



Steps to Becoming a Community Co-Sponsor Host Group and a Sample Timeline provided by our partner, Neighbors for Refugees

To improve refugee lives, WJCI looks to form *Community Sponsorship or "Host Groups," and guide them through the organizing process, which includes the creation of specific committees designed to acclimate newly arrived refugees to their new home and community and fundraising to support these efforts .

The welcoming Host Groups will receive training through a resettlement agency including HIAS (formerly known as Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society) or IRIS (Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services), to learn how to put new arrivals on the road to self-sufficiency. WJCI provides microgrants in amounts up to \$5,000 to Host Groups that qualify for these matching funds. That application can be found [here](#).

*Community Sponsorship: The pairing of refugees with groups or individuals (i.e. synagogues, churches, mosques) who commit to providing clearly defined financial and/or in-kind contributions and volunteer services to support refugee welcome and integration (Defined in the FY 2022 R&P Notice of Funding Opportunity).

Phase One - Formation Phase

1. Organize a Community *Co-Sponsorship Host Group:

Identify leaders with commitment, compassion, availability and expertise.

Look for commitment, compassion, availability, and expertise in your leadership.

Prior to arrival, conduct an inventory of job possibilities from among your group and the wider community. The skills of refugees vary widely from farming to electrical engineering and will come in handy.

You will need 10-12 volunteers to serve as the core resettlement team, or your executive committee. Each one of these volunteers should head up a committee.

TWO group leaders are recommended. Committee chairs will communicate regularly with the team's group leader(s). A sample Resettlement Team Structure can be found [here](#).

Have 1-2 lead volunteers from each congregation/organization.

Initial three months: 5-8 committed volunteers must be ready to commit at least 5-8 hours a week.

Ensure that all volunteers are vaccinated in order to meet with family members..

Bring together and mobilize the team to carry out their responsibilities.

2. Identify and designate a fiduciary to hold and disburse co-sponsorship funds.

If you are a 501(c)(3) tax exempt organization, skip ahead to item 3.

- *If you are not*, then you must designate a fiscal sponsor with 501(c)(3) status to hold your Host Group's funds. Most congregations can serve as a fiscal sponsor for a Host Group. Such an arrangement is best served with a legal fiscal sponsorship agreement.
- When using a fiscal sponsor you must advise financial contributors to make checks payable to the fiscal sponsor duly noting that this contribution is for your Host Group.
- In either case, checks should NOT be made payable to the resettlement agency (such as HIAS or IRIS) since these funds are used for direct support of the refugee family (e.g., your Host Group provides rental assistance by making a check out directly to the landlord of the refugee family).

3. Fundraising

Fundraise to secure enough money, as advised by resettlement agencies. In southern and central Westchester, the best *annual* estimates at this time are \$30,000-\$35,000 for a family of four and \$20,000-\$25,000 for an individual for annual living expenses. Resettlement costs are approximately \$5,000 less in Northern Westchester and Rockland County.

The total amount of money can be raised throughout the year, but you must be confident that you will be able to raise the necessary amount to cover rent and other expenses that may arise outside of the benefits a family receives.

To apply to HIAS, please visit hias.org/nyc and click "Congregation and Interfaith Group Volunteer Opportunities" to view the application materials and the HOME program manual.

To apply to IRIS, head to their Co-Sponsorship Group page:

<https://irisct.org/communitycosponsorship>.

4. Attend co-sponsorship training through the resettlement agency. WJCI can help you with this information.

Complete the resettlement agency's training program.

Complete background checks for all volunteers as advised by your resettlement agency.

5. Look for safe, affordable housing (Housing Committee)

Identify a lease co-signer and provider of volunteer insurance.

Landlords require a co-signer for tenants without credit. Typically, refugees are listed as occupants, and whomever signs the lease is the tenant (this would be someone in the Host Group).

Recommendations on Location: Refugees tend to fare best in communities where they have access to public transportation, employment opportunities, ESOL resources, and affordable housing.

If these options are not available in your town, we urge you to identify a nearby location with the following features:

- Accessibility to public transportation.
- An area with adult ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes.
- A school district that provides support resources for English language learners.
- Availability to entry-level jobs that do not require a high level of English: e.g., service work, cleaning, factory work, etc.
- Proximity to an affordable grocery store that accepts food stamps.
- Proximity to a hospital or health clinic that takes Medicaid and provides interpreters.
- Availability of clean, safe, affordable apartments.
- Sign the lease, arrange for utilities to be turned on
- Housing Committee will furnish the house. Committee finds furniture through NextDoor, Craig's List, Furniture Sharehouse, personal networks and other local resources.
- Team of people to pick up donated furniture on designated day(s)

6. Initially, hold group meetings weekly (at least) to update, trouble-shoot, encourage, and plan next steps.

Phase Two - Greenlight & Family Placement Phase (Your group has been approved after meeting all requirements by a Resettlement Agency such as HIAS or IRIS.) It is time to:

- Make final preparations.
- Wait for the Resettlement Agency to contact you regarding a family placement (48 hours or 2+ months!)
- We strongly advise you not to sign a lease until you know when your family is set to arrive. (Temporary housing like an airbnb may work for the first couple of weeks.)

Phase Three - Family Resettlement Phase

(Sample Timeline provided by our partner, [Neighbors for Refugees](#))

Week One

- The **Group Leader(s)** and **Budget Team** meet the family to go over the financial plan and talk through the volunteer services your group can provide.
- The **Group Leader(s)** determines whether all family members have sufficient clothing for the season. If not, someone from the Transportation Team will need to take the family shopping at a thrift store or retail store.

- **Community Connections Team** orients the family to the neighborhood, to public transportation, to the grocery stores and the laundromat. If the family requests it, help set up an internet or cable account.
- **The resettlement agency or trained group members** enroll families for SNAP and Medicaid.
- **Group Leader(s)** checks in daily to answer questions, alert team leaders to any possible needs.

Week Two and Forward

- **Education Team Leaders**
 - Meet with family to begin the school registration process for the children and determine appropriate ESOL study for the adults.
 - Maintain contact with school counselors re potential adjustment issues
 - Arrange for tutoring and/or homework help as needed and requested by family.
- **Employment Team Leaders**
 - Meet with wage earner (s) to explore career interests, prior experience, education and training.
 - Based on the information gathered, the Employment Team begins job search while
 - Team volunteer(s) meet weekly with the family to help the wage earner develop a current resume, prepare for job interviews, and attend interviews until a job is secured.
 - The Employment Team is an important commitment and its work can last for 2-3 months. Members should understand this at the outset. This is a crucial role in successful resettlement.
- **The Medical Team** helps families register at a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC), and asks the Transportation Team to provide drivers for appointments as necessary.
- **The Transportation Team Leader** coordinates rides for families as requested.
- **The Group Leader** continues to check in frequently for the first few months.

One of the most important, ongoing roles of the Group Leader(s) is to help **manage expectations**, both of the family and of group members. You may sometimes need to explain things many times in different ways over a period of weeks. People process information differently and resettlement is a new experience for most. Most groups are fortunate to have numerous volunteers. It is important to set volunteer expectations as well. During the first several weeks it is best to limit the amount of people that are interacting and contacting the

family. It is overwhelming to arrive in a new country, move to a new home and be immersed in a new culture. In addition, many have left family behind.

In discussion with the family, **never assume. Ask, clarify, restate.** Ask them to tell you what they understand from the discussion. Expectations about financial arrangements can be difficult to discuss, but it is crucial to avoid misunderstandings.

Helpful tips for the first few months:

- Continue to meet frequently with the group and talk about rewards and challenges.
- **Be aware of the power imbalance** and look for opportunities to even it out.
- **Check your assumptions** about what people want or need.
- **Check your impulses** to “save” or “rescue” or “fix.”
- **Practice acceptance and non-judgement** – their family, their lives, their choices.
- **Assess frequently** whether the group is allowing an unhealthy dependency to develop. Correct as needed.

Ready to improve the lives of new refugee arrivals? Email info@wjci.org for more information on getting started.