



Connecting with Your State Refugee Office

Strategies for Promoting ECBO Sustainability Through State-Level Partnerships

Building a relationship with your State Refugee Office (SRO) and State Refugee Coordinator (SRC) is an important strategy for the long-term sustainability of your ethnic community-based organization (ECBO) and for strengthening its ability to carry out its mission. This relationship is also critical for the success of refugee resettlement in your state. ECBOs are closest to the needs, concerns, and realities of newcomers in local communities and can share that expertise to inform statewide resettlement plans and programs. ECBOs can serve as trusted bridges, helping resettlement agencies and state governments carry out effective resettlement and integration. This information guide provides an overview of the roles of SROs and SRCs, the benefits of and challenges to ECBOs establishing relationships with them, and practical steps and tips for building these relationships.

What are the roles of a State Refugee Coordinator and State Refugee Office?

The Refugee Act of 1980, which established the U.S. resettlement system, requires each state to have a **State Refugee Coordinator (SRC)** who is responsible for effectively carrying out the state's plan for refugee resettlement. The State Refugee Coordinator is typically the head of the **State Refugee Office (SRO)**, the entity responsible for administering funding for and overseeing refugee resettlement programs.

While SROs operate in different ways, they all work to ensure coordination among diverse service providers to support the effective resettlement and integration of refugees and other eligible populations in the state.

SROs receive funds from the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). They manage the process of awarding these funds to resettlement agencies and other providers throughout the state to deliver integration, employment, health, education, and other services for ORR-eligible populations.

How do you find your State Refugee Office and State Refugee Coordinator?

While the overall roles of the State Refugee Office and State Refugee Coordinator are similar across states, what they are called, how they are structured, and where these offices are housed varies.

In most states, the SRO operates directly under a state government agency, such as a department of human services or social services.

However, in some states, the state government has opted out of managing the refugee resettlement program, and that responsibility has been absorbed by an in-state nonprofit, also known as a **replacement designee**. For example, in Idaho, the Idaho Office of Refugees (IOR) is managed by the nonprofit Jannus Programs, such as the Afghan Cultural Center of Idaho, work with IOR to support refugee resettlement.



Visit [ORR's Key State Contacts](#) page to find the email addresses and phone numbers of your State Refugee Coordinator, as well as your state's website for refugee resettlement and service programs.

What are the benefits of and challenges to building a relationship with your SRO and SRC?

Once you've found your SRC, it's important to establish and build a relationship with them.

Benefits to building a relationship:

- Directly communicating perspectives from your community about their needs and concerns to inform statewide planning and programs
- Gaining timely information about what the state has planned, bringing that information back to your community, and using it to inform your ECBO's own planning
- Gaining access to state-wide data related to refugee resettlement and integration
- Meeting and building relationships with a wide range of organizations and service providers with whom the SRO has relationships

As you build a deeper relationship, you may be able to encourage your SRO to provide additional support for ECBOs. For example:

- You can call to their attention the needs of ECBOs like yours and help them develop opportunities, such as tailored trainings, to build ECBOs' capacity
- You can ask your SRO for guidance on the process of applying for grants and explore whether any assistance is available

Challenges to building a relationship:

- The structure of State Refugee Offices varies, making it difficult for ECBO leaders to navigate the system and start building relationships
- Many ECBOs, especially newer or smaller ones, feel intimidated to initiate first contact with the SRC or other SRO representatives
- Many SROs lack knowledge and awareness of the ECBOs in their state and the vital roles they play in the community

How can your ECBO build a relationship with your SRO and SRC?

Ask for an introductory meeting with your State Refugee Coordinator

Organize a meeting with your SRC, whether online or in person, to introduce yourself, your ECBO, and what it has to offer. During this meeting, discuss possible avenues of collaboration and partnership. Describe how your ECBO can provide unique support in meeting the state's goals due to your knowledge and trusted relationships with local newcomer communities. Share that many ECBO leaders can offer the SRO valuable perspectives of lived experience in guiding policies.

Many ECBOs report challenges in getting the attention of SRCs. While reaching out to an SRC can be intimidating, remember that your ECBO provides key services that help the SRO in their mission. Be sure to effectively communicate the role your ECBO plays in the state's refugee resettlement ecosystem and how your ECBO can help give the SRC a more complete picture of what is happening in their state.

Attend quarterly consultation or state advisory meetings

All SROs are required to lead or co-lead **quarterly consultation meetings** for the purposes of: (1) assessing community capacity for placement and

service provision and planning for appropriate placement and arrivals, (2) assessing refugees' needs for services and assistance, and (3) using data to gauge projected services and benefits needed.

ECBO leaders should attend these consultation meetings not only to hear key resettlement updates but also to raise concerns and advocate for local refugee populations. While state-level conversations do occur at these meetings, these quarterly consultations are intentionally community-based.

Some states, [such as California](#), have quarterly State Advisory Council meetings to discuss topics related to refugee resettlement. These meetings have a public question and answer session that attendees from the general public may participate in. Some states also offer collaborative spaces for convening refugee service providers by region, including SRO representatives, resettlement agencies, and ECBOs. One example is refugee forums hosted in the most affected counties [in California](#). Check with your local SRO to see if your state has similar events and to obtain their schedule.

Keep your SRC informed about your ECBO's activities and invite them to events

Sharing updates about your ECBO's activities and inviting the SRC to events you host are great ways to strengthen your connection. Such events can include ECBO open houses, community celebrations, cultural events, and World Refugee Day events. Consider sharing flyers and other promotional materials with the SRO, which may be able to share them further. However, be intentional with invites, as sending an overwhelming number of invitations may be less impactful than a more targeted approach.

World Refugee Day is an opportunity to co-host an event with other refugee-serving organizations and ECBOs, including the State Refugee Office.

Continue connecting with your SRO and SRC and learn about state funding

After building relationships with your SRO and SRC, continue connecting with them regularly, and ask about upcoming state grant opportunities, application processes, and eligibility. Unlike federal grant opportunities, which are listed at [Grants.Gov](#), state

funding opportunities are usually not listed on a specific online platform. Thus, identifying state funding opportunities often requires more effort.

You can contact your SRO to find upcoming state funding opportunities or to learn how to read the State Policy Letters including state funding information. If your ECBO is not eligible to apply for a certain funding opportunity due to its budget size or the number of individuals it can reach, consider submitting a joint proposal with other ECBOs, resettlement agencies, or other refugee-serving organizations.

Conclusion

One of the most important partnerships your ECBO can build is with your State Refugee Office and State Refugee Coordinator. This relationship can enhance your ECBO's organizational sustainability, as well as your service provision to newcomer community members. Recognize and communicate to your SRO the many benefits of building a strong partnership and the unique ways your ECBO can improve refugee resettlement in your state.

Resources

[ORR: Key State Contacts](#): This web page provides easy access to State email addresses and phone numbers.

[Developing Strategies to Strengthen Quarterly Consultations in Newcomer Receiving Communities](#): This Switchboard archived webinar highlights strategies to create expansive consultation opportunities while meeting federal compliance measures.

[Planning for ECBO Sustainability: Strategies and Considerations for the Future of the Organization](#): This Switchboard archived webinar spotlights three ECBOs, each at a different stage of the organizational life cycle.

[Navigating the ECBO Organizational Lifecycle: Planning, Networking and Partnerships, and Fundraising](#): This Switchboard tip sheet highlights actions an ECBO can take related to strategic planning, networking, partnership, and fundraising at each stage of the organizational life cycle.

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