

# Job Counseling for Career Pathways

**Individualized Assessment,  
Career Planning, and  
Community Partnerships**



**switchboard**  
connecting resettlement experts

## Job Counseling for Career Pathways

### Individualized Assessment, Career Planning, and Community Partnerships

Many employment programs that serve refugees and immigrants are interested in launching career pathways services for their clients, beyond initial employment services. Others already provide longer-term employment support, but are seeking new and creative ways to expand career pathways programming.

Job Counseling for Career Pathways is the first of two Switchboard toolkits focused on strengthening career pathways programming. This toolkit will focus on things you can do right away (without much additional funding) to strengthen your career pathways efforts, including: identifying client motivations and needs, collaborating with clients to set goals and action steps, and making use of available labor market information and key community programs or resources that your clients could access.

A future toolkit will dive deeper into the topic of partnerships, exploring both public and private opportunities that can be leveraged to expand career pathways programming over time.

### Defining Career Pathways

Switchboard defines career pathways as the process of following an identified path from entry-level jobs to more advanced positions within a chosen industry or field. Career pathways programming helps clients work toward their ultimate career goals by identifying the steps needed to enter (or re-enter) an industry, achieve a promotion, or obtain higher pay. This may include foundational upskilling in areas such as English, math, and digital skills, or participation in formal skills training programs such as apprenticeships, on-the-job training, or other vocational training opportunities. For some clients (particularly refugee youth) this may include providing assistance with pursuing higher education, while other clients may need help obtaining evaluation of previously obtained foreign academic credentials.



## Key Client Motivations

Understanding a client's motivations for seeking career pathways services will help you identify the right questions to ask when exploring possible career pathways. While not an exhaustive list, there are **four common motivating factors** that influence clients seeking career pathways services.

1. Clients who **desire a higher wage** can be classified as low-skilled or high-skilled, and counseled accordingly.

For example, a returning client was previously a nurse before entering the U.S. The client is currently working an entry-level position in a hospital, due to his need for self-sufficiency and lack of U.S. credentials and training. The client is interested in positions within the medical industry that pay more money. While building this client's career pathway, ask:

- How much will the training cost and are there any scholarship programs that your client may be eligible for?
- What programs or apprenticeships are available in the area?
- Will your client be able to work and attend training once funding is secured?

2. Clients who **desire a specific job** are those with previous experience in a particular industry, or those who have a specific position in mind. It could take months or years before a client is ready for a particular job, depending on the industry and position.

For example, a new client has been working as a housekeeper for a year. She is happy at the hotel where she works, and discovers an opening for a supervisory position. She calls her employment case worker seeking help to apply for the new position. Ask:

- Does your client have the skills or training required for the position?
- Does your client have necessary credentials like a high school diploma or General Education Development (GED), for example?
- Does your agency have a relationship with the employer to help initiate conversations about your client's potential promotion?
- What coaching strategies can you use to build your client's self-confidence and encourage the client to be as independent as possible in pursuing this promotion?

3. Clients who **need to develop foundational skills and credentials** are those who need general education, including continued English language training, a GED certificate, skills-training, and those who need particular certification to advance professionally. Refugee and immigrant youth (in school or out of school) often fall into this group.

For example, a young adult is interested in becoming a software programmer but may not know how to pursue this goal. Ask:

- What certifications are needed to pursue a career in this field?
- Are there affordable GED classes, possible Job Corps (based on IT trade availability), or other training providers for IT software available?
- Does your client have time or resources to actively participate in full-time training?
- Are there positions available in your client's field of choice?

4. Clients who are **unsure and seeking information** are those who are uncertain about which career they would like to pursue long-term, but know that they would like to explore new career options.

For example, a client has worked an entry-level position at a warehouse for the last eight months, is physically exhausted, and does not wish to continue this work. He would like to find a new job, but is unsure what he would like to do or what is available in the area. Ask:

- Are there other positions within your client's current company that he may be qualified for (or can pursue qualification for) that could be a better fit?
- What other positions are available in the area that could be less physically demanding?
- Does your client need to enroll in English classes or other training outside of work to gain skills needed to find a new job?

Keep in mind that each client may require different approaches to address his or her particular needs or goals. Clients may fall into more than one category, so it is important for staff to ask questions regarding a client's wants or needs on their employment journeys. Here are a few general questions to ask all clients:

- Does your client want a new job with higher wages, regardless of career path?
- Does your client have the skills required for a promotion or a new position?
- What wage increase is necessary for your client to meet his or her financial goals?
- Does your client's budget require more than one income to reach or maintain self-sufficiency?



## Designing the Intake and Enrollment Process

The information that you gather during a career pathways services intake appointment will be similar to other employment intakes, but will also include some unique elements such as current employment information and more details about long-term career goals. Below are some areas to consider when building an intake form and enrolling clients.

### 1. Background Information

Find out about the client's past education and work experience, including experience prior to coming to the U.S.

- What is their completed level of education?
- Do they have any professional certifications?
- Do they have a hard copy of their diploma or any certificates from their previous studies?
- What work experiences did they have prior to coming to the U.S.?
- Do they have a resume, cover letter, email address, LinkedIn profile, or professional references?

### 2. Current Employment Information

Capturing this information explores the client's U.S. experience and their availability for meeting.

- What is their current place of employment? Job title? Rate of pay? Hours worked?
- When did they start this job? Is this their first job in the U.S.?
- What is their favorite thing about their current job? What is their least favorite aspect?
- Have they been promoted or explored opportunities for growth within their current company?
- Which days of the week and specific hours are they available to meet?

### 3. Financial Information

Having a stable income and a strict budget are crucial to a client's success. The client's grasp of financial literacy, and whether or not the client is the sole breadwinner in the family, will inform the activities undertaken.

- How much do they earn per month?
- Do they have a monthly budget?
- Are they able to save money each month?
- Are there other individuals working in their household?
- Do they have any financial goals?
- Are they sending money overseas to family?

### 4. Career Goal

After exploring the client's background, you will want to identify the client's personal goals for the program. It is important to clarify what a successful career pathway looks like to them. Is it solely about making more money, or does it involve advancing in a specific field? A client's pathway will vary

greatly depending on whether he or she is hoping to go back to school, get recertified in his or her previous profession, or enter a new profession altogether.

- What would they like to accomplish through this program?
- What field would they like to work in? What is their dream job?
- How much time are they willing to commit to finding this job?
- Did they previously work in this field?
- Are they open to finding a better paying job that may not be in their field of study?

## 5. Assessing Barriers

As when the client first arrived in the country, they will have barriers that need to be addressed.

- How comfortable are they speaking, reading, and writing in English?
- Does anyone in the family have serious or chronic medical issues?
- Do they have children under the age of 5? If so, how do they provide childcare?
- Do they have any religious practices or beliefs that prevent them from working certain jobs?
- Do they plan on staying in their current city for the next 12 months?
- What type of transportation do they use?
- How comfortable are they using computers?

## Long-Term Career Planning Tool

Discussing a client's goals will be an ongoing conversation, and having a good planning and tracking tool will aid you through this process. As you meet with the client, this form can be revisited and updated. Some steps will need further research as available partnerships or programs are identified, or as a clearer timeline emerges. Long term planning is the process of sketching out each of the individual goals required for a client to reach his or her ultimate goal.

**For each step toward the client's occupational goal, the following factors will need to be identified:**

- **Goal:** What is needed to move the client forward on his or her career path?
- **Action Steps:** What steps does he or she need to take to reach the goal?
- **Obstacles:** What obstacles need to be overcome in order to achieve the goal?
- **Solutions:** What strategies can be implemented to overcome obstacles? What partnerships are needed?
- **Target Completion Date:** How long will it take to accomplish each goal?
- **Evaluations/Comments:** Have a space to include any updates to strategies, new obstacles, changes in completion dates, new partnerships, or other items that could affect the goal.



Below is an example of a completed Career Planning Tool. For the example, client Manal currently works as a dishwasher for a hotel chain but desires to work as a Certified Nursing Assistant. She has good English skills, but is not familiar with many of the technical terms used in the medical field.

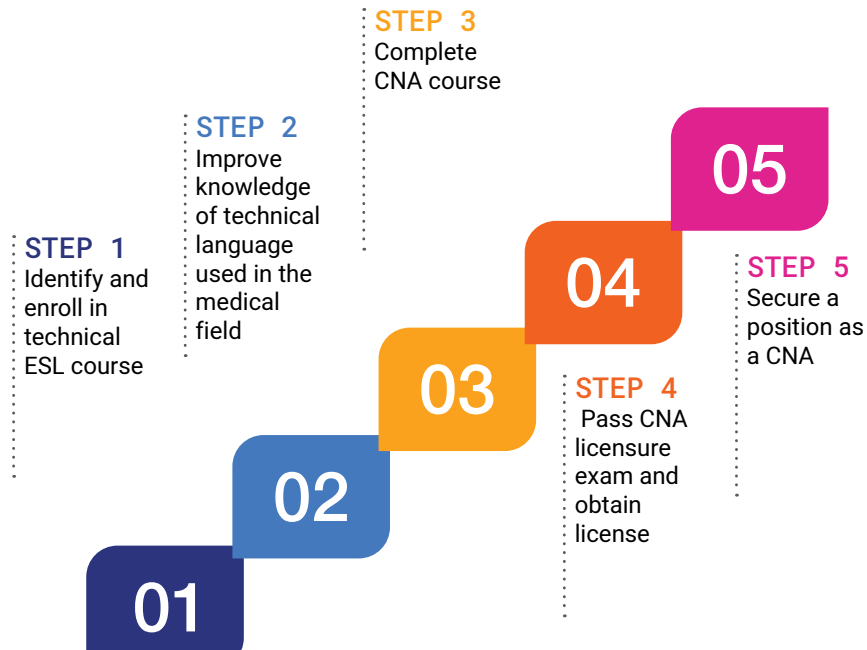
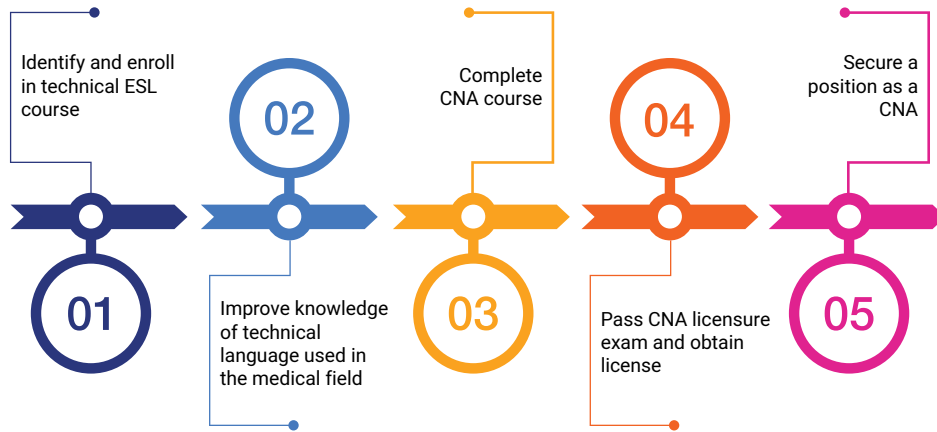
This format is a suggestion and can be changed based on the client's needs. It is designed to lay out a plan for clients to showcase each step toward the ultimate goal.

Goal Title	Action Steps	Obstacles	Solutions	Target Date of Completion	Evaluation/Comments
Learn technical ESL for Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA)	Refer and enroll client in a technical ESL course at local community college	Cost of course Schedule conflict	Create savings plan with client, or have client apply for microloan or financial aid from community college  Find course that meets at a time convenient to her schedule	Enter date of completion goal here (for savings plan, time would depend on how much client can save each month; financial aid or loan program should have timeline associated)	At a later date, include follow-up comments regarding client's completion of this goal  For example:  In 3 months, the client was able to save the amount of money required to pay for the cost of the course
Complete CNA course and licensure exam	Research with client the best institution for her to attend a course that fits her scheduling needs  Make appointment to attend info session and CNA program enrollment session with client	Compare and contrast location of colleges versus cost of CNA courses	After research and info sessions, client will choose best institution to meet her needs	Program will have a course schedule specifying course duration	Client successfully completed CNA course and licensure exam

## Mapping the Planning Process

After breaking down all the steps required to achieve the client’s goal, consider visually mapping out the plan. This process may help the client understand the plan and further understand how long the career pathways journey could take. Below are common shapes used by field offices to map a career pathway.

Feel free to use whatever visualization works best for your staff and clients.





## Exploring Occupation-Specific Data

Not every staff member can be knowledgeable about every industry in his or her geographic area, let alone every employment sector in the economy. Fortunately, there are resources available to help employment staff and their clients better understand the qualifications needed for a particular career. Federally funded websites such as [CareerOneStop](#) and [O\\*NET](#) offer helpful career exploration resources. Additionally, [A Guide to Labor Market Information for Refugee Employment Programs](#), published by Higher (the former Office of Refugee Resettlement-funded technical assistance provider) in 2018, walks refugee employment staff through various strategies and resources related to labor market information.

For clients who previously held a position in their country of origin, but are unable to return to the field in the U.S., try looking for similar jobs that may appeal to those clients. For clients who are uncertain about the occupations they would like to enter, use CareerOneStop's [My Skills My Future](#) tool.

When career planning with a client, it is okay for you and the client to learn together. Consider using [CareerOneStop](#) or [O\\*NET](#) alongside a client. Together you can look for answers to the following questions:

- Does the job have a positive employment projection over the next 10 years?
- What is the projection for your local market?
- If the industry is in decline, is there an area of the country with a better projection?
- What are the average wages in your local market for this job?
- What education and experience are required for this position?
- What degree, training, or work experience must the client have in order to enter this occupation?
- Are there specific licenses and certificates needed for this job?
- Are there apprenticeship opportunities available?
- What technology skills are needed?
- Are there other fields or positions that might involve the same skills and/or provide work that the client considers fulfilling?



## Leveraging Local and National Resources for Career Pathways Programs

You won't always be able to provide everything in-house. One key element of career pathways programs (especially for those just starting out) is to identify other organizations, programs, and resources in your community where you can refer clients. Below are some key partnerships to consider when building your career pathways program:

### American Job Centers:

Federally-funded American Job Centers (sometimes called One-stop Centers) have an abundance of resources and programs, both for vocational training and job placement. They also typically provide computer labs, resume workshops, job fairs, and more. To find an American Job Center near you, visit the American Job Center Finder at [www.careeronestop.org](http://www.careeronestop.org).

### Community Colleges/Universities:

Many educational institutions receive specific funding to provide adult basic education (English, GED, and citizenship preparation) as well as other vocational training programs. Community colleges are also great partners, as they can provide sophisticated expertise in language acquisition, are well connected to the broader workforce development system, and can serve as a gateway to higher education for refugees and immigrants.

### Volunteers:

Utilize volunteers in the community to support job readiness classes, career mentoring, in-home tutoring, childcare, transportation, and more. Volunteers can be trained to keep clients accountable with weekly or monthly check-ins. Consider sourcing donations from corporations, foundations, or through micro-lending programs for training, licensing, or re-credentialing. Hold donation drives for interview clothing, uniforms, and work gear.

### Start-Up Community:

Starting a business is a career path for some refugees and immigrants, so don't forget to connect with the start-up community when soliciting donations and recruiting volunteers or career mentors. Make an appointment at your local Small Business Administration office. Put flyers on the bulletin board of incubator spaces. Attend events hosted by entrepreneurship programs at local universities.

### Financial Institutions/Credit Unions:

Establish relationships with local banks for assistance in setting up checking and savings accounts, help with teaching financial literacy classes, or possible donor and volunteer opportunities. Developing relationships with financial institutions can also be helpful for providing guidance to refugee and immigrant entrepreneurs who may need access to start-up capital.

### Organizations that Focus on Highly Skilled Immigrants:

Organizations that focus specifically on supporting the career pathways of highly skilled refugees and immigrants can be critical partners. [Upwardly Global](#), [The Welcome Back Initiative](#), and [World Education Services](#) are examples of organizations that provide customized services and resources for highly skilled and foreign-educated professionals.

## Conclusion

Helping clients navigate career pathways will have its challenges and may often feel like a rollercoaster rather than a smooth pathway, but when clients obtain better paying jobs, or jobs that provide greater personal satisfaction, this contributes not only to their own economic wellbeing, but also to their overall community integration. Service providers on the other hand, are rewarded with the satisfaction that they helped clients not only attain self-sufficiency, but find paths to their own American dreams.

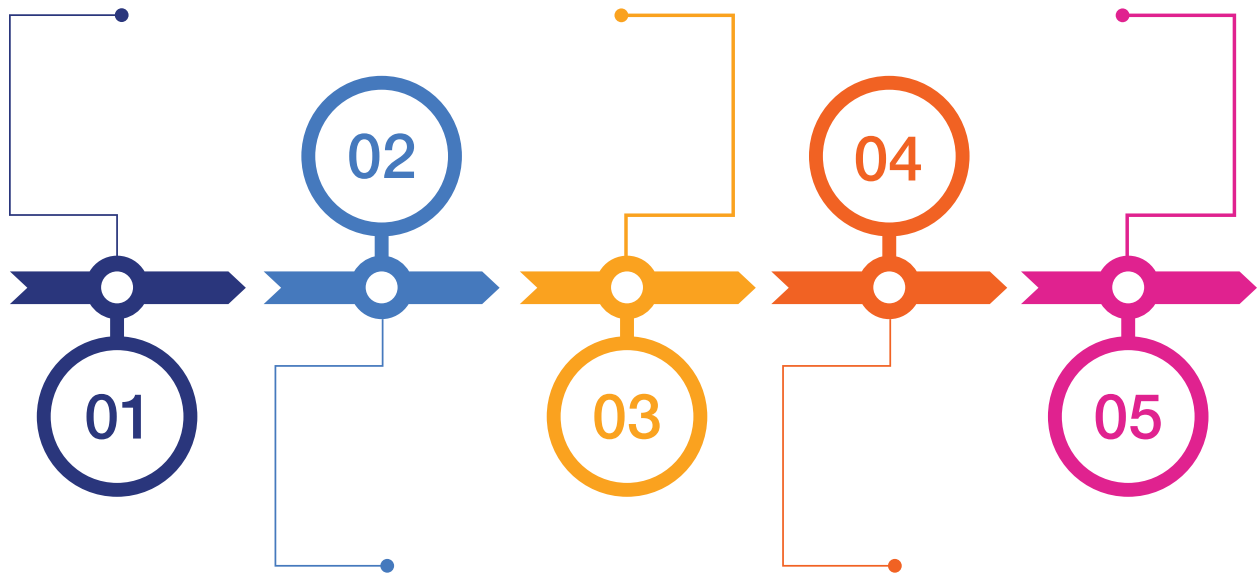
To find more resources on developing career pathways programs and other refugee resettlement topics, visit [Switchboard's online resource library](#).



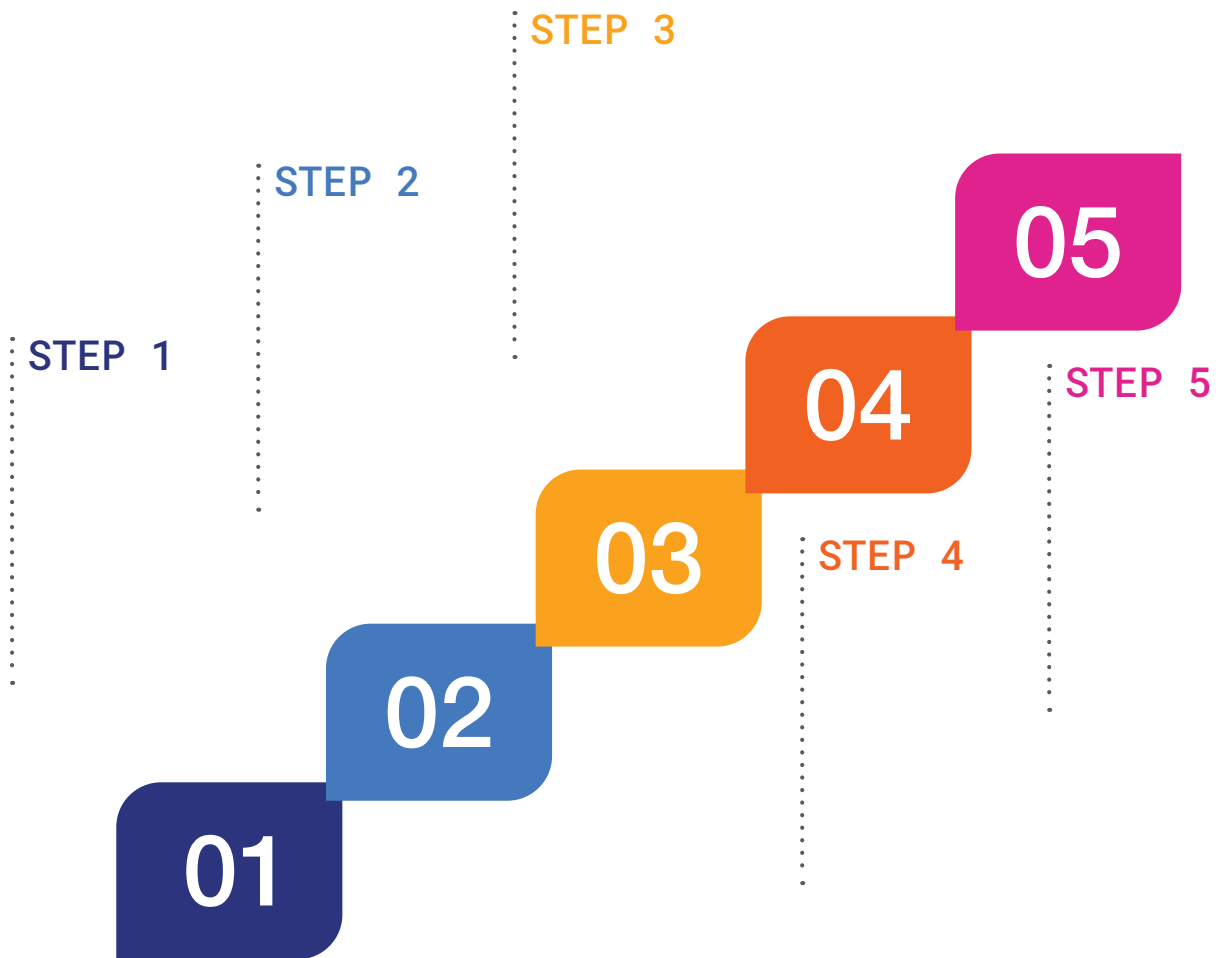
### Long-Term Career Planning Form

Goal Title	Action Steps	Obstacles	Solutions	Target date of completion	Evaluation/Comments

Career-Mapping Graphic #1



### Career-Mapping Graphic #2



## Resources Referenced

### **A Guide to Labor Market Information for Refugee Employment Programs:**

<https://switchboardta.org/blog/resource/a-guide-to-labor-market-information-for-refugee-employment-programs-2/>

This guide provides an overview of resources and strategies for using labor market information in job readiness and job development.

### **CareerOneStop:**

<https://www.careeronestop.org/>

CareerOneStop provides a wealth of information related to career explanation, training and jobs and is home to the [American Job Center Finder](#).

### **My Skills My Future:**

<https://www.myskillsmyfuture.org/>

My Skills My Future helps laid-off workers and other career changers explore new careers that may use the skills and experience gained in previous jobs.

### **O\*NET OnLine:**

<https://www.onetonline.org/>

The O\*NET OnLine database includes information on skills, abilities, knowledge, work activities, and interests associated with various occupations and offers a variety of search options and occupational data.

### **Switchboard Online Resource Library:**

<https://switchboardta.org/resources/>

The Switchboard resource library brings together a variety of resettlement-related materials, including archived webinars, toolkits, videos, podcasts, tip sheets, reports, and more.

### **The Welcome Back Initiative:**

<https://www.wbcenters.org/>

The Welcome Back Initiative's mission is "to build a bridge between the pool of internationally trained health workers already living in the United States and the need for linguistically and culturally competent health services in underserved communities." The initiative provides services through 11 centers in 9 states.

### **Upwardly Global:**

<https://www.upwardlyglobal.org/>

Upwardly Global's mission is "to eliminate employment barriers for skilled immigrants and refugees, and integrate this population into the professional U.S. workforce." Upwardly Global provides resources, training and professional mentorship for skilled immigrants and refugees, as well as products and resources for service providers.



**World Education Services:**

<https://www.wes.org/>

World Education Services (WES) is dedicated to helping international students and professionals achieve their educational and professional goals in the United States and Canada. WES provides credential evaluation, free tools and resources, and research and consulting to institutions that work with international students and professionals.



## About Switchboard

Switchboard is a one-stop resource hub for refugee service providers in the United States. With the support of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), we offer tools and materials, learning opportunities, research, and technical assistance on resettlement-related topics. From employment, education, and health, to monitoring and evaluation, Switchboard's focus areas reflect real-world needs. Switchboard is funded by ORR and implemented by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in partnership with Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS).

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LIRS