



Identifying Strategic Local Partnerships: Guidance for ECBOs

This information guide provides an overview of the different kinds of organizations and institutions that ethnic community-based organizations (ECBOs) can partner with in their local communities. This guide uses the term “partnerships” to refer to a continuum of relationships—from informal ones that simply involve sharing information to formal ones that involve sharing resources and running programs and projects together. For each type of partnership, we highlight the benefits of partnering as well as some strategies for getting started.

Colleges and Universities

Colleges and universities can be a tremendous source of in-kind resources—interns or volunteers, meeting or event spaces, skills and expertise—that can help your ECBO build its capacity, expand programs, and increase its visibility. It’s also important to remember that for most colleges and universities, civic engagement and contributing to their local communities is a part of their purpose, so by reaching out to them, you are helping them accomplish their missions.

Benefits

By partnering with colleges and universities, your ECBO can benefit from:

- **Student Interns:** Many academic programs require students to complete an internship, for which they receive course credit.
- **Volunteers:** Colleges and universities typically have centers for community engagement that help match students interested in community service with local nonprofit organizations.
- **Group Projects:** Some academic programs require and solicit group project proposals from nonprofit organizations. Proposed projects could be developing a marketing plan, organizing a small-scale event, or conducting a strategic research project.

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Partnership Examples

Karen Organization of San Diego (KOSD) has increased its organizational capacity through partnerships. For example, since 2021, KOSD has received substantial funding for its summer program from the San Diego Foundation by partnering with the San Diego Unified School District, University of California San Diego, and Teaching and Learning Collaborative. Through these unique partnerships, KOSD has served at least 70 students for five to eight weeks each summer by providing Karen/Burmese language and cultural classes as well as Science, Technology, Research, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STREAM)-based activities.

San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD) – Marshall Elementary School supports the summer program by providing five classrooms and onsite support from custodians and administrators. KOSD has built a strong partnership with SDUSD over the past 12 years through regular interactions with local schools to support newcomer families originally from Burma as well as other projects such as the Refugee School Impact Grant and the California Newcomer Education and Well-Being (CalNEW) Program.

University of California San Diego (UCSD) – UCSD’s Partners at Learning (PAL) Program supports KOSD’s summer program by providing eight to ten college interns to run the daily activities. PAL also provides background checks and basic training for these student interns.

Teaching and Learning Collaborative (TLC) – TLC is a local nonprofit organization consisting of educators and community members committed to supporting the growth and development of innovative teachers and groundbreaking schools. TLC supports KOSD’s summer program by creating STREAM-based curricula, recruiting qualified teachers with credentials, and providing onsite support and training.

- **Opportunities for ECBO Clients:** These may include mentorship programs and in-person or virtual tutoring. College students can also lead cultural orientation trips to museums or sports events, organize school supply drives, help clients explore different educational paths, and help build clients’ networks through social events (e.g., students hosting an annual Thanksgiving dinner for newcomers).
- **Community-Based Research Projects:** Professors often seek out research projects for their students, which might focus on community needs, contributions, or gaps in service delivery. You can also partner to preserve and document refugees’ rich stories and experiences through oral histories.
- **Advisory Board Members:** Faculty and doctoral students who have academic interests in common with your organization can provide useful insights. These subject matter experts can serve on your board and assist with framing new program initiatives in line with your strategic plan.
- **Classes/Training:** Colleges may offer low-cost classes or programs relevant to ECBO staff. For example, staff may be able to take grant writing or nonprofit management courses.

- **Guest Speaking Opportunities:** Faculty and student groups often look for guest speakers who can speak during classes or at events on campus. These are wonderful opportunities to raise awareness about the needs and strengths of newcomer communities. Building relationships with faculty and student groups through speaking opportunities may lead to more formal partnerships in the long term.

Strategies

Here are some strategies for getting started:

- Research what **academic departments** might be interested in learning more about your community, such as departments in the social sciences, ethnic studies, or health fields.
- Look at the **bios of professors** in these departments to see what kinds of research projects they are interested in.
- If your ECBO is interested in hosting interns, try **connecting with degree programs** in social work, business, public administration, or public health.
- **Request a meeting** with a center for civic or community engagement.
- **Use your website** to describe opportunities for research partnerships or student projects.

Nonprofit Organizations

As with colleges and universities, there are networks of nonprofit organizations that offer a variety of training and technical assistance in areas such as starting up a new nonprofit, strategic planning, resource development, board governance, financial management, programs, partnerships, and other management areas. Many of these are membership organizations that you can join for a reasonable fee.

Benefits

By reaching out to nonprofit associations, your ECBO can gain access to:

- **Training and other resources** (webinars, tool kits, templates, etc.) in nonprofit management
- **Networking opportunities** to share information on funding opportunities, news, and events related to nonprofits in the area
- **Opportunities to advocate** around issues of shared concern to nonprofit organizations in your city and state.
- Information on free or low-cost **consultancy services**
- **Group benefits** such as health insurance plans
- Access to **discounted or donated** office furniture, supplies, and other services

Strategies

Here are some strategies for getting started:

- You can find the **State Nonprofit Association** for your state here: [National Council of Nonprofits Members Map](#). See what your state association has to offer and what their membership fees are.
- Explore your city and county **government websites and public library**. Many local governments have offices focused on community partnerships that offer resources for nonprofits.
- While you can [find a local United Way](#) in most communities, what they offer and the opportunities for partnerships vary widely based on location. However, it is worth exploring or asking others about your local **United Way**.

There may be other nonprofit associations or coalitions in your area based on the type of services provided, such as refugee services or legal services. For example, in San Diego, there are coalitions of refugee-serving

organizations and ECBOs: the [San Diego Refugee Forum](#) and [the San Diego Refugee Communities Coalition](#). These groups provide excellent opportunities for networking and partnerships, coordination, sharing of technical information, information on relevant local events, joint advocacy for your cause, and joint applications for potential grants. Ask other organizations or the municipal administration in your area if a local coalition exists that you may be able to join.

Established Immigrant and Refugee Groups and Advocacy Organizations

Immigrant and refugee communities across the U.S., from large cities to rural areas, have established organizations to serve, organize, and advocate for their communities. If you are an established ECBO, you likely already have relationships with other newcomer-led organizations. If you are a new ECBO, you can learn a lot from these organizations, as well as the more established ECBOs in your community.

Benefits

By reaching out to established immigrant and refugee organizations, your ECBO can:

- **Learn more about the local landscape**—for example, how to connect to school districts and local government, how to navigate the health care system, and who the different service providers in the community are. This might be especially helpful for a new ECBO.
- **Learn more about the histories** of struggle and empowerment experienced by earlier immigrant and refugee communities. We can always learn from those who paved the way before us.
- **Find leaders from other communities** who can be mentors to your ECBO, possibly serving on an advisory committee or even your board.
- **Create a louder advocacy voice** by joining with others.

Strategies

Here are some strategies for getting started:

- **Identify and join local advocacy coalitions** working on issues affecting local refugee and immigrant communities. Your community might have a refugee and immigrant-focused coalition or task force you can join. In most communities, you can find coalitions that

advocate to improve access to affordable housing, address gender-based violence, or increase leadership opportunities for youth. These kinds of issue-focused coalitions may not be aware of the needs of refugee communities, and by joining, you can ensure solutions are inclusive of refugees' concerns. Further, these coalitions are a great place to share information and resources, identify common problems, and advocate for solutions, such as policies that ensure access to education for refugee children or reduce barriers to employment for foreign-trained professionals.

- **Become a member of Switchboard's Community of Practice (CoP) for ECBO Leaders!** Beyond being a space to share challenges and moments of pride, the CoP for ECBO Leaders gives leaders a chance to talk about long-standing issues troubling their community with colleagues who may have also faced these problems or are facing them now. You can register [here](#).

Resettlement Agencies

Relationships between ECBOs and resettlement agencies can be complex. Many ECBOs have been founded by current or former refugee staff of resettlement agencies. Sometimes those relationships are very beneficial, with resettlement agencies offering to serve as fiscal sponsors and mentors for ECBOs.

Sometimes, however, there may be tension stemming from a sense of competition or perceived lack of accountability to the community. It is critical for ECBOs to have honest conversations on boundaries and clarify the responsibilities of both ECBOs and resettlement agencies to assist newcomer families during the initial resettlement phases. Ultimately, strong partnerships between resettlement agencies and ECBOs have positive impacts on the resettlement and integration of newcomers into their receiving communities.

Benefits

By reaching out to resettlement agencies in your area, your ECBO can gain the following benefits:

- Share **mutually beneficial information** to support resettled families.
- Coordinate **client referrals** and offer additional support to newcomer families.

- Coordinate services and ensure there is a **continuum of care** related to post-resettlement support.
- Engage in **collaborative programming** and potential joint grant applications.

Strategies

Here are some strategies for getting started:

- **Request a meeting** with each of the local resettlement agencies in your area to introduce your organization and the programs and services you offer to the community you serve. Identify ways you can coordinate your efforts.
- If you agree to provide support to the resettlement agency, such as outreach or interpretation and translation services, make sure to **ask for an official agreement** or, ideally, a contract to get paid for your critical services.

Businesses and Professional Associations

Today, businesses need to be both profitable and socially responsible. By tapping into the many resources local businesses and professionals can provide, ECBOs can strengthen their boards, improve fundraising and operations, create innovative programs, and receive in-kind donations of goods and services. Remember that partnerships with businesses are mutually beneficial to both the nonprofit and the business.

Benefits

By reaching out to business and professional associations, your ECBO can gain the following benefits:

- **In-Kind Donations of Services:** ECBOs can meet their needs for expert services through in-kind donations of time from local professionals. For example, a nonprofit can have its annual financial statements compiled free of charge by a local accounting firm, and the accounting firm can make a tax deduction of the monetary equivalent to the time they spent compiling the financials. Law firms often provide free or *pro bono* legal services in a variety of areas community members might need, such as immigration, housing, or public benefits, as well as areas in nonprofit law.

- **Skilled Volunteers:** Corporate professionals, retired professionals, and other skilled individuals are often interested in volunteering with nonprofit organizations as free consultants in leadership, management, and resource development or as volunteer staff.
- **In-Kind Donations of Goods:** ECBOs often receive donations of goods such as office furniture, computers, and supplies for families through local businesses.
- **Program Partnerships:** Opportunities to partner on employment training programs.

Strategies

Here are some strategies for getting started:

- **Advertise** your opportunity on your website, Idealist.org, VolunteerMatch.org, and LinkedIn.com.
- Get to know your **local Chamber of Commerce** and attend their events. You can find a state-by-state listing [here](#).
- Make a community **business and professional association map** by asking yourself, “What businesses and professional associations exist whose services we could use or who have an interest in our community?” Ask your staff, board members, volunteers, and even program participants which local businesses or professional associations they know and add those to the map!
- **Invite** the local businesses and professional associations to your events or organize an open house just for them.

Conclusion

Ethnic community-based organizations cannot achieve their mission and vision by themselves. All organizations need partners. Partnerships are just as important a resource for ECBOs as financial donations, as they provide connections to resources that would otherwise be difficult to access. Everyone has a role to play in identifying prospective partners and fostering these critical connections for your organization.

Don't be shy—ask for introductory meetings, research who you will be meeting with, and learn about their organization or institution's interests and goals. See how you align, because in the end, knowing the right people can work wonders in helping advance your ECBO's mission.

Resources

[National Council of Nonprofits Members Map](#)

This webpage provides a complete list of nonprofit associations by state, including their membership fees.

[United Way Finder](#)

This webpage helps you easily find a United Way near your organization.

[Chamber of Commerce Directory](#)

This webpage provides a state-by-state listing of local chambers of commerce.

[Refugee Welcome Collective: State Resource Map](#)

The information provided on this state resource map was developed by refugee resettlement experts knowledgeable about the services and benefits in the states where they work.

[Switchboard: Community Resource Mapping Templates](#)

These templates are intended to support you in your community resource mapping process. Community resource mapping is the process of identifying and aligning assets within a defined area to accomplish stated objectives. It supports integration by engaging community members, cultivating new partnerships, strengthening referral pathways, and coordinating services. You may also hear “community resource mapping” called “landscape mapping.”

To learn more about
Switchboard, visit
SwitchboardTA.org.



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