic status, educational background, the part of town in which you live, or your level of familiarity with U.S./ local culture. Keep in mind that these may affect your perceptions of others and what is acceptable, and their perceptions of you.

Recognize language implications:

- This not only includes the privilege and access that comes with speaking the dominant language in a particular context; it also means that miscommunications can happen in translation and interpretation. It may also impact the extent to which people are able to express their emotions and experiences or convey their needs or preferences. As needed, adapt your communication and stay open and patient with each other.

“IN ORDER TO WALK A MILE IN SOMEONE ELSE’S SHOES, YOU HAVE TO TAKE YOUR OWN SHOES OFF FIRST.”

- UNKNOWN

“BECOMING AWARE OF PRIVILEGE SHOULD NOT BE VIEWED AS A BURDEN OR SOURCE OF GUILT, BUT RATHER, AN OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN AND BE RESPONSIBLE SO THAT WE MAY WORK TOWARD A MORE JUST AND INCLUSIVE WORLD.”

- UNKNOWN

Manage micro-behaviors:

- Micro-behaviors are small and often subtle ways in which we say or do things that impact others without our intention or awareness. The other party may feel unheard, unseen, not valued, offended or hurt, which may affect the trust and relationship building with each other. Before you say and do things, consider the impact it may have on others, develop understanding and empathy of other people’s experiences, and work hard to align your words and behavior with your intentions of treating others with dignity and respect.

UNDERSTANDING OTHERS

Learn about others:

- Find opportunities to learn about other people and communities. We often rely on others to educate us, and of course we also want to get to know people and learn about them, but we also have a responsibility to pro-actively educate ourselves with our own research and listening.

Appreciate cultural diversity

- Be aware of different cultural patterns regarding communication style, expressing emotions, relationship to time, handling conflict, family dynamics, decision- making and numerous other manifestations of our rich human diversity. Try not to judge or try to change them; instead try to learn about them and respect them.

See people as full human beings:

- When we learn about others, our brains sometimes turn this information into generalizations and assumptions about everyone who is part of that group. Go beyond stereotypes, biases and one-dimensional interpretations by getting to know people as the whole and complex human beings we all are. We are all uniquely different but also have a shared humanity that enriches and unites us if we embrace diversity and invest in relationship building across difference.

RELATIONSHIP AND TRUST BUILDING

Ask and listen:

- Trust is built when people feel that you understand them. One of the ways to do this is by asking questions so that you can get insights into other person’s feelings, perspectives, and preferences. Be mindful to not inundate people with questions but don’t operate solely from your assumptions either.
- When asking questions, it is just as important to listen from a place of empathy, non-judgment, and desire to understand the other person from their perspective rather than your own. Consider repeating back your interpretation of what you heard to verify the other party’s intention.

“THE WORLD IN WHICH YOU WERE BORN IS JUST ONE MODEL OF REALITY. OTHER CULTURES ARE NOT FAILED ATTEMPTS AT BEING YOU; THEY ARE UNIQUE MANIFESTATIONS OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT.”

- WADE DAVIS

.....

“MANY STORIES MATTER. STORIES HAVE BEEN USED TO DISPOSSESS AND TO MALIGN. BUT STORIES CAN ALSO BE USED TO EMPOWER, AND TO HUMANIZE. STORIES CAN BREAK THE DIGNITY OF A PEOPLE. BUT STORIES CAN ALSO REPAIR THAT BROKEN DIGNITY.”

- CHIMAMANDA ADICHIE

Respect people's space and property:

- Space includes bodily integrity and physical space. Not everyone appreciates being touched by or being in close proximity to another person they don't know well. It can also mean certain preferences for opening up their home to others - when, how often, to whom, etc. Similar to space, people also have different relationships to property and other people handling their property, so ask before you act.

Be mindful of your role and responsibilities:

- You are there to support; not to make decisions for someone else. Different people need different things in order to feel comfortable, safe, connected, and happy; rather than dictating, focus on facilitating what the other person is asking for.

ADVOCACY AND SHARING STORIES

Make space rather than take space:

- As an ally and an advocate, you are not speaking for others. You are creating space for them to make their own voices heard.

Ask permission and share responsibly:

- If you would like to share another person's story, ask express permission to do so. Be clear on what you will share, how you will share it, why you will share it, and with whom you will share it. Do not embellish or otherwise edit the story to make a stronger point; staying true to the story respects the story's owner.

Do not expect people to tell you their story:

- Not everyone feels comfortable sharing their stories one or multiple times. This may especially be the case when people have experienced significant hardship and trauma, which tends to be the case for many refugees, asylum-seekers, and asylees. Others may be eager to share their stories as a way to process their experiences, lift up the issues they want to see addressed, build relationships, etc., so communicating that you are open to hearing their story if they choose to share them without any pressure or expectation is important. People may or may not choose to share it with you as your relationship evolves.

Know the issue(s):

- As an ally, it is important that you have a clear understanding of the issue(s) on which you are advocating and your motivations for advocacy. You don't have to be a subject matter expert, but you should be able to communicate the issue and the accompanying ask.

ONGOING LEARNING

Continue to keep an open mind and invest in educating yourself.

Recognize the difference between intention and impact:

- Even though you may feel like you already are an ally and have the best of intentions, the other party may not always experience that in the same way.
- Be open to receiving feedback and see it as an opportunity to learn and grow. Listen to the feedback, take full ownership of the impact you had on the other person, and apologize unconditionally. Work on both your self-awareness and your self-regulation. Remember, the best apology is sincere understanding and permanently changed behavior.

Provide feedback to others if they are not showing up as an ally, and do so with respect and from a place of shared commitment and accountability.



INCLUSION · DIVERSITY · EQUITY · ACCESSIBILITY



TALKING WITH RESETTLED REFUGEES, ASYLUM-SEEKERS, AND ASYLEES

For many people, the common instinct when meeting someone and getting to know them is to ask about their backstory. We want to create connections and have meaningful conversations.

That is a great instinct. It also may not be the best way to introduce yourself when talking with a resettled refugee, asylum-seeker, or asylee.

Questions about past experiences, such as “*Why did you flee your country?*” or “*Why are you here?*” might re-traumatize them.

Questions that only focus on the harm that happened to them risks also reduces them to one identity – that of a refugee, asylum-seeker, or

asylee, when actually, that part of their life is only a fraction of their story.

Make sure to see the whole person – just as we want to be seen. They are a person like you, with ambitions and concerns and everyday observations to share; someone’s child and someone’s friend or partner; a worker; a person with hobbies.

All of this is advised not because a resettled refugee, asylum-seeker, or asylee is vulnerable or fragile, but because we want to respect the person. Just as any of us who have survived abuse would not want to be spoken to only about that abuse or asked about it again and again.

Be culturally aware. If at all possible, before you meet, learn the history and customs of their home country, faith, and ethnicity so the conversation is culturally appropriate. Be sure to follow their lead in how they address you, whether they want to shake hands or make frequent eye contact. Don't assume that hugs or pats on the shoulder will be appropriate, even with the warmest intentions.

Make a point to establish an empathetic connection that builds on identifying mutual experiences and interests and understandings. These may seem like innocuous questions but have a major impact on forging connection and empathy.

- Where do they live? Have they visited local parks/attractions in their community yet?
- What are their hobbies?
- What is their family like?
- What kind of music do they enjoy? Any recent films or books they enjoyed or would recommend?
- How have they found the weather in your area recently?

If they choose to share stories with you, either about their journey here or the current challenges they face as a resettled refugee, asylum-seeker, or asylee, listen and give space to their experience. Consider validating their experience without taking over and making it your own.

Most of all, be friendly and open and welcoming. They are a newcomer and a new neighbor.

Do say:

- *"I can't imagine how hard that must be / have been for you."*
- *"I appreciate you sharing that with me. It means so much."*
- *"This sounds like an incredibly tough time."*

What helped you the most in this process?
How have you found people most helpful?

Do not say:

- *"Everything happens for a reason" or "God works in mysterious ways"* – You do not know their faith, and there is no good reason to experience trauma.
- *"I know exactly how you feel... [sharing your own experience.]"* – While you may have experienced trauma of your own, or migrated from another country, unless you are a refugee or asylum-seeker, you will not know how that person feels.
- *"Thank goodness we / the resettlement agency / the U.S. is here to help you."* – Refugees, asylum-seekers, and asylees are not asking to be saved. They are independent adults and, while they need support, they might not find this language reassuring.
- *"Well, at least you have [your health / a home / a job]."* – Just like anyone else who has experienced trauma, resettled refugees, asylum-seekers, and asylees deserve your empathy, not your advice.





TRANSFORM YOUR COMMUNITY INTO A MOVEMENT

Each of us lives inside powerful social circles. As Amnesty members like you engage communities across the country in support of refugees and asylum-seekers, consider recruiting unlikely supporters in your community. In these socially and politically divided times, your call to action can help neighbors, friends, colleagues, and teammates become a part of the solution.

Here are a few steps you can take towards building a movement to support refugees, and asylum-seekers:

- Identify communities you belong to that could be open to taking at least one action in support of refugees and asylum-seekers. This single, meaningful act could have a massive impact. This could include your book club, sports club, group of friends, faith community, an online community, or any other gathering.
- Introduce the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers at your next meeting or gathering as a non-partisan way of supporting people who need it the most. Share with your friends or colleagues that resettling refugees has been a priority of every Presidential administration going back to Reagan, and that the attacks we're seeing right now are unprecedented.
- Use information about the situation of refugees and asylum-seekers that would appeal to your particular community. You can find our resources on our website: <https://www.amnestyusa.org/refugees>.
- Leverage your community's strengths and lean into what your community already does best and apply it to supporting refugees and asylum-seekers. For example, if you belong to a soccer team, consider hosting a friendly match where you invite refugees, asylum-seekers, and asylees.
- If possible, invite a local elected official or, at the very least, ensure he or she knows about the community you are building in support of refugees and asylum-seekers. Your city council member could be interested in attending. Your extended community may have connections, but even if they don't, now is a great time to build a relationship with your local elected officials.
- Invite local press to cover an event you're leading in support of refugees. Local television news stations love attending in-person events!
- Share what you're planning with your local field organizer. If you don't know who your local field organizer is, feel free to reach out to refugees@aiusa.org and we'll connect you with that person. We want to amplify your powerful activism!

And continue to celebrate! Share your successes with refugees@aiusa.org, and we may ask you to share your experiences and strengths with another community somewhere else in the U.S. that is considering taking action.



FUNDRAISING GUIDE

FOR GROUPS INTERESTED IN COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP

Amnesty International has long history of creating communities of individuals who are care passionately and act fiercely. At AIUSA, we are exceedingly proud to be met in solidarity with steadfast supporters like you, who make our work possible.

Community sponsorship is a unique form of engagement that pairs AIUSA members with refugees, asylum-seekers, and asylees in the U.S. to give them a warm and supportive welcome. Community sponsorship will look different depending on the case and individuals involved. Some financial factors include: the requirements of the partnership resettlement agency, size of the family being assisted, cost of housing and other in-kind resources.

Financial support is crucial for the success of sponsoring families and individuals. There are lots of ways to get creative in your fundraising, and we've put together some helpful information to help you succeed.

A few guiding principles:

- Depending on the area with where you are working, the more needed in-kind contributions you can secure, the less cash you will need raise.
- People are far more likely to give to a person than they are to a cause. This means that while you may have had trouble raising money for your group in the past, the experience of raising money for a family will likely be different! If you have a photo of your family and permission to use it, this will help to make the cause more real.
- Communicate the urgency. If your family is expected to arrive soon, make this known.
- The more specific you are about how the money raised will be used, the better. (However, do not provide information that will jeopardize client confidentiality.) For example, you might say:
 - * This money will cover the family's rent until they are employed and self-sufficient.
 - * We are helping an Afghan family of six arriving.
- While not every person will want a tax-deductible receipt for their contribution, some will – especially those who are giving larger amounts of money. You can provide this receipt through your local chapter and we can help you to do this. Letting them know of this possibility increases the legitimacy of your efforts and may result in more donations received.

Some means of fundraising:

- **Online:** Online fundraising has become increasingly popular in the last few years and there are many tools that can be used. The most popular are Facebook and GoFundMe. Tips on how to raise funds through GoFundMe can be found [here](#).

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- **Individual, Corporate or Faith Donors:** Businesses, faith groups, schools, and universities may have interest in supporting refugees and asylum-seekers, but may not know how. You can give them the opportunity. The ask is often best made over the phone or in person. Be prepared that they may not offer you funds, but instead will offer in-kind goods or job opportunities for the case. Consider carefully how you will handle these offers. With this model, you may wish to coordinate with your local affiliate as they may be in communication with some of these same groups.
 - **Special Events:** While special events tend to be the most time-consuming and costly forms of fundraising, there are ways to make them manageable:
 1. Consider your target group and what event would appeal most to them.
 2. Make a budget in advance, anticipating what you will spend and what you will raise.
 3. Secure in-kind contributions for supplies rather than purchasing them. For example, say you want to host an evening of coffee and conversation about refugees and asylum-seekers. A great way to further engage your local community is to inquire with coffee shops about donating goods for your event. A great way to say thank you to a business is take a photo at your event and include it a handwritten thank you letter or card!

You're raising money. Now what?

- Keep an accurate record of the donations received with donor name, amount given, and date received. If they have strict restrictions about how the money should be used, note this and be sure to honor it. (If you can't honor it, don't accept the money.)
- Hold the money raised in a secure location. This can be in the GoFundMe account, a chapter bank account (if one exists), a faith group or foundation that has offered to hold it.
- If you're working through another group, make certain to draft an agreement regarding the holding and release of the money. Be sure to thank you donors!
- If the family is comfortable, get them involved! The kids can draw a picture, or they can sign postcards that you provide.
- If the donation helped to provide housing, take a picture of the housing to shared. (Again, be certain not to jeopardize client confidentiality by revealing the location of housing.)
- If you're providing receipts of tax-deductible contributions, be certain to do this in a timely manner.



COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHY DID AIUSA LAUNCH A COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP (CS) PROGRAM?

During this unparalleled attack on the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers, our members, staff, and leadership agree the best we can advocate for refugees and asylum-seekers is by supporting them directly. Community sponsorship is a new project for AIUSA, but part of the existing U.S. response to the global *I Welcome* campaign, a priority campaign since 2016. For the first time, members in the United States will be able to participate in volunteer and community sponsorship activities directly supporting refugees and asylum-seekers.

WHY FOCUS ON CS?

All of us are stronger advocates when we undergo powerful and personal experiences connected to the issues we care about. We also believe this is the most urgent time to advocate for the resettlement infrastructure, and that local voices have greater power when they have participated or have signed up to participate in community sponsorship activities. Right now, people all over the world are coming together to welcome refugees and asylum-seekers – simply because they empathize with people who have lost everything, and want to create open, friendly communities to live in.

WHAT DOES AIUSA MEAN WHEN THEY SAY CS?

Community sponsorship is a written commitment to partner with a local resettlement agency (RA) to provide volunteer services, in-kind contributions, and/or financial support to an arriving or previously arrived refugee, asylee, or asylum-seeking individual or family. Activities may include airport greeting, securing of initial housing, housing setup, transportation to initial appointments, support with English language learning and job applications. Ultimately, community sponsors are guides, advocates and friends.

IS CS A LEGAL COMMITMENT?

No, community sponsorship is a moral commitment and not a legal one. Ultimately, the provision of welcome services is the responsibility of the resettlement agency. At the same time, these institutions are under attack and need your support. Your participation in community sponsorship will help ease the burden for resettlement agencies and strengthen your voice as an advocate for refugees and asylum-seekers.

HOW MUCH DOES CS COST?

The cost of community sponsorship varies by site and can range from \$0 - \$15,000, depending on the family or individual, the cost of housing in your area, and the in-kind contributions you are able to pull together. Don't let the financial commitment put you off – we have a network of supportive staff and existing community sponsors who are available to help you navigate fundraising, and a fund to which you can apply for matching support!

IF CS VARIES BY SITE, WHAT DOES CS IN MY AREA LOOK LIKE?

Information on community sponsorship opportunities in your area can be obtained by emailing refugees@aiusa.org or speaking with your local field organizer.

DO I HAVE TO BE PART OF A GROUP TO SERVE AS A COMMUNITY SPONSOR?

This depends on the requirements of your local resettlement agency. If your local resettlement agency requires that you be part of a group and you don't have a local AIUSA group in your community, you can start an AIUSA group; participate through another established group such as a faith-based center (if you belong to one), which are a common community sponsors; or ask your local resettlement agency if they know of another group to which they can connect you. You can also reach out to refugees@aiusa.org to get support from our staff and to be connected to other advocates interested in community sponsorship in your area.

I'M PART OF A STUDENT GROUP. HOW CAN I BE INVOLVED?

Depending on the requirements of your local resettlement agency, your student group may be able to sponsor a family. You, may, however, need the support of adults outside of your group to address specific needs of the family or individual such as transportation to initial appointments or questions about finances. We can help you to figure out what's possible. Just email us at refugees@aiusa.org or speak with your local field organizer.

WE'VE AGREED TO SERVE AS A COMMUNITY SPONSOR BUT HAVE NOT BEEN ASSIGNED A CASE. WHY IS THERE A DELAY?

Unfortunately, your ability to sponsor a refugee is under attack. Every year, the president and members of his or her staff establish the maximum number of refugees allowed into the U.S. Under the Trump administration, the number of refugees allowed is at the lowest level since the program's inception in 1980. The program is on track to resettle less than half of that number due to new restrictions and bureaucratic red tape. This means that in some communities, there are more individuals interested in community sponsorship than there are arriving refugees. This is where your voice can be most impactful. If you have signed up to participate in community sponsorship but are on a wait list, fight for your ability to sponsor a refugee, asylum-seeker, or asylee by emailing us at refugees@aiusa.org.

OUR AFFILIATE HAS SUGGESTED PAIRING US WITH AN SIV, ASYLUM SEEKER, ASYLEE, OR REFUGEE WHO HAS ALREADY ARRIVED. IS THIS OKAY? HOW ARE THESE POPULATIONS DIFFERENT FROM REFUGEES?

These individuals are also in need of support and your assistance will still send a powerful message of welcome. SIVs or Special Immigrant Visa holders are certain Afghans or Iraqis who provided support to U.S. military forces as interpreters or translators. They are eligible for the same resettlement services as refugees. Asylum-seekers are like refugees in that they fled their home country due to a fear of persecution based on race, religion, national origin, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Unlike refugees, asylum-seekers apply for and receive their status in the U.S. Those who have received status are considered asylees. Asylees are eligible for certain federally-funded services, while asylum-seekers are not.

SHOULD WE AGREE TO BE A COMMUNITY SPONSOR, WHAT KIND OF TRAINING WILL WE RECEIVE?

AIUSA will share a recorded webinar and accompanying materials to groups interested in sponsorship. In addition to this, when AIUSA members volunteer with a local affiliate they will be expected to participate in any trainings required by the affiliate.

HOW CAN WE LEARN ABOUT THE LOCAL RESETTLEMENT AGENCIES AND AFFILIATES IN OUR AREA?

You can learn about your local resettlement agency by writing to refugees@aiusa.org or speaking with your local field organizer.

IN WHAT LOCATIONS WILL THE INITIATIVE BE CARRIED OUT?

Advocacy will be carried out in communities across the U.S., regardless of whether or not there are RAs present. AIUSA volunteerism and community sponsorships will be carried out in more than 50 sites throughout the United States. To learn if volunteerism and community sponsorship is an option in your area, please write to refugees@aiusa.org or speak with your local field organizer.

SHOULD WE HAVE CHALLENGES IN WORKING WITH A RESETTLEMENT AGENCY, WITH WHOM SHOULD WE BE IN CONTACT?

Resettlement agencies, like many institutions working under government contracts, have very strict policies and paperwork. At the same time, due to the attacks on refugees by the Trump administration, they face office closures and budget cuts regularly. This combination means that they may not be able to give you the dedicated service and support you would like.

Refugees also face major challenges coming to the United States for the first time. They will typically live in low-income housing and will experience many of the same hardships as many of those facing poverty in the United States. This is why they need your help – to help them thrive in their communities. Community sponsorship helps you fill the gap where the resettlement agency typically cannot.

As is the case with any agency, if you are unable to resolve an issue, request to speak with the person's supervisor and escalate the issue until it has been addressed. If you need support, email refugees@aiusa.org with the subject "Feedback". Please keep in mind that the RA is a partner and like you, they want what's best for the refugee, asylum-seeker, or asylee.

HOW HAS THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AFFECTED REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS?

As our daily lives are with anxieties, concerns, and new challenges, these feelings of uncertainty may be felt even more intensely by refugees and asylum-seekers who may be adversely impacted by governments' responses to the crisis and face greater risks. Tens of millions are displaced in crowded camps and shelters, without access to adequate health services, testing, and care.

Here in the U.S., the Trump administration closed the southern border in mid-March, effectively banning and abandoning people seeking safety here, and continues to hold many asylum-seekers in the U.S. in detention facilities where they cannot practice physical distancing and where conditions have been well-documented to have substandard medical care, inadequate basic hygiene, and overcrowding.

Further, refugee resettlement globally and here in the U.S. has been temporarily suspended in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving refugee populations in need of a permanent home in continued limbo.

Refugees, asylum-seekers, and asylees who recently arrived in the U.S. before this crisis may not yet have ties to their community to help them navigate these times of uncertainty as they rebuild their lives in new homes.

We all want to live in a world where we look after each other, and everyone is treated with dignity, respect, and fairness. Those seeking safety want the same thing any of us would want if we were in their shoes. Together, we can respond with compassion and respect for people arriving in the U.S. seeking safety.

Your support for refugees and asylum-seekers is more critical than ever, and there are ways you can offer welcome and comfort during this time from your homes virtually. The global reach of COVID-19 shows how we are all connected. It's during crises like this that something new can emerge – we close down demonization and anger and decisively replace it with empathy and kindness through virtual community sponsorship and other actions of welcome and support. People may need to be physically distant at the moment, but we are united. Together, we will get through this.

IS IT POSSIBLE TO DO A COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP DURING COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS?

Absolutely! While we all practice physical distancing to protect ourselves, our loved ones, neighbors, and communities, **there are ways that you can engage in community sponsorship activities, even virtually!**

This is also a perfect time to engage in the usual pre-sponsorship preparations such as assembling a core group of volunteers, fundraising for sponsorship where needed, and using the resources from this toolkit to prepare yourself in advance of being matched with an individual or family.

For groups under the age of 18, sponsorship is possible but may require the involvement of adults for more creativity in the type of activities in which you can participate due to requirements around age and legal liability. The most likely option for younger students may be supporting another sponsoring group and working together to address the specific needs of the family or individual on phone and video calls, such as helping with English language studies and school lessons, answering questions about their new community (where the market or hospital is, how public services work, etc.), just to name a few of the questions people living in a new country with new systems and responsibilities might have. Groups may also provide support for newcomers as pen pals or by organizing online supply drives.

CONTACT

FOR ANY QUESTIONS, PLEASE REACH OUT
TO OUR TEAM AT REFUGEES@AIUSA.ORG.

