



Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

Engaging Refugees to Promote Resettlement

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Engaging Refugees in Resettlement Advocacy

- I. Why engage refugees?**
- II. How to appropriately engage refugees?**
- III. Case studies**



Why Engage Refugees?

- **Refugees are effective advocates for resettlement.**
Refugees live the experience and understands what needs to be done to effect the change we need to see.
- **Refugees give credibility to the cause** by putting a face to the issue.
- **Refugees create sustainability for advocacy at the grassroots** because of their connection to the refugee community and deep commitment to the cause.



Why Engage Refugees?

No one can better advocate for refugee rights than refugees themselves.

Refugees bring unique assets and experience:

- Many are **well educated and experienced** leaders
- They bring the power of **storytelling**
- They have the ability to **mentor others around key issues**: community integration, education, workplace rights, anti-refugee sentiments



How to Engage Refugees: Barriers to Refugee Engagement

Work/ life balance.

- Many refugees have difficulties taking time off work and many combine work, academics with family responsibilities

Social and cultural barriers.

- Refugees come from many countries and cultures – requires cross cultural approach
- Many refugees come from countries where freedom of speech, association, and access to decision makers are severely constrained.
- They may not recognize their own leadership abilities.





How to Engage Refugees: Overcoming Barriers

- **Make engagement strategic, impactful and demonstrate success.**
- **Provide training of trainers opportunities.**
- **Empower refugee leaders** through employment opportunities, training, and adequate resourcing.
- **Coordinate efforts** with resettlement partner affiliates.



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Case Studies of Refugee Engagement: LIRS

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service's efforts to empower refugees:

World Refugee Day Advocacy Training

- In 2013, LIRS brought together 30 former refugees from 20 states, representing 16 nationalities of origin for advocacy training and congressional lobby day. Focused on story telling as an art of leadership, organizing through relationships and getting commitments.

New American Mentoring Project



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Refugee Congress Model

- Successful engagement model should be based on a **collective and shared leadership approach**. Model recognizes that there are distinct areas of refugee advocacy which are best handled by professional refugee advocacy organizations and that there are areas that are best owned by refugees and their leaders.
- There is an intersection area where advocacy organizations and refugees need to work together in the spirit of shared leadership.