



Expanding Perspectives on Refugee Integration Recommendations for Philanthropic Response June 20, 2016

Overview

Refugees are a critical part of immigrant integration efforts and supporting the long-term vitality and well-being of our communities. While there is a [national resettlement system](#) in place that supports refugees when they arrive to the U.S. with the goal of [improving integration outcomes](#), there is still a critical need to strengthen efforts and build capacity and resources that support the long-term integration of refugee families. There are many innovative local opportunities for funders to be inclusive of refugees in key grantmaking priorities—ranging from health and education to advocacy and policy to civic engagement and research.

Funding Opportunities for U.S. Funders

Understand Newcomer Communities

Having a solid understanding of refugee trends in your community is critical to developing an effective funding strategy in any issue area. There are a number of key resources to help understand the demographics of the refugees in your community and additional contact information to deepen an understanding of refugees.

- The U.S. resettles thousands of refugees every year who [undergo screenings](#) prior to their admission to the U.S.
- The U.S. Department of State provides [an interactive report request](#) system about [where refugees are being resettled in the United States](#), broken down by city and state.
- The Office of Refugee Resettlement has an online tool which collects [resources and contacts by state](#) for resettlement agencies and other organizations providing support to refugees in your community.
- The Office of Refugee Resettlement provides information about [refugee resettlement programs funded across the U.S.](#), such as the Refugee Agricultural Partnership Program, the Ethnic Community Self-Help Program, Microenterprise Development Program, and the Refugee School Impact Program.

- There is great [ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity](#), even amongst refugees from the same country of origin.
- In addition to understanding the demographics, it is also critical to learn about refugee communities in more depth, especially their lived experiences, through listening sessions and community convenings, particularly mindful of women and girls and LGBT experiences.

Recommendations for Funders: Meet Basic Needs, Protect Fundamental Rights

Improving English Proficiency

- Refugees come from diverse backgrounds, with different educational backgrounds and language proficiencies that [can create challenges for local communities](#), particularly for health and service providers to be able to communicate effectively. Philanthropy can support programs to increase language access, English proficiency, and educational supports and opportunities designed with the particular needs of refugee families in mind. These include quality early-learning programs; programs for dual language learners; and vocational English programs. Understanding the particular needs of certain communities that [have more limited English proficiency over time](#), such as the Burmese, Cuban, and Vietnamese refugee communities, can improve these efforts.

Responding to Xenophobia and Hostile Environments

- To mitigate the impact of heightened enforcement and xenophobic sentiment, support efforts to educate the broader society about immigrant and refugee contributions; address misinformation and misperceptions; and put in place local and state policies that support long-term immigrant and refugee integration.
- Support efforts to monitor and document enforcement and detention practices in local communities; bolster efforts that highlight how local law enforcement is collaborating with federal immigration authorities; ensure fair and humane treatment of immigrants and refugees throughout the enforcement process; and scale up support for mental health counseling, support services, and advocacy to ensure that school, social service, and child welfare systems can meet the needs of children and families affected by enforcement in local communities.

Evaluate opportunities to address cross-sector gender and racial equity challenges through collaborative grantmaking or cross-sector approaches

- Within our communities, there are programs that are addressing gender-specific or racial equity challenges. Funders are increasingly involved in grantmaking with this framework in mind and working collaboratively in [cross-sector approaches](#). Refugees

are often beneficiaries of these programs which empower refugees and improve relationships across communities.

Recommendations for Funders: Strengthen Economic Integration

Enhancing Educational Achievement

- Underwrite efforts to increase awareness among refugee parents and students in refugee families about higher-education opportunities and options, the admissions process, and the resources and assistance available to help facilitate college access and success.
- Support training of high-school counselors, college financial-aid officers, educators, and administrators on the challenges facing students from refugee families, and resources available to assist them.
- Fund programs that promote college success for students from refugee families, particularly those in low-income households. These include scholarship and loan funds, especially for refugee youth who may be ineligible; programs that create a welcoming campus environment and provide social support; and mentorship and other academic support efforts.
- Support programs that take into account the specific characteristics of the children of refugee families to improve outcomes for children at heightened risk of foregoing higher-education opportunities, particularly communities facing higher levels of ethnic discrimination and language proficiency challenges.

Improving Employment Outcomes

- Programs that improve English language and vocational skills are essential to helping refugees improve their employment outcomes. The Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA) offers eligible newcomers access to federally funded workforce development programs, as well as adult education and English literacy, but advocacy will be needed to ensure that refugees not only have access but that programs are designed to meet their specific needs.
- High-skill refugee workers need assistance to gain accreditation for their foreign credentials, secure relevant work experience, and obtain further education to facilitate integration into the U.S. job market.
- Outreach, education, and organizing efforts can empower low-wage refugee and immigrant workers and partner with their U.S.-born counterparts to improve working conditions, fight against wage theft, and enhance earnings and benefits for all low-wage workers.

Integration into the Financial Mainstream

- Funders can support financial education and literacy programs to increase newcomers' knowledge and understanding of mainstream financial services; efforts to create and

expand access to affordable financial products and services that immigrants and refugees need, including low-cost loans for naturalization application fees; and programs that help immigrants save for homeownership and build wealth.

Recommendations for Funders: Enhance Civic Participation

Promoting Citizenship

- Foundations can support outreach and education to help refugees understand the benefits of citizenship; English and civics classes to help prepare for the citizenship exam; legal services and other assistance to navigate the complex application process; and financial assistance to defray the application and documentation fees. In many locations across the country, funders have formed [regional citizenship funding collaboratives](#) that provide valuable lessons, best practices, and models that can be adapted for other regions.

Improving Civic Engagement

- The broader civic participation arena is rich with funding opportunities. To cite a few examples, foundations can support parent leadership development programs; youth organizing to combat gang violence and ethnic and racial profiling; and efforts to educate and mobilize newcomers on a range of policy issues affecting their communities from affordable housing to public transportation. Initiatives that engage refugees, immigrants, and U.S.-born residents have the added benefit of increasing the cohesiveness of communities.

Recommendations for Funders: Programming Needs and Evaluation

- ORR-funded programs are discretionary **three-year limited programs** that are subject to competitive re-bidding and some excellent programs may not be able to obtain re-funding after three years. This means there are likely organizations in communities who face sustainability challenges despite being good programs for refugees and could possibly serve as models for programming in other parts of the country.
- There are smaller ethnic communities programs that are led by refugees across the country, which **are in need of capacity building** in development, grantwriting, and creating sustainable programs.
- There are also organizations and **programs outside of the ORR-funded system, which are inclusive of refugees** in their services and programming, and these vary from community to community. Understanding these programs may require outreach to refugee communities to understand where and how they are involved with community-based initiatives or creating spaces for collaborative dialogue at the local level with

other foundations to understand how and whether their grantees are inclusive of refugees in their programs.

- There is also a need to conduct **research on integration outcomes for refugees** to better understand the impact of the ORR programs and whether refugees pursue additional support through other organizations in their communities.

DRAFT