

# Project Welcome Guide

## Public Libraries Serving Refugees



Public libraries in the United States (US) offer welcoming spaces and services to their communities, including the newest members of society, especially refugees and asylum seekers. Project Welcome, a partnership between the Mortenson Center for International Library Programs at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the American Library Association (ALA), assists libraries with addressing the information needs of refugees and asylum seekers in their resettlement and integration process.

### About this Guide

With the support of a planning grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), this the Project Welcome Guide was created to help libraries provide programs and services for refugees and asylum seekers living in their communities. The guide was developed from the ideas, knowledge, and experiences from librarians, refugees, and refugee resettlement workers nationally and internationally.

The Project Welcome Guide presents an integrated service-approach that engages refugees and non-refugees and promotes multilingual, inclusive, and engaging services. It is made up of four actions:

- **Learn** – Know your target audience, their needs and interests, the public library's current response to them, and best practices.

- **Collaborate** – Partner with community leaders and members, organizations, and government agencies for collective impact to enhance your potential to meet refugee needs.
- **Connect** – Build community connections to create awareness of refugees, and foster inter/intra/cross-cultural and intergenerational relationships.
- **Support** – Provide resources and services to support refugee communities, individually and collectively, to have the agency to flourish in the process of resettlement, integration, and lifelong learning.

### Refugees in Our Community

#### ► WHO

"A refugee is defined by the US Immigration and Nationality Act as any person outside his or her country who has a 'well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.'"<sup>1</sup> Displaced persons hoping to resettle in the US as refugees can be referred by the office of the United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) UN Refugee Agency or petition directly outside or inside the US. Refugees come to the US out of necessity, escaping oppression and persecution.

The term "refugee" is used to refer to a person who has officially received the aforementioned classification. An asylum seeker (or asylee) refers to a displaced person who has applied for asylum/refugee status from within the US and is under review. For reasons of policy, process, and scope, there is a distinction between the two terms, but for the purpose of this Guide, the term "refugee" will be used for both groups.



Photo: Denver Public Library

## ► WHEN

Historically, the US has welcomed refugees since before World War II. One of the earliest legislative responses to refugees in the US was the admittance of 400,000 displaced Europeans after establishing the Displaced Persons Act of 1948.<sup>2</sup> Later laws were created to admit persons fleeing Communist regimes, such as those in Hungary, Poland, Yugoslavia, Korea, China and Cuba. Since 1975, the US has welcomed over 3 million refugees,<sup>3</sup> approximately half originating from Asia.

Each year, the US federal government sets a ceiling for the number of refugees admitted into the country. The admissions ceiling set for fiscal year 2018 is 45,000 refugees.<sup>4</sup>

## ► WHERE

The US government resettles refugees in almost every state. The states that have resettled the most refugees include California, Texas, Michigan, Washington, and New York.<sup>5</sup> To learn more about refugees in your area, contact your local state refugee coordinator: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/resource/orr-funded-programs-key-contacts> or the national resettlement agencies: <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/us-resettlement-agencies.html>.

## ► WHY

Refugees resettling in the United States rebuild their lives and contribute to their new community's growth and development. They are a community asset, enriching the social, cultural and economic fabric of society. For example, in a refugee report on Franklin County, Ohio, it was discovered that the workforce participation rate is 81.8%; the national participation rate is 62%.<sup>6</sup> Social service and ethnic community-based organizations (ECBOs) form part of a refugee's support system in their resettlement and integration into their local communities.

## Libraries Serving Refugees

Libraries support the successful resettlement and integration of refugees into the community with information and services. Libraries serve both the universal and unique needs of their communities by offering tailored services, resources and lifelong learning opportunities.

The American Library Association (ALA) Policy (2006-2007 CD#20.2) recognizes America's immigrants as strong and valuable members of the social fabric of this nation, and the ALA Bill of

Rights states that a person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background or views. Libraries' inclusivity endeavor to transform refugee lives.

## Scope of Project Welcome Guide

While there are public libraries provide a broad range of service to refugees, many are still looking for guidance to better support their resettlement and integration process. The Project Welcome Guide was created to answer this need. It is a concise, professional guide for public libraries and stakeholders to welcome and effectively serve refugees. This guide and additional resources are available at the Project Welcome website: <https://publish.illinois.edu/projectwelcome>. Through this process, librarians are learning from each other's best practices. Other libraries may find the Guide useful and adapt it to their local situation. Libraries, collaborating with refugee resettlement agencies, ethnic library associations and refugee community members, can better serve and understand refugee needs.

An inclusive and sustainable approach is the cornerstone of the Project Welcome Guide. The needs of refugees may be met by general library services or services to newcomers and immigrants. Specific services that are sensitive and focused on refugee needs should be provided in collaboration with experienced and knowledgeable experts and institutions, such as programs on overcoming trauma. Sustainable library services for refugees require committed administrative leadership, consideration in mission development and strategic planning, inclusive policies and procedures, reliable funding, trained personnel, community engagement and input, strong partnerships, and a welcoming library culture.

Any library can be welcoming for refugees! This guide is not meant to measure libraries' progress toward becoming welcoming; rather, it is meant to encourage all libraries to recognize their potential as a community anchor that welcomes and continuously serves refugees. Libraries will need to develop their own set of measurement tools to gauge their success in attaining their goals and objectives. This guide can be adapted to the needs and budgets of every library. Whether it is adding or changing characteristics of the existing physical environment, policy, procedures or services based on the recommendations within this guide, it is our hope that this will keep refugees coming back to the library.

## Endnotes

1. "Immigration," National Conference of State Legislatures, <http://www.ncsl.org/research/immigration/the-u-s-refugee-resettlement-program-a-primer-forpolicymakers.aspx#2>.
2. "History of the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program," Refugee Council USA, <http://www.rcusa.org/history/>.
- 3, 5. "Refugee Resettlement Facts," UNHCR, 2015, <http://www.unhcr.org/us-refugee-resettlement-facts.html>.
4. "Refugee Admissions Report December 31, 2017," US Department of State, <http://www.wrapsnet.org/admissions-and-arrivals/>.
6. "Impact of Refugees on Central Ohio," US Together, Community Refugee & Immigration Services, World Relief Columbus, and the City of Columbus, 2015, [http://ustogether.us/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/IMPACT-OF-REFUGEES-ON-CENTRAL-OHIO\\_2015SP.pdf](http://ustogether.us/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/IMPACT-OF-REFUGEES-ON-CENTRAL-OHIO_2015SP.pdf).





# Framework for Libraries Serving Refugees



## Learn

Know your target audience. <b>Who are they?</b>	What can you do?	Who/what can help?	What is the impact?
National refugee arrival trends	Data, infographic, and/or asset map searches	Refugee Processing Center; national refugee resettlement agencies; US government agencies; state refugee coordinator; UNHCR	Library staff, trustees, volunteers and stakeholders enhance knowledge of refugees, their needs and interests, and are informed of the library's current response to them, and best practices in order to develop relevant and appropriate services.
Local refugee arrival trends	Data, infographic, and/or asset map searches	Local refugee resettlement agencies; Refugee Processing Center; state refugee coordinator	Understanding of extent and conditions of local refugee resettlement; awareness of how community is changing, anticipation of service needs
Refugee histories and cultures	consultation with refugee; individuals working with refugees; experts; information resources	Refugees; social scientists; refugee community organizations; published resources	Understanding of background of a sector of library community, discovery of information needs
Adjustment phases and integration needs	Consultation with refugee; individuals working with refugees; expert; information resources; information needs study	International Rescue Committee; refugees; social workers; psychologists; refugee community organizations; published resources	Increasing empathy of a sector of library community; better prepared to serve; understanding of emotional, psychological, and social well-being of a sector of library community; understanding refugee information needs
Capacity building	Training; best practices lists; self-directed learning; refugee services audit	Refugee experts and resettlement specialists; Project Welcome	Better informed and trained about refugees, and their experiences and needs; Better informed about current library approaches to refugees

## Collaborate

Partner for collective impact. <b>Who can we work with?</b>	What can you do?	Who/what can help?	What is the impact?
Local resettlement agencies	Refugee resettlement guide; programs and services	Refugee Processing Center; national refugee resettlement agencies; US government agencies; state refugee coordinator	Libraries partner with community leaders and memberWs, organizations, and government agencies to leverage knowledge and resources for the collective impact on refugee needs.
Direct service providers	Contact/referral list; partner activities hosted at the library	Educational institutions; health organizations; social services; local non-profits	Enhancing community outreach and direct partnerships for the collective impact on refugee settlement and integration; library serves as an essential resource for refugees
Non-direct service providers	Local refugee service community meetings; tip sheet of examples	museums; faith-based organizations, local non-profits; community engagement librarian/contact person	Increasing access to essential services; new partnerships with established community organizations; new programming/service opportunities
Ethnic Community-Based Organizations (ECBOs)	Explanation sheet/guide; collaborative working group	Local resettlement agency; local non-profits; community engagement librarian/contact person	New partnerships with established community organizations; new programming/service opportunities
			Promotion of refugee integration into community, create new programming/service opportunities



# Framework for Libraries Serving Refugees



## Connect

Build community connections. <b>How do we get to know them and each other?</b>	What can you do?	Who/what can help?	What is the impact?
Awareness about refugees within community	UNHCR poster; refugee cultural heritage materials; collections on refugees; materials in refugee languages; multicultural celebrations calendar	UNHCR; local resettlement agencies; ECBOs	Sensitizing and educating the community about refugees and their issues
Dialogue with and about refugees and experiences	Book discussions; English conversation circles; Socratic conversations	Local government officials; local resettlement agencies; ECBOs	Person-to-person understanding and relationship building; cross-cultural communication and understanding
Preservation and promotion of refugee cultural heritage and contributions	Panels; book discussions; off-site events; oral history and digital archiving; exhibits; community asset map; cultural celebrations	Refugee community; ECBOs; archives; museums; experts	Preserving refugee stories and integrating their narrative into community history; Celebrating refugee culture
Solidarity with refugees	World Refugee Day; UNHCR poster; exhibits; film presentations; forums; refugee community events	UNHCR; local resettlement agencies; ECBOs; Refugees; legal services	Understanding the refugee experience and refugee crises; Affirming refugees as integral to community

## Support

Contribute to successful resettlement and integration. <b>What can we provide them?</b>	What can you do?	Who/what can help?	What is the impact?
Cultural services (e.g., programs, resources, etc.)	Book clubs; movie nights; human library; off-site events; digital resources and programs	Local resettlement agencies; ECBOs; best practices; community engagement librarian/contact person	Refugees, individually and collectively, have the information resources and services to flourish in the process of resettlement and integration, and lifelong learning.
Multilingual services	Interlibrary loan; first language access; digital newspapers	EMIERT; ethnic LIS associations; ECBOs; embassies; specialty bookstores	Enhancing cultural respect, knowledge and inclusion; Strengthening multicultural identity of refugees
National language(s) learning services (e.g., English for United States)	Collection development policy; conversation circles; tutoring programs; intergenerational programs; digital resources and programming	Local educational institutions;; language learning services	Preserving heritage language; Learning new language
Needs and interest-driven refugee services	Refugee services and resources database; job skills; life skills; mentorship; pop culture; safe spaces; print and digital literacy; refugee artists' collective	Local educational institutions;; language learning services	Enhancing new language fluency; Community integration Individual empowerment and confidence
Library membership	Off-site campaign; PTO visits; community festivals; national library card sign-up month; reading clubs	All community and select groups; refugee resettlement agencies; non-profit organizations	Enhancing practical and soft skills; Individual and family support and wellness; Complementary refugee supports
Community space	Co-sponsored events; meeting space; tours; public service orientations; tailored book displays	Educational institutions; social services; refugee resettlement agencies; faith-based organizations	Lifelong learning; New opportunities Resource access
Civics	Citizenship resources and classes; citizen corner; practice citizenship tests online;	Community leaders; community centers; ECBOs	Increasing social capital; Building community relationships; "Third place" creation
Legal Information resources	Citizenship resources and classes; citizen corner; practice citizenship tests online;	US Citizenship & Immigration Services; Refugee Center Online; local nonprofit citizenship organizations	Civic engagement
Legal Information resources	Know Your Rights resources; access to legal resources; Department of Justice (DOJ) accreditation of non-attorney representation on legal immigration matters	DOJ accredited organizations; immigrant and refugee rights organizations	Reduction of legal vulnerability; Informed of legal processes