
REFRAMING REFUGEES

MESSAGING TOOLKIT



This toolkit was developed under the Fostering Community Engagement and Welcoming Communities Project which is supported by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR/ACF/DHHS)



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W E L C O M I N G
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🏠 *Building a Nation of Neighbors*
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The refugee experience is a unique one, even among immigrants, and this unique experience is both *a strength and a source of struggle*.

Many Americans recognize that refugees are able to come to this country legally to escape persecution in their home countries, which generates a level of sympathy that is not always extended to other immigrants. Yet, this very sympathy based on the challenges refugees face can also form a barrier to a better understanding of the strengths refugees bring and the positive economic and cultural contributions refugees make to our nation and its communities.

Recognizing this challenge, Welcoming America, with the support of the Office of Refugee Resettlement, is working with organizations and communities across the nation to help Americans deepen their understanding of refugees. Through this effort, we seek to shift people's perception of refugees by defining them less by their struggles and more by their triumphs.

These kinds of shifts are best accomplished through what communicators call "reframing." In this toolkit, we explain this concept generally and specifically as it applies to the work at hand. By changing the frame, you can change the conversation, and by changing the conversation you get to tell new stories that enable people to understand things in new ways.

This toolkit is intended as a communications resource for individuals working in organizations that serve refugees and the broader community. Such organizations have ample opportunity to do this work well, because they have true and powerful stories to tell. With this toolkit, we aim to give you the tools, tips and resources you need to tell these stories to "Reframe Refugees."

PHOTO CREDIT: Nancy Farese and TIRRC

This toolkit has been developed with the input of leaders in field, beginning with a conversation about the opportunity to reframe refugees and a rich discussion of the strengths, opportunities and challenges of this effort. We have used all that input, as well as the latest research on framing of these issues, to inform this messaging toolkit. Welcoming America thanks the Office of Refugee Resettlement for their support of this document.

Welcoming America would also like to thank the members of the Communications Learning Circle for their vision and insights in creating this document, including Nelda Ault, Jen Barkan, Amanda Bergson-Shilcock, Kara Fink, Cheryl Hamilton, Deidre Harrison, Joy Jones, Sierra Kraft, Anne Marie Kudlacz, Dan Trudeau, Sandra Vines, and Shaina Ward. We are also grateful to Amanda Cooper and Holly Minch of Lightbox Collaborative for their extraordinary work in developing this tool, as well as to the many practitioners, researchers, and funders whose research and practical examples made this tool possible. Finally, Welcoming America recognizes all of the incredible advocates and organizations working in communities across the U.S. to share the inspiring story of refugee resettlement and immigration - a chorus of voices that we hope will continue to grow stronger through this tool. Communications is an evolving and adaptive effort. We hope you will let us know how these messages work in your community and new ways in which you are able to foster greater community support for refugees.

For the latest tools and resources, to share your story, and to learn more about the Fostering Community Engagement and Welcoming Communities Project, please visit www.welcomingrefugees.org.

ABOUT MESSAGING

This message toolkit is designed to help people working with and on behalf of recent refugees to deliver strong messages that will encourage community leaders and policy makers to take action to support refugees in their area. But before we dive into the specifics of this work, it is always valuable to become grounded in best practices.

As you incorporate the ideas from this toolkit and further develop stories and messages, remember the key principles of meaningful messages:

Perception trumps reality. A person's opinion isn't based on reality—it's based on his or her perception of reality. Listen to and accept your audiences' perceived reality, then craft your messages to resonate with it, and use these new messages to reshape perception.

Emotion trumps logic. Logic supports our emotions and is used to justify our decisions, but research indicates we usually apply logic only after we've made our emotional decisions. Logic plays a part in decision-making, but emotion is always the main ingredient. Emotions will get people passionate about your cause. Appeal to your audience's emotions first and you'll win them over.

Brevity trumps precision. You don't need to accurately describe every single function of the organization in your messaging. And in a world where we've grown increasingly accustomed to sound bites and 140-character tweets, you won't have enough attention time to do so. Use the few moments of attention people give you to convey what is essential about the work you're doing.

Values trump features. Above everything else, your work is founded on values. Don't talk up programs and services that may not matter to your entire audience; talk about the core values that animate your work—values that your audiences share.

Vibrant language trumps jargon. Whenever possible, use clear and concise (and emotional!) language to make sure your audience can understand and connect with your message.

Actions trump magic words. Smart messaging expresses action; messaging isn't magic and it can't paper over strategy or execution that's missing in action. People can tell if your actions don't line up with your words. While it's great to have aspirations as an organization, your messaging should primarily express the work you do now.

Your audience trumps you. Chances are, you (and your staff and board) are not the audience you need to influence. You and your closest stakeholders are immersed in the work and already bought in. Your messaging is crafted to help you reach people who are not yet engaged. It needs to resonate with their perspective and answer for them, "So what?"

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"I know the strength that diversity has given my country and I believe we must persuade the world that refugees must not be simply viewed as a burden.

They are the survivors.

The refugees I have met and spent time with have profoundly changed my life."

ANGELINA JOLIE, speaking at World Refugee Day

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MESSAGE TOOLKIT ELEMENTS

The following toolkit is designed to provide a variety of tools that will help you develop and deliver winning messages.

We start by going deep on the goals of the toolkit, and then explain **The Power of Reframing** to establish why we are using this particular approach.

No discussion of messaging is ever complete without an assessment of your **Audience** and some tips for how to better understand them.

Then we share the **Winning Message Themes** that stood up to broad audience testing and the experience of your partners.

Stories are our most powerful tools in the effort to shift people's thinking. We share storytelling tools and how to employ them. We have also included some great ideas for stories from your own work that reinforce the new frame and tested messaging.

Next, we share some **Examples and Samples**: sample press materials, a letter to the editor and talking points for taking on the hard questions.

Finally, we share a selection of **Tools and Resources** that will further support your efforts to gather and tell your own stories in the new frame.

REFRAMING REFUGEES:

Recognizing the Contributions of our New Neighbors

THE POWER OF REFRAMING

Welcoming America is, in many ways, an organization that is all about reframing. Its name, initiatives, and all that it does seeks to expand Americans' understanding of immigration, immigrants and how they impact our communities and families.

If we play the word association game, and I say "refugee" what word comes into mind for many Americans? For too many, the word is "camp." So much of what we currently know and understand about refugees comes from the very beginning of their experience, and the extreme circumstances involved with going from one tough situation to the next.

Wouldn't it be better if we could think more about how refugees' lives change – and their communities, too – once they are settled and stable? Wouldn't it be more accurate, and more positive, if people associated the word "refugee" with words like neighbor, worker, business owner, voter, parent, community leader, person of faith, or any of our other many roles and identities in our communities?

When we ask people to think about refugees, too often an image like this comes to mind:



But what do refugee people and families really look like in our communities? Many are working, going to school, and contributing to our communities in numerous ways.

The work of reframing refugees is to build the association between the people we know who have settled here and their actual lives here – rather than some abstract, far away, unfamiliar other. We can help people in our community make the same associations we have. When we think of refugees we see the actual faces of families we know. We think of their lives, yes their struggle, but also the triumph in all that they have overcome, the richness they have brought to our communities, and the contributions they have made in schools, faith organizations and to our local economy and tax base.

By reframing the issue, and telling stories that connect real life refugees and their neighbors based on what they have in common, we can start to see how welcoming and supporting refugees is just another way of building stronger communities for everyone.

Reframing also has power to unsettle people who would try to dehumanize and ostracize refugees. When people who don't want to welcome refugees try to talk about how different, even dangerous they are, and how they are a drain on society, the best response is not to counter their "facts" but to reset the frame, and tell stories of exactly how refugees add to our communities. You will find many examples of how to do this in the *Tough Questions Talking Points* in the **Examples and Samples** section.

While many of us want to begin the process of educating community members by starting with the "how" (for example, explaining the resettlement process itself), we suggest instead that you begin the conversation by first connecting to the values and worldview that will help your audience understand and connect emotionally to the issue and to refugees themselves. From there, you can then go on to address the facts and factors that shape community resettlement.

Throughout this toolkit, you will see examples of ways that you can use communications products and opportunities to reframe the refugee experience in your communities. By applying these ideas into the language of your press releases and talking points, and when choosing spokespeople and stories to tell, you can start changing the narrative about who refugees are, and how we are woven together into the rich tapestries of our schools, workplaces, homes and lives.

STARTING A NEW CONVERSATION

While many of us want to begin the process of educating community members by starting with the "how" (for example, explaining the resettlement process itself), we suggest instead that you begin the conversation by first connecting to the values and worldview that will help your audience understand and connect emotionally to the issue and to refugees themselves.

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AUDIENCE

As the intended recipient of your message, and the people you are ultimately trying to persuade, understanding your audience and tailoring your messages for them is a key element of good messaging. For the purposes of this toolkit, we have focused on civic leaders and community members who could be targeted as supporters, and who are part of what opinion researchers often call the “moveable middle,” or what Welcoming America often refers to as the “unsure” That means that they are people who don’t necessarily already share your opinions about how to welcome refugees and make our communities stronger, but they share enough common values and beliefs that they are open to your message, and upon hearing the right stories, can be moved toward being allies. These may include, but are not limited to:

- Faith leaders
- Local elected and unelected officials
(city managers, planning professionals, economic development)
- Civic leaders organized around service
(Rotary Club, Lions Club, etc.)
- Community leaders, educators, and service providers organized around other issues
(business development, health, education, etc.)

We also recommend our toolkit focused on economic messaging, which is especially helpful for elected officials, the business community, and other audiences who are interested in messages that tap into values of prosperity and opportunity (see: Stronger Together: Making the Case for Shared Prosperity Through Welcoming Immigrants In Our Communities.)

To do deeper work on audience focused messaging, we recommend using the “Your Turn” resources in the Stronger Together toolkit. The survey on page 6 raises the important questions you need to answer as you get to know an audience. Then, utilize that knowledge to work through the message wheel on page 15 and you will have a suite of audience focused messages that will help you reach and move your target.

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“Without the energy and intellect and innovation of our immigrant community, Montgomery County would, quite simply, be incomplete. ‘New Americans’ are a critical piece in building a better future for all County residents.”

IKE LEGGETT,
Montgomery County Executive

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WINNING MESSAGE THEMES

The frames and language presented in this toolkit have been adapted and refined from a set of well-tested immigration messages developed by political strategists that have been shown through research and polling to be effective. For more on the process and original messaging, please see the Appendix.

FRAME: *Define America*

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America is a nation of values, founded on an idea—that all men and women are created equal. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all people have rights no matter what they look like or where they come from. So how we treat refugees reflects our commitment to the values that define us as Americans.

We believe that families should stick together, that we should look out for each other, and that hard work should be rewarded. You see, its not just about what you look like or where you were born that makes you American—its how you live your life and what you do that defines you here in this country.

Refugees that come here embody these American values. They have defied all odds to leave behind discrimination, threats and even violence. Bringing your family here to build a better, safer life, is a quintessentially American thing to do.

FRAME: *Dignity of Work*

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Out of many cultures, our country's strength is grounded in our ability to work together as fellow Americans. From the man down the street who cooks the food that you eat to the woman who created an innovative new business in your town, new immigrants and refugees realize the value of working hard and doing your part in exchange for the blessings of liberty.

As Americans, we all do our part to contribute, and we're all the better for having hardworking refugees as contributing members of our communities who are customers in our stores, small business owners who pay payroll taxes, and neighbors who give to local churches and charities.

We all come from diverse backgrounds and many different places; we are united by a deep respect for those who work hard for a living and a shared commitment to the country we all call home. America works best when we all do our part and work together as one nation, indivisible and strong.

FRAME: *People Move*

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The same is true today as it has been throughout history: People move to make life better for themselves and their families. It's hard to move – to pack up everything and go to a new place takes courage—but you do it in order to put food on the table, to provide for your family or send your kids to a decent school.

New Americans [feel free to localize this title for community work, for example Uniting NC uses “New Tar Heels”] who come as refugees move here for the promise of freedom and opportunity in this country, and to escape persecution and violence. People move in order to improve life, and we believe that moving to make a better life for your family is one of the hardest things – and one of the most American things – a person can do.

One of the values we hold dear to our hearts is a deeply rooted belief in the freedom to be who you want to be, say what you want to say, and go where you want to go. America is supposed to be the land of the free and the home of the brave—that's a good thing so let's keep it that way.

There is a lot of great language in these vignettes, which we encourage you to use freely in your own materials, writing and talking points. This language has been tried and tested, and can be used as a sort of template to write local and organizational materials.

We also strongly recommend you use these messages as a framework to tell stories in your community. As you will see in the next section, stories are our most powerful tool, and stories that use these framing devices and messages have extra power because they are stories that use values and beliefs we know will move our target audiences.

For example, when talking about the experience of a family who has recently arrived, use the “People Move” framework to decide what details to share and what quotes to use. Pick ideas that focus on the challenges and promises of picking up and moving your family, which are universal truths that many can relate to.

When sharing stories about refugees who have been successful in business, refer to the ideas and words used in the “Dignity of Work” frame and messaging. Help people see the contributions refugees make to our economy, and how very much that looks like the work they themselves aspire to.

And for communities that need encouragement to be more welcoming to refugees, we can use stories to remind them that both seeking a better life here and opening our doors and hearts to newcomers is the most American thing people can do.

THE FACTS ABOUT FACTS:

What Brain Science Tells Us About Communication

Those of us who want to make change in the world often point to statistics to inform our advocacy. When talking about newcomers and refugees – people who are too often excluded from the picture – we may feel the need to legitimize our ideas with facts. But facts alone rarely change how people think and feel.

In reality, neuroscientists and psychologists have found just the opposite. A wealth of research about what is often called “confirmation bias” proves again and again that we tend to process facts differently – we believe and remember them selectively – based on our previously held understanding of a subject, especially topics that are emotionally or politically charged.

PHOTO CREDIT: Nancy Farese and TIRRC

This means presenting facts to people who don't already agree with you will not change what they think. It can even back fire, pushing them into a position of deeper opposition.

This is not to say facts don't matter, but rather to underscore facts only matter if they are the right facts in the right context. People have to be ready to hear your information and be primed to believe it in order to actually process it so the information sticks. The way we prepare fertile ground for our information is through stories.

And this is neither culturally determined nor recent. As far as researchers can tell, our human brains are “hard wired” for stories and have been for millennia. Stories are the key building block for how we process, remember and share information.



STORIES

THE POWER OF STORIES

If I asked you to tell me a story that you heard from a favorite relative growing up, could you? What if I asked you about the most recent statistic you heard about the status of refugees in the U.S.?

Which question generates a faster answer? And how does each make you feel?

The bottom line is, in our effort to reframe people's thinking about refugees, focusing on facts related to all the needs refugees have in our communities will not get us very far. Likewise, when we talk about their contributions solely in terms of facts we also miss an opportunity to build greater support. When audiences associate refugees with struggle and strife, they need to hear stories—a lot of stories—that challenge their current assumptions in credible ways before they are ready to hear, believe and internalize what we know to be true about refugees.

The great news is that this need for stories plays directly to the strengths of your organizations. You know the refugee individuals and families who have made a difference in their neighborhoods, churches, schools and businesses. You can tell these stories again and again in meetings, videos, on social media and traditional media to create the fertile ground we need to build welcoming communities with policies and practices that make it possible for refugees to find acceptance and success in their new homes.

A word of caution: it's important to make sure that refugees are comfortable having their stories shared. While many will be eager to have their personal experience communicated to a broader audience, others may be reticent to do so or may not truly understand the purpose behind having their story told. Sometimes story sharing has been designed to “tug at the heart strings” and may even feel exploitative. The spirit of storytelling in these examples is to help empower refugees by fully communicating their strengths and resiliency with the community.

STORY COLLECTION

You know you need to incorporate strategic storytelling into your communications efforts, but how? The first step is gathering the elements you need to tell great stories. Here are some questions to ask your clients, constituents and community members.

- *Who is this story about? Who are the main characters? What is their contact information?*
- *If this is a story about refugees, what were the circumstances that brought them to your community?*
- *If this is a story about people who are supporting refugees, how did that support start? What inspired it or what was the first action?*
- *What has this person/group done to improve or change your community? What problem are they trying to solve?*
- *How is your community better as a result of this activity?*
- *What would this person/groups neighbors, employers, teachers, etc. say about them [get real quotes if possible]?*
- *What is the situation today? Is the problem solved? Do they need help or action to get to the next step?*
- *What can we all learn from this situation? What opportunities do we have to be like this person?*
- *How does this story fit into one of the winning themes [Define America, Dignity of Work, People Move]?*

You can organize these inputs into a database using a spreadsheet or other format. We created an example using details from a story we heard in our webinars:

SOURCE	<i>Laura de Rosier</i>
HERO	<i>Mary George</i>
CONTEXT	<i>Location?</i>
UPSHOT	<i>Mary George, a South Sudanese refugee, has contributed to our community by teaching those working in schools about how to work with the Sudanese populations</i>
TELLING DETAILS	<i>Mary's background? Motivations?</i>

STORYTELLING

Now that you have captured the components of your story, it is time to put them together into a compelling tale that will connect with audiences, and tell it everywhere. The elements of any story are consistent regardless of medium or outlet. Any good story includes:

Beginning:

Who is in your story? Tell us a little about them, and then tell us what kicks off the action. Don't necessarily start with the first thing you know about a person. Think about where the story begins. For example, if you are telling the story about a refugee who is now in medical school, the story could begin with the event or moment she was inspired to take up that profession, rather than when she arrived in the U.S.

Middle:

This is where you have the most leeway for length. Shorter stories might only describe the problem to be solved in the middle. Many stories use the middle to talk about one or many moments between the beginning and end, perhaps where our characters overcame an obstacle. Longer stories will include a series of obstacles or setbacks as well as moments of triumph that happen to our characters throughout their story.

The End:

How is the situation resolved? Does the character solve the problem? Do they at least reach a plateau in their situation? Even if the story is not over in real life, it needs an end to feel like a good story, so pick a point with some sense of resolution and end the story there. Think about how you want people to feel at the end of the story. Are we hopeful, concerned, inspired? Make sure your ending evokes the right feelings to move people in the right direction.

The Big Picture:

When telling a story to make change, it is critical to link it to the broader issues we are working on. How is this story typical of others like it? How is it different? What greater truth does it tell us about ourselves and our communities?

Now, the question is where to tell your stories, and the answer is: EVERYWHERE! Encourage your staff, volunteers, members and constituents to work on their story so they can tell it at meetings and events, to politicians, each other, even in line at the grocery! While speeches get stiff with practice, stories improve the more we tell them.

By getting cues from our audience about what they find interesting and what they want to know more about, we can hone our stories so they improve with age. Any event, big or small, that you hold or attend, your team should be ready, willing and able to tell stories—ideally their own first person stories—or stories about people they know well.

Make sure that all of your written materials also include stories, no matter how short. No press release, newsletter, petition or anything else should go out without the personal and emotional touch a story generates. Adding a quote and a photo that briefly tells a person's story goes a long way in making our materials more meaningful.

STORY INSPIRATION FROM THE FIELD

In our work together preparing this toolkit, we heard snippets of stories from individuals working in the field that sparked our interest. We share these with you as food for thought as you cultivate, capture and share your own stories in your communities.

REFUGEES MAKE US RICHER

The key to helping people see the contributions refugees make is to tell them true stories about real people with names and faces and humanizing details that make them come to life for the listener.

- LAURA DE ROSIER:** Mary George, a South Sudanese refugee, has contributed to our community by teaching those working in schools about how to work with the Sudanese population.
- NICKY WALKER:** Jean Golo has contributed to our community by starting a successful farm, employing Americans and providing healthy produce to food desert areas.
- RACHEL HELWIG:** Mohammed has contributed to our community by continuing his medical training at our local hospital, and has now been accepted to a medical residency program.
- FLORENCE ACKEY:** The Burmese Garden in the Tampa Bay area brings organic food to our community and provides jobs to newcomers and healthy food to our neighbors.
- HAVAN CLARK:** An East African refugee woman has contributed to our community by establishing her own at-home child care business to generate an income for her family and provide culturally-appropriate child care services to the community.
- MARY FOX:** Armin provides orthopedic care in an area that is underserved medically.
- MARCI MROZ:** The refugee kids in our community have contributed by showing sheer joy in the simplest of things—adult attention, learning, new experiences.
- EMILY VITALE:** Refugees at the Americana Center have introduced community gardening to provide a nutritious, cheap food source for poverty-stricken families.

HEROS AT HOME

Non-refugee community members need to see themselves in the stories, and see examples of how they can help make their community more welcoming, stronger and richer.

- MARCI MROZ:** Establishing a weekly Refugee Help Center at a local apartment complex in the area where many refugees live; this is a free “session” where refugees can get answers to questions, help with filing forms, or making telephone calls, etc.
- KARA FINK:** Organize a city-wide World Refugee Day that showcases refugees’ cultures, talents, and traditions and encourages thousands of local residents to meet their new neighbors
- KELLY LAFLAMME:** When hate crimes were committed against refugee families, the community came together for a Love Your Neighbor Campaign. Community members - newcomers and long time residents and local officials spoke loudly and clearly against hate.
- ELIZABETH SANFORD:** One thing our community has done to welcome refugees is to volunteer their time teaching them English, prepare resumes, etc.
- KELLYE BRANSON:** Establish a global mall with shops, classes, and resource centers at a shopping mall that had closed.
- LJILJANA KRESOVIC:** Establish volunteer circle of support through parishes to help individual refugee families.
- FLORENCE ACKEY:** Local church has their members host an international/refugee family for Thanksgiving feast.
- MARCI MROZ:** In January, with the help of some churches, we have an annual 01-01 Birthday Party (since many refugees come with unknown birthdates) for ALL refugees, with prizes for kids and adults as well.
- KELLYE BRANSON:** Mayor’s office created a New Citizens Academy and invited refugee community leaders to attend.

EXAMPLES AND SAMPLES

SAMPLE LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The following is a sample letter to the editor, drafted in response to a fictional news story with the headline “School superintendent says school overcrowding is a result of refugee surge.”

Remember that Letters to the Editor should only be sent in as a response to story or editorial already printed, and whenever possible should be in first person from a person affected or with a personal connection to the issue. The suggested word count is generally between 100 – 250 words.

To the Editor:

As a PTA volunteer and parent, I agree that there are space and resource challenges in our local schools [xx/xx/xx article “School superintendent says school overcrowding is a result of refugee surge”]. My family moved to our city as refugees for the same reason all newcomers do: for the opportunity to build a better life. Luckily, at our neighborhood school, new families are welcomed and valued for our volunteer hours, financial and cultural contributions and sponsorships.

Pointing to refugees as the cause of our education problems is not accurate or productive. The future of this country depends on educating all of our young people. We are part of the solution, and are eager to work with the district to find the resources we need to assure every child in our community gets the education they deserve.

Sincerely,

Name

Address

Phone/email

SAMPLE PRESS MATERIALS

As many of our partners commemorate World Refugee Day each year, we have created a sample media alert and press release that promotes a fictional city's event.

Media Alert

A media alert is a preview of your event, inviting the press to attend and produce a story about it:

Contact: Ms. Media Contact, (xxx) xxx – xxxx, mediacontact1@organization.org
Mr. Media Contact, (xxx) xxx -xxxx, mediacontact2@organization.org

**Mayor, Local Celebrity and Local Families Will Gather June 20th to
Highlight Contributions of Local Refugees**

Event will feature food, dance and music from around the world as part of World Refugee Day.

What: Local Community's seventh annual commemoration of World Refugee Day.

Who: Mayor Local Town [name names where you can]
Council Member Local Town
Local Refugee Services Director
Local Sports, News or Entertainment Celebrity
Local Refugee Business leader of Local Business
Local Refuge Community leader of Local Community Group
Local families and friends
Local school children from Local School

Where: Local Park and Recreation Center
1000 West Local Street, Local, CA 90000
(press can park at lot on corner of Local and Community)

When: Friday, June 20th from 10 am to 5 pm; Mayor's welcome press event at 10:30 am.

Why: Our city is a rich and vibrant place, in part because we have a tradition of welcoming new families and cultures. Come experience the stories, sounds and tastes of some of our newest neighbors. As the world recognizes World Refugee Day, Local Town holds our own celebration to congratulate refugees on rebuilding their lives, and recognize how they have helped build our community.

Visuals: Adult and child dance groups and musical groups. Art by local artisans, and interactive stations for families.

For more information, please contact Ms. Media Contact at xxx-xxx-xxxx or Mr. Media Contact at xxx-xxx-xxx.

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Press Release

Your press release should read like a short version of your ideal news story coming out of your event. Though it can be written before the event, the style is generally for it to read as if the event has already happened. You should have it with you at the event to share with reporters who attend, and then you can email it out immediately after the event.

As soon after your event as possible, share your press release with member of the media who you would have liked to cover the event but weren't able to attend. Place a phone call to any who expressed interest but did not come, and let them know what interview subjects you could still connect them to and any photos you can share with them.

Non-event specific press releases can also be used to release research findings, announce programs or share other new information. To react to or comment on current events or news of the day you can issue a press release that is a statement from one of your leaders.

Another great resource for media materials is the Welcoming America National Welcoming Week Affiliate Resource Kit found at www.welcomingweek.org. Here is a sample release for an event that celebrates refugees during National Welcoming Week.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 20, 2014

Contact: Ms. Media Contact, (xxx) xxx – xxxx, mediacontact1@organization.org
Mr. Media Contact, (xxx) xxx -xxxx, mediacontact2@organization.org

Anytown Residents Celebrate a Spirit of Unity during National Welcoming Week

More than 100 Immigrant and U.S.-Born Volunteers Clean Up Stevens Forest Park

[Local Town, Our State] Approximately 100 volunteers from the Stevens Forest community, including the Mayor, longtime residents, and newer Somali and Latino residents, gathered today in Stevens Forest to clean up the community park, establish a new community garden and celebrate their new neighbors.

Speaking at the event, Mayor Somebody said “This event celebrates the contributions being made every day by our diverse community. We recognize that our communities are strongest when everyone who lives in them feels welcome. This park is a shining example of how we all benefit when we tap into the talent and energy of all of our residents – including immigrants and refugees.”

Said local Somali business owner, [insert local resident], “This event made me feel welcome in Anytown, and I appreciated the opportunity to meet my neighbors and give back to the community.”

The event was organized by [name of organization], in partnership with [name of organization] and local residents. The event is one of a number of activities taking place this week in Anytown, as the city joins with communities across the country to celebrate National Welcoming Week. During the week of September 14-21, immigrants and U.S.-born individuals in communities across the country will come together to build meaningful connections and create stronger communities as part of the event, which is organized by the national organization, Welcoming America.

The park cleanup is just one of a number of events taking place this week in Anytown during this week, which also include a community dinner and awards ceremony hosted by the Chamber of Commerce.

For more information, please contact Ms. Media Contact at xxx-xxx-xxxx or Mr. Media Contact at xxx-xxx-xxx.

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Sample Blog Post

The following blog post is reprinted with permission from Welcoming America partner, Nebraska is Home, an initiative of Nebraska Appleseed. For more information, see <http://nebraskaishome.org>

Lincoln is among the first Welcoming Cities in the country who recognize the contributions immigrants make to creating a vibrant culture and a growing economy.

On Saturday, January 4 Lincoln Mayor Chris Beutler joined the celebration of the new year hosted by Karen Society of Nebraska. "It is important to me to welcome you to this place as your new home," Mayor Beutler said through an interpreter.

The city is lucky people from many different cultures have decided to make their homes in Lincoln, he said. "We encourage you to share your culture with the entire community, like the event you've planned today," Beutler said. "It's important we all continue working to build bridges with people who come from old and rich traditions."

Karen people came to Nebraska primarily from Thailand refugee camps after fleeing Burma's civil war. Celebrations like this New Year's celebration create opportunities to share and to learn about the culture of new neighbors.

Read more in this story from the Lincoln Journal Star: "Lincoln's growing Karen community celebrates New Year" http://journalstar.com/news/local/lincoln-s-growing-karen-community-celebrates-new-year/article_d5531aa8-5ec2-54f9-a5e2-8fdf3615b42c.html

TOUGH QUESTIONS TALKING POINTS

Even when you are reframing the story of refugees away from their needs and focusing on all they add to our communities, certain tough questions will come up. The following talking points are a sample Q&A designed to give you some solid responses and pivot points to try to redirect the conversation back into our desired frame. These are provided as a reference point only, and we strongly suggest not restating these questions. For example, when you restate a claim or myth in a “frequently asked questions” document, you can inadvertently reinforce the myth in your reader’s mind, rather than dispel it.

These questions are for your internal reference as a tool for thinking through how best to respond in a community setting.

Why? Because when you restate a claim or myth—such as in a “frequently asked questions” document—you can inadvertently reinforce the myth in your reader’s mind, rather than dispel it.

**Q: We are happy to welcome some refugees, but we can’t be overwhelmed.
How many exactly are coming?**

A: Many American cities have been losing population as jobs move overseas and urban centers lose their appeal. Newcomers have been key to revitalizing urban areas, sprucing up houses and neighborhoods, launching and supporting small businesses and improving schools. [For example, in our community...] In general, areas that have welcomed new Americans have seen their fortunes rise and opportunities expand. Local economies are not “zero sum games” where one pie has to be sliced up for everyone. Newcomers help make a bigger pie for all of us to get a piece of!

**Q: There are people in our communities already without jobs,
how can we accommodate these newcomers?**

A: Welcoming cities have seen their economies boom for all residents. Newcomers are job creators in our communities. Immigrants and refugees are very entrepreneurial, and in 2011 immigrants started 28% of new businesses even though they are only 13% of the population. These businesses employ all kinds of folks, and refugees are also customers for existing local businesses. An infusion of new talent and resources can be just what a struggling job market needs.

**Q: Why are you helping people get on welfare?
How long until they can stand on their own feet without any help?**

A: We are helping struggling families move, get shelter and meet their basic needs. There are services available for them that recognize the challenges that past traumas and relocation may create. The good news is that our new neighbors share our desire for self-reliance and independence, and use this support to enter our communities and start working as quickly as they can. How quickly depends on a lot of factors, like it does for anyone who is starting fresh in a new place, but our help jump starts the process and accelerates their acclimation and increases the likelihood they will be successful.



Q: My son's class is almost 50% ESL learners now. They get more attention than American children.

A: If any students in any school aren't getting the attention and instruction they need to succeed, that is a problem for all of us. The future of our country depends on educating all of our children. Refugee families share our concerns about our school system and we want to work together to make sure that all kids get the education they deserve.

Q: Why is America always responsible for cleaning up every other country's problems? (in reference to foreign policy/civil war/genocide/etc). Why aren't you helping Americans instead? Why should this be our problem?

A: America was founded on these values: that all men and women are created equal and that all people have rights no matter what they look like or where they come from. So how we treat refugees reflects our commitment to the values that define us as Americans.

We believe that families should stick together, that we should look out for each other, and that hard work should be rewarded. Because its how you live your life and what you do that defines you here in this country.

Refugees that come here embody these American values. They have defied all odds to leave behind discrimination, threats and even violence. Bringing your family here to build a better, safer life, is a quintessentially American thing to do.

Q: Refugees are not interacting with us. They are not friendly and they don't fit in. Also they aren't learning English. I am not a racist, but is it really good to resettle people in an environment so different than where they came from/where no one looks like them?

A: It's hard to move – to pack up everything and go to a new place takes courage—but you do it in order to put food on the table, to provide for your family or send your kids to a decent school. It can be even harder for refugees, who may not have been able to plan ahead or prepare.

But despite these challenges, refugees can and do make homes and deep ties in their new communities. And in our experience, the more welcoming their new communities are, the better and faster newcomers feel part of their new home, learning languages and customs as well as adding richness to the local communities with some of the sights, sounds and flavors of their previous home. [This is a great place to share an individual story].

Q: How do you know they aren't terrorists? Who does the background checks?

A: For everyone's safety, all refugee newcomers are screened by the appropriate federal authorities. But by definition, refugees are people and families who are here because they face a threat to their safety in their former homes. As a result, refugees are far more likely to have experienced the trauma of violence, political unrest and terrorism than the average American. They know personally the horrors of these situations, and are coming here to escape them, not perpetuate them.

TOOLS AND RESOURCES

We recognize this toolkit as only the proverbial tip of the iceberg for what partners can do to leverage effective strategic communications in their local efforts. For those interested in gaining further ideas and honing further skills, here are some of our favorite resources below.

WELCOMING RESOURCES

Welcoming Refugees

www.welcomingrefugees.org

Stronger Together:

Making the Case for Shared Prosperity Through Welcoming Immigrants In Our Communities

http://www.welcomingamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/wac.toolkit.WEB_.FNL_.pdf

National Welcoming Week

www.welcomingweek.org

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS AND CAMPAIGN PLANNING

<http://toolkit.opportunityagenda.org/>

www.smartchart.org

<http://www.justenoughplanning.org/>

MESSAGING

http://opportunityagenda.org/talking_points

<http://www.lightboxcollaborative.com/no-more-middle-of-the-road-messages>

MEDIA RELATIONS

<http://communitymediaworkshop.org/resources/>

<http://www.lightboxcollaborative.com/pitch-a-reporter-mad-lib>

<http://toolkit.opportunityagenda.org/>

SOCIAL MEDIA

<http://www.bethkanter.org/>

<http://www.lightboxcollaborative.com/building-content-strategy>

<http://www.lightboxcollaborative.com/2014-editorial-calendar>

CONCLUSION

We hope you feel that this messaging toolkit will prepare you to shift the frame and change the conversation. Our communities—newcomers and old timers alike—deserve to live in vibrant, thriving neighborhoods. When towns and cities become more welcoming, they can generate more opportunities for all. By helping people see the contributions refugees make, you are making it possible for all families to get more out life.

For those who work in the refugee resettlement sector, we know that there are formidable challenges when it comes to meeting community needs and developing the resources to carry out programs. This messaging is not intended to gloss over these concerns, nor the very real struggles that refugees confront in adapting to their new lives in the U.S.. It is important to acknowledge these concerns, and also important for the American public to develop a deeper understanding of why their support is so very essential. However, we are confident that by first starting the conversation with a focus on the meaningful opportunities presented by resettlement, along with the strengths that refugees contribute, our future partners are given the chance to see for themselves the resilience and potential in people that many of us see every day. Experience has shown that when we begin with a positive vision and speak to shared values, the difficult conversations around solving tough challenges become much easier because the question is no longer whether refugees should be in the community, but rather how we can work together to build a community's welcome and capacity.

With the right messages and tools, we're confident you'll engage your most important audiences as you move forward to build strong communities that encourage not just welcoming newcomers, but opening up to a variety of possibilities and opportunities that we might not even be able to imagine yet.

Please contact Welcoming America if we can be of help to you, and to share your feedback and ideas around using and applying these messages and communications strategies. And please be sure to check back with us on the project website, www.welcomingrefugees.org, for the latest ideas and tools.

APPENDIX

In preparation for the 2013 congressional debate about comprehensive immigration policy reform, a group of like-minded organizations came together to radically rethink the approach to messaging that immigrant advocates and allies were using. They took a totally new approach: rather than beginning their research by looking at the opposition, and the messages they were trying to overcome, they started by talking to immigrants and advocates within the movement to secure better immigration policies.

The research team, which included top researchers and strategists from political polling and advertising firms as well as a cognitive linguist, made a choice to start building their messaging from the base up, recognizing that even the best messages won't go anywhere if the people on the front lines

of the work won't carry them or don't believe in them. Then they developed and tested the messages that resonated with the core advocates, and found the messages that shored up the base and moved the moveable middle, while alienating opponents. You can learn about all about it and see the original messaging here: <http://www.cuutah.org/NM%20-%20Immigration%20-%20HowToTalkAboutImmigrants.pdf>.

LightBox Collaborative took this work a step further by adapting it around the refugee experience, sharing it with Welcoming America and the resettlement learning community, and finally refining it with the help of Anat Shenker-Osorio, a primary author and researcher on the original winning message themes project. The resulting frames and messages are reflected earlier in the document.



