

Creating Welcoming Communities: Federal Housing Agencies and Refugee Success

ENHANCING WELCOME WITH LOCAL COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS

The tradition of welcoming refugees and newcomers has long been a cornerstone commitment of the United States, whether through providing safety from religious persecution in America's earlier years or the official U.S. Refugee Admissions Program following the 1951 Refugee Convention and Refugee Act of 1980.

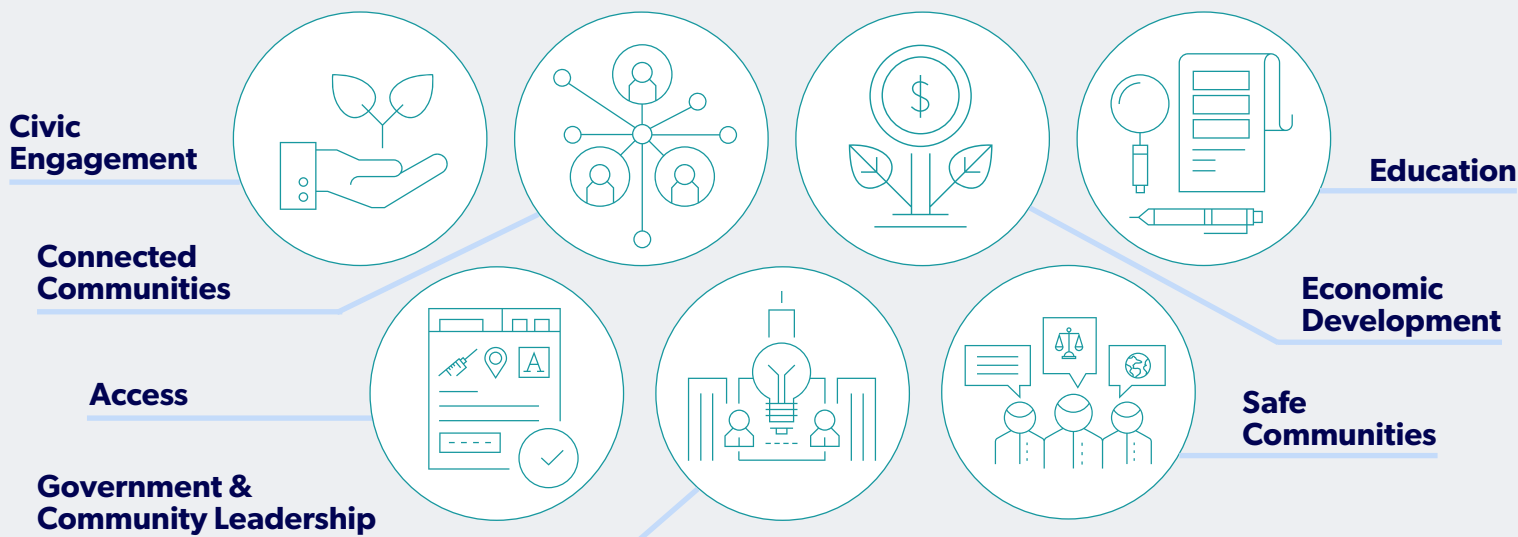
To continue exploring the United States' long history of welcome, this resource is multifaceted in its approach and will go into depth in three specific areas and how they are interrelated. These include 1) the concept of a welcoming community, 2) the importance of housing as a core pillar in all communities, and 3) how federal housing agencies are key stakeholders in both housing and creating holistic and welcoming communities which ultimately create a thriving nation for all.

Key Components of Welcoming Communities

The concept of a "welcoming community" for refugees and newcomers, including ORR-eligible populations, has progressed and evolved as the U.S. has continued to see the benefits that these populations bring to local communities.

Welcoming America, a nonprofit organization, leads a movement of communities to become more prosperous by ensuring everyone belongs. They do this through creating a comprehensive "Welcoming" roadmap, which identifies a "Welcoming Standard [that] sets criteria or benchmarks, that local governments, community organizations, residents, and others can use to hold welcoming places accountable and spur innovation."

THE WELCOMING STANDARD



Original graphics created by Welcoming America

Federal housing agencies and stakeholders are key actors in ensuring welcome at the federal, state, and local levels, just as they are for ensuring all residents in the U.S. can live in safe, dignified housing. In looking at the “Welcoming Standard,” federal agencies are key partners in fostering supportive environments for refugees at the local level, specifically when it comes to:

- **Access**

- Fair Housing programs, housing assistance programs for LMI (low-to-moderate income) households, veterans, people with disabilities, and other eligible individuals

- **Government and Community Leadership**

- Grant and funding allocation to state and local communities via Communities of Care (CoCs) and Local/State Public Housing Authorities
- National housing standards inherently influence local housing codes

“Refugees and asylees contributed an estimated **\$581 billion** in revenue to federal, state and local governments. They contributed an estimated **\$363 billion** to the federal government through payroll, income, and excise taxes, and **\$218 billion** to state and local governments, through income, sales, and property taxes.”

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
AND HUMAN SERVICES

- **Safe Communities**

- Attaining housing and shelter directly affects the safety of communities. In some communities, federal housing funding is one of the only resources available to invest in, maintain, and improve affordable housing as well as support traditional and transitional shelters.
- Housing is a social determinant of health and thus housing standards and the ability of residents to attain housing is key to maintaining safe communities.
 - » According to [Healthy People 2030’s social determinates of health](#), the quality of housing, including design, safety features, maintenance, and age of housing, all play part in ensuring residents live healthy lives (both physically and mentally). Federal housing laws, codes, and regulations, as well as recommendations, have a direct correlation to both quantity and quality of housing built and maintained in local communities.

Federal Housing Programs Supporting Welcoming Communities

Federal housing programs are critical components to creating a welcoming community for refugees and newcomers in their journey towards self-sufficiency and successful integration. Continued eligibility in these housing programs is imperative to ensure refugees and other newcomers can continue thriving and benefiting local communities. A few practical ways federal housing agencies and stakeholders enhance welcome through housing stability for newcomers may include but are not limited to:

- **Partnerships with local/state governments and nonprofits.**

- Strengthening federal and local partnerships to support refugee success.
- Community-based housing programs that include resident refugees and their families.
- Leveraging local nonprofits to provide wrap-around services (e.g., legal assistance, mental health services).

- **Grants and funding for local governments and nonprofits** supporting engagement of refugees in housing priorities, projects and programs.

- **Special programs** aimed at promoting neighborhood integration.

- **Ensure staff who facilitate federal housing programs are trained on the background of ORR-eligible populations to assist with community integration.**

Case Studies of Successful Community Integration

There are several successful case studies in which we see ORR-eligible population-serving organizations and federal housing agencies partnering together to support a holistic approach to community integration. A few case studies are explored below.

HUD HOUSING COUNSELING AGENCIES

One of the keys to supporting a community of welcome and belonging is ensuring new residents, refugees, and other ORR-eligible populations understand how to best attain and maintain affordable housing. By working in partnership with ORR-eligible population-serving organizations, the HUD Office of Housing Counseling may be able to better serve eligible residents of the program.

A recent example and case study of a successful partnership is organizations like Isuroon in Minneapolis, Minnesota who also operate as Local Housing Counseling Agencies (LHCA), offering housing counseling on a variety of topics, such as rental counseling, pre-purchase counseling and homebuyer education, financial, budgeting, and credit workshops, predatory lending workshops, and Fair Housing workshops. Due to its reputation and holistic work with refugees and other newcomers, Isuroon is an approachable organization with multilingual staff experienced in working with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. These qualifications make it a safe, welcoming place for newcomers who may be hesitant to approach another agency.

HARRIS COUNTY HOUSING STABILIZATION PROGRAM

In April 2025, the Harris County Housing Stabilization Program worked with the Houston resettlement agencies in partnership with relevant community stakeholders to reallocate COVID funding and were able to enroll about 100 newly arrived refugee families that had arrived between October 2024 and April 2025. The program paid three months of rent for the families, which enabled struggling families to avoid eviction or excessive late fees. Supporting a family with even one month of rent can ensure they do not fall behind and can continue an upward trajectory toward self-sufficiency.

TXOR AND CHEROKEE AFGHAN ALLIES PROGRAM

The Texas Office for Refugees (TXOR) launched a program in partnership with Cherokee Federal to support eligible Afghan allies and their families to access housing support and rental assistance. Newcomers were invited to attend enrollment fairs in Houston to receive support from financial experts and peer support specialists from the community to help build long-term success. In partnership with the state of Texas and the state designee, Cherokee helped to provide three months of rent to eligible Afghans and Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders. Similar “Afghan Support Centers” were also set up across the country with support of Cherokee Federal and USCIS.

MICHIGAN NEWCOMER RENTAL SUBSIDY PROGRAM

The Newcomer Rental Subsidy program provides newcomer households with rental assistance up to \$500 per month for up to 12 months, with eligibility based on immigration status and household income. This program is part of the Office of Global Michigan, whose mission is to make Michigan welcoming and inclusive, in partnership with Michigan State Housing Development Authority. These two state entities worked together to develop this programming through federal grants from the U.S. Department of Treasury and the Office of Refugee Resettlement. While not currently accepting new applications, this innovative program has been used as an example for other states seeking to increase access to better and more affordable housing opportunities while supporting a more rapid social integration for refugees and other newcomer populations.

Overcoming Barriers to Creating Welcoming Communities

Refugees and other newcomers, including ORR-eligible populations, often face heightened barriers to housing in addition to those already present for low-to-moderate income (LMI) households – especially amid the affordability challenges across the U.S.

Providing landlords with supplemental resources they may need to avoid any unintentional housing discrimination and/or misunderstandings about their tenants can reduce barriers and improve welcoming communities. A helpful supplemental resource could be this [Fact Sheet & FAQ on Renting to Refugees and Other Eligible Newcomers](#).

Outreach and education on available housing programs and resources that refugees and ORR-eligible populations may be eligible for could also prove valuable.

Often, refugees and other eligible newcomers are unaware of housing programs due to their newness to the country. Federal housing agencies and stakeholders can partner with local governments and nonprofits to fund programs to ensure these populations are aware of their eligibility for federal, state, and local housing programs and assistance.

Partnership and engagement with local communities to support refugee integration can further improve mutual understanding between the community supports systems and how both may contribute to thriving U.S. communities. If federal housing agencies work alongside state and local governments, faith groups, and organizations to not only educate the local community on the benefits of new neighbors but also dispel misinformation and generalizations about refugee and newcomer populations, they can improve successful integration. For example, ensuring that local HUD certified housing counselors and other staff facilitating HUD programs are equipped with the [specific skills to work with individuals new to the U.S. housing system](#) ensures programming is welcoming and accessible to all eligible participants.

Community members can be involved in helping newcomers overcome barriers to housing in several ways, including:

Financial Support

Community members may choose to financially support a new arrival by paying an upfront rent contribution for a transition period or to cover a deposit. The CWS affiliate office in Chicago, **RefugeeOne**, requires raising \$6,000-\$10,000 to help with initial housing costs as a new arrival works towards financial stability.

Co-signing on Leases

Having a co-signer allows newcomers to access housing options that have high barriers to entry such as credit requirements. A community member supporting newcomer populations through co-signing a lease can help provide affirmation to a housing agency and ease the rental process.

Referrals

Community members can use their network to locate housing options and resources that newcomers may not know how to access on their own. They can also support by writing referrals for housing applications for newcomers to help the housing approval and application process.

Community members can also help educate their communities on Fair Housing practices that benefit not only newcomers but also anyone who needs housing assistance by drawing awareness to existing housing policies and areas where change could be beneficial at the local, state, and federal levels of government.

Conclusion

Creating welcoming communities for both native-born U.S. individuals and newcomers is an essential component of a successful and thriving environment. Affordable and attainable stable housing is a core pillar as we approach economic stability, well-being, and self-sufficiency. The role which federal housing agencies and community members play alongside ORR-eligible population-serving organizations is a pivotal intersection of key engagement and partnership.

Bringing these myriad housing stakeholders together to participate in the welcoming framework, as briefly described throughout this document and starting with the basic structure of the *Welcoming Standard*, has the potential to build a strong foundation for both newcomers and longstanding community members alike and create a holistic and welcoming community for all residents.

References & Resources

- [Welcoming America](#)
- [Refugee Housing Solutions](#)
- [Isuroon](#)
- [How to Be a Good Neighbor: Tips on Community Living](#) (Refugee Housing Solutions)
- [Refugee Treaty and Legislation Dashboard](#) (UNHCR)
- [Refugee Act of 1980](#)
- [Religion and the Founding of the American Republic](#) (Library of Congress)
- [The Fiscal Impact of Refugees and Asylees Over 15 Years: Over \\$123 Billion in Net Benefit from 2005 to 2019](#) (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services)
- [The Economic Impact of Housing Stability on Local Communities](#) (Refugee Housing Solutions)
- [Fact Sheet & FAQ on Renting to Refugees and Other Eligible Newcomers](#) (Refugee Housing Solutions)
- [Michigan Newcomer Rental Subsidy](#)
- [ORR-Eligible Populations](#) (Office of Refugee Resettlement)
- [Healthy People 2030's Social Determinates of Health: Quality Housing](#) (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services)
- [Navigating New Horizons: A Pathway to Understanding Housing Challenges for Individuals New to the U.S. Housing System](#) (Refugee Housing Solutions)

Refugee Welcome Collective

- [Community Sponsorship Manual - Housing](#)
- [Community Sponsors Assisting with Housing \(webinar recording\)](#)

FEEDBACK

Refugee Housing Solutions wants to hear from you about the quality, relevancy, and helpfulness of our resources and tools.

Help us improve our offerings by completing this [short form](#).

You may also scan the QR code to access the form on another device.



www.refugeehousing.org

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