



# Podcast: Reintroducing the Switchboard Podcast

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Guest speaker: **Meg Gibbon**, Director, Switchboard

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## Introduction

**Selina Máté:** Welcome to The Switchboard Podcast. Switchboard is a one-stop resource hub for refugee service providers in the United States, funded by the Office of Refugee Resettlement. We provide resources, trainings, communities of practice, and programmatic assistance for programs funded by the ORR. My name is Selina Máté, and I will be your host. Today, I will be talking with Meg Gibbon, Switchboard's program director about the services that we provide and how ORR-funded programs can rely on Switchboard as their hub. Welcome, Meg, thank you for joining today.

**Meg Gibbon:** Thank you.

**SM:** Awesome, let's jump right in.

## What are some of the services that Switchboard has to offer for ORR grantees?

**MG:** As you mentioned, Switchboard is a one-stop resource hub for refugee service providers in the US. What that means is our mandate is to provide support and training that can help build the capacity of anyone receiving ORR funds to deliver services to refugees and other newcomers in the US. So specifically, when it comes to services we offer, it's all in the realm of training for capacity building. We have two suites of offerings that I can highlight. One is our public-facing content [which includes] online and in-person trainings, and a public resource library on our website, which has a number of resources [like] downloadable tools, multimedia, learning resources, and self-paced e-learning courses.

Our second area of support is our invitation-only private support. [That includes] certificate courses—which offer intensive, small-group learning opportunities—invitation-only trainings that are tailored to a specific organization, consultations, resource lists, emails, all of those things that go to one person or one group that reached out to us for [specific] support. So, between that public-facing and that invitation-only work, we do offer quite a few services that are designed to help improve the capacity of service providers to do their work on a daily basis.

**SM:** It sounds like we really do offer a million different ways for ORR grantees to get plugged in with Switchboard. That's awesome.

## Can you describe some of the ways that Switchboard has helped service providers improve their programs?

**MG:** Training and technical assistance is definitely a term that we throw around, and it can be hard to picture what that looks like in practice. I am happy to give a few examples. [We're happy to answer] something as simple as an email from one individual case worker or one employment specialist who is reaching out for help. We do it all day, every day. You can reach out to us with a question like, "I am looking for resources on mask-

wearing during COVID." And that's something we can certainly pull and send around back to you. What we like to say is that this is something we have dedicated time for when service providers often don't. So, if you're thinking, "If only I had an hour to take a look and find some materials that would help me," we're happy to find that hour on our side and send that to you.

Looking at interventions that are a little bit more time intensive, you can feel free to reach out to us and say, "This is a problem that I'm facing, I have a really challenging case, or my program is facing this external context that is impacting our ability to achieve our targets." Those are things where we can hop on the phone and have a conversation with a subject-matter expert, whether it's someone on our team, or someone that we bring in through consultancy or partnership. [We want to] really hear what's on your mind to see if that's something we might be able to help advise on.

We also provide formal on-demand training for your organization. Something like, "My team is brand new. Out of my team of six case workers, four started in the last year, we really need a training on documentation," or 'we need a training on protecting PII," "My employment program really needs a training on career pathways. "Those are some topics where we can arrange for a live training to come in and conduct an interactive workshop, an online training, or in some cases an in-person training on site.

Those are some of the examples of things that we can help service providers do but, really, we're here to support in whatever way a provider needs. So, we get creative, we love to hear challenges, we love to brainstorm around what is useful and what's not useful. Really, it's on everyone in ORR's network to give us a challenge. Reach out to us with something that you're struggling with or something that you want to learn more about and help us understand what we can do to support you.

**SM:** That's awesome, Meg, thanks for sharing all of that. As a former service provider, one thing that comes to mind when talking about TTA is personal information.

**If I am dealing with a difficult client case and really looking for that extra help, how does Switchboard ensure that I can still share the situation while providing protection to my client?**

**MG:** That's a great question. So, this has come up very frequently. As you know, no service provider can share any personal identifying information on a given client without that client's expressed permission. So, the majority of times when we are giving a case consultation on a specific situation, we ask that the provider anonymize the situation. So, frequently, the situation is one where we do not need access to the client's name, we don't need information about their specifics to the extent that it would identify them. We've done plenty of case consultations that go along the lines of, "So mom is in the home and grandma also is there, and the challenge that they're having is grandson is five and is having delays in school," these kinds of questions where we're able to talk through a scenario without getting into the details of some of the personally identifying information.

**SM:** Awesome, that's great to know that I can still protect the anonymity of my client while getting the help that I need to become the best case manager that I can. So, I appreciate that. Let's take a quick look behind the scenes of Switchboard's training selection process.

**Can you share a bit about how your team selects the training topics for the trainings? I know you had mentioned that some of it comes from requests, but what are some of the other ways that these topics are selected?**

**MG:** Absolutely. When it comes to the design of our training intervention [we ask]: what do we talk about, when do we talk about it, and in what way do we decide to train on a given topic? Those are all things that we look to the network of ORR-funded service providers to guide us on. Many of you listening to this may be familiar with our annual needs assessment. That's an exercise we go through every year that we really put a lot of time and

intention behind and the goal is to try to understand what is on the minds of ORR's service providers throughout the US. Typically, we include a quantitative component to that assessment, that's an online survey where a number of topics are offered with opportunities to really select what's most relevant and then elaborate with some more qualitative responses.

In addition to that, we also prioritize qualitative methods for data collection, so we really look at key informant interviews with many colleagues at ORR to give us guidance on what they're seeing. We also focus group discussions with key staff throughout the network on various topic areas. For instance, in this past fiscally year, some of the focus group discussion topics we held included mental health and wellness, serving refugee minors, serving LGBTQ+ clients, and a few more topics.

So, all of that information gives us a really helpful snapshot in time to understand what is on the minds of the providers that we're seeking to support. But that happens once a year at the beginning of our fiscal year, and then throughout the remainder of any given year, we really prioritize listening. It's something that comes up whenever anyone reaches out to us to really try to understand, not just a general topic of someone's request, but really specifically, what is it about that topic area that is challenging, that is affecting the clients and their work? And so, we use all of those interactions to inform our public training on an ongoing basis. And then we also continue to have conversations beyond those individual training requests with key stakeholders to help give us a better understanding of where the network is. So, we continue to engage closely with ORR and other federal partners, as well as state refugee coordinators, state refugee health coordinators, other technical assistants and training providers, and really anywhere we can get information to help us guide our work.

**SM:** It sounds like, honestly, Switchboard has a slew of team members that have done the work, but then also we're constantly listening to folks who are still doing the work. And so that's great to know that service providers can ensure that they are getting top-notch assistance when they reach out to Switchboard and that not only are we listening in small ways, but in big ways and listening to those training topics that are requested. That's great.

## How can an ORR grantee get in touch with Switchboard for assistance?

**MG:** This is my favorite question, because every once in a while, we'll hear, "I'm so sorry for reaching out to you so much," or "Sorry to bother you." We are here to be contacted; we don't exist without all of the amazing work that providers throughout the network are doing. We would love to hear from each and every person listening to this podcast. When it comes to how to contact us, you have a few options. You can visit our website and find a really wide range of materials that we've already produced. You can independently take our self-paced e-learning, you can access our resource library, you can review our research and evidence work. There are all kinds of ways you can engage with us on your own. You can also, on our website, submit a TA or technical assistance request. You can do that at [switchboardta.org/request](https://switchboardta.org/request). That's a very short form that gives us a sense of what's on your mind and a member of our team receives that and we'll be in touch. And then lastly, if you have a question for us, but you're not sure it rises to the level of a formal request or you want to talk it out before you go ahead and submit that online form, you can always email [switchboard@rescue.org](mailto:switchboard@rescue.org), and we would be more than happy to talk with you any time.

**SM:** I love that. One of my favorite quotes is, "The answer is always no until you ask," and so Switchboard is here to help. And as a person who's on the Switchboard team who formerly worked in resettlement, on the ground, I say there are times that I felt so isolated and then I was hoping for some help, but really didn't know where to look. I was working with a program that was fairly new, and had I known about the services that Switchboard could have provided, I think I could have really had some assistance and some support, that I was really looking for. And so, I'm eager to hear some requests that maybe come from this. So please do reach out if you're listening to this and you're thinking, "How can I get some help? I feel a little isolated." Everybody's so busy these days, but Switchboard is here to help.

## Conclusion

**SM:** Thank you, Meg, for joining us today and giving us the inside scoop on Switchboard. If you're a resettlement service provider and are looking for new ways to improve your current programs or build new programs, please do not hesitate to reach out to the Switchboard team via our website. Please check out our resource library for all of the latest resources on refugee resettlement. We will publish one episode each month throughout the year. Thank you for tuning in. See you next month on the Switchboard Podcast.

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