![switchboard — connecting resettlement experts]

Refugee and Newcomer Services 101:
A Sample Onboarding Guide for New Service Providers

Successful programs serving refugees and newcomers are built on a foundation of coordinated, responsive, and client-centered services that support long-term stability, integration, and self-sufficiency. Delivering these programs effectively requires strong partnerships, thoughtful coordination, and a shared commitment to guiding newcomers through complex systems and connecting them with the resources they need to thrive.

This onboarding guide is designed for new service providers. It provides a foundational overview of who refugees are, the pathways through which they arrive in the United States, and the systems that support their resettlement. It is relevant for new staff working across various roles within refugee and immigrant-serving organizations, including those delivering or managing programs at the local or state level. It is intended to be customized with organization-specific training, including any in-house requirements, as well as specific focus areas for the programs and populations your agency serves.

Switchboard also offers other sample onboarding guides for specialized program areas, including ***Comprehensive Case Management, Intensive Case Management, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support, Housing,*** and ***Matching Grant***. In addition to reading materials, recorded webinars, and other resources, these guides include spaces for additional activities including training from supervisors, shadowing colleagues, and reviewing procedural materials.

Learn More About Who You Serve	
This section provides you with an introduction to some of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR)-eligible populations you may serve through your program. *Note: This is not a comprehensive list of ORR-eligible populations that may be enrolled in your agency's program. For a full list of eligibility documents for all eligible client populations, please refer to the ORR website.*	
Immigration Statuses and ORR Eligibility	☐ **Watch:** Understanding Newcomer Immigration Statuses ☐ **Watch:** How Resettlement Agencies Work with the U.S. Government ☐ **Read:** Getting Started in Navigating ORR Eligibility ☐ **Read:** ACF Policy Web Address ☐ **Read:** Status and Documentation Requirements ☐ **Watch:** Overview of the U.S. Naturalization Process and Citizenship Benefits

	For Expanded Skill Building: ☐ **Review: Programs and Benefits for Clients Section** in the Sample Comprehensive Case Management Onboarding Guide for information about ORR-funded and other federal programs available to newcomers.
Refugees	☐ **Watch:** Who are refugees and how do they arrive in the U.S.? ☐ **Read:** Resettlement in the United States ☐ **Watch:** What is refugee resettlement and what is UNHCR's role?
Cuban & Haitian Entrants	☐ **Read:** ORR Fact Sheet for Cuban/Haitian Entrants
Certain Amerasians	☐ **Read:** ORR Fact Sheet for Amerasians
Victims of Trafficking	☐ **Read:** ORR Fact Sheet for Victims of Trafficking ☐ **Watch:** Faces of Human Trafficking Series ☐ **Read:** An Introduction to Human Trafficking in the United States
Afghan and Ukrainian Humanitarian Parolees	☐ **Read:** Resource List: Serving Ukrainian Newcomers ☐ **Read:** Useful Resources to Support Afghan Newcomers in the U.S. ☐ **Read:** Answering FAQs on Benefits for Ukrainian and Afghan Humanitarian Parolees Arriving On or After October 1 2023
Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) Recipients	☐ **Read:** Special Immigrant Visa (SIV): Application Vetting Approval ☐ **Read:** Special Immigrant Visas for Afghans
Cultural Background Information	☐ **Read:** Cultural Backgrounders for the most commonly served populations at your location (Afghan, Afrikaner, Bhutanese, Burmese (Myanmar), Congolese, Cuban, Haitian, Iraqi, Rohingya, Somali, and Ukrainian.)

Core Principles of Service Delivery

The following section outlines key practices for working effectively with refugees and newcomers. These values draw heavily from the field of social work. Although many refugee resettlement staff may not be social workers, the services we provide are aligned with the standards found in the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics.

Strengths-Based Approach	☐ **Watch:** Demystifying Strengths-Based Services to Foster Refugees' Resilience ☐ **Read:** What is a Strength-Based Approach? ☐ **Watch:** Practical Guide to Working With Refugees

Trauma-Informed Care	☐ **Watch:** Trauma-Informed Care in Case Management or **Read:** Trauma-Informed Care: A Primer for Refugee Service Providers ☐ **Read:** Preventing Crises and De-Escalating Difficult Situations with Newcomer Clients
Boundaries, Staff Care, and Ethics of Service Provision	☐ **Read:** Internal Agency Policies on Boundaries (check with supervisor) ☐ **Watch:** Balancing the Demanding Needs of Case Management ☐ **Watch:** Client Boundaries ☐ **Watch:** Boundaries in the Electronic Age ☐ **Read:** Preventing Occupational Hazards by Promoting Organizational Resilience ☐ **Listen:** How Can Supervisors and Organizations Support Staff Care? ☐ **Read:** National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics* *Note that this Code of Ethics is meant for social workers and MSW students, but the ethics and practices are applicable to anyone who works with clients. You may find other codes of ethics for other professionals useful as well.*
Language Access	☐ **E-learning:** Introduction to Working with Interpreters ☐ **E-learning:** Overcoming Challenges in Interpretation ☐ **Review:** Advocate for Clients' Right to Interpretation Services ☐ **Review:** Scripts for Working with Interpreters ☐ **Review:** Apps for Translations and Interpretation **For Expanded Skill Building:** ☐ **Watch:** Training and Supporting Community Members Serving as Interpreters

Core Program Areas

The following section provides basic resources relevant to core programs you may support as a refugee service provider.

Community Engagement and Outreach	☐ **Watch:** Strengthening Refugee Integration through Community Resource Mapping ☐ **Watch:** Five Ways the Community Can Help Refugees and Other Newcomers ☐ **Read:** Harnessing Volunteer Energy to Support and Welcome Refugees in Your Community: Five Tips for Success ☐ **Read:** Leveraging Client Feedback in Community Engagement ☐ **Read:** Community Needs Assessments with Newcomers ☐ **Review:** Switchboard Community Support Line FAQ

Employment and Economic Empowerment	☐ **Watch:** Effective Employment Services ☐ **Review:** Immigrant Jobseeker Journey Map ☐ **Watch:** 4 Tips for Effective Employer Conversations Video ☐ **Watch:** Establishing and Maintaining Employer Partnerships ☐ **Read:** Three Ways to Support Newcomers' Personal Financial Health ☐ **Read:** Helping Clients Overcome Employment Barriers ☐ **Watch:** Adjusting To Life & Work In The U.S.— Advice From Clients To Case Managers ☐ **Watch:** Adjusting To Life & Work In The U.S.— Perspectives From Refugee Youth ☐ **Read**: Resume Building for First-Time Jobseekers: Tips for Service Providers ☐ **Watch:** Job Counseling for Career Pathways ☐ **Review:** Sample Matching Grant Onboarding Guide for more information on Matching Grant services and self-sufficiency through employment
Health	☐ **Read**: An Introduction to Refugee Health ☐ **Watch:** Assisting Newcomers with Navigating The U.S. Health Care System: An Introduction for Direct Service Providers or **Read**: Assisting Newcomers with Navigating the U.S. Health Care System ☐ **Watch:** Understanding U.S. Domestic Medical Screening for Refugees and Other Newcomers ☐ **Read**: What Resettlement Staff Should Know About Public Health Reportable Conditions ☐ **Review**: Helping Clients Prepare for Initial Medical Appointments ☐ **Review:** Improving Well-Being for Refugees in Primary Care
Mental Health and Wellness	☐ **Listen:** A Discussion on Refugee Mental Health ☐ **Review:** Mental Health First Aid Training Glossary of Key Terms ☐ **Watch:** Access to Mental Health Services for Refugees ☐ **Read:** Essential Concepts and Best Practices in Delivering MHPSS to People Who Have Experienced Forced Displacement ☐ **Read:** Building Capacity to Support the Mental Health of Immigrants and Refugees: A Toolkit for Settlement, Social, and Health Service Providers
Monitoring and Evaluation	☐ **E-learning:** Introduction to M&E and Evidence-Based Programs ☐ **Read:** The Resources You Need to Get Started with Monitoring and Evaluation ☐ **Read:** 4 Practical Tips for Improving Data Quality in Case Management Programs, with Case Study ☐ **Review:** Monitoring and Evaluation Glossary

	☐ **Read:** [When's that Report Due Again? How to Develop a Monitoring and Evaluation Workplan](#) **For Expanded Skill Building:** ☐ **Review:** [Balancing Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Priorities: Practical Tips on Data Collection for Compliance and Project Improvement](#)

We encourage you to continue learning as you progress in your role. Please consult your supervisor or training officer with respect to additional opportunities to continue to grow within your role. Social learning opportunities, such as [communities of practice](#) or working groups, can also be a great way to exchange knowledge and learn from others! We encourage you to register for the [Switchboard newsletter](#) and engage with our other resources on our website.