

MODELS OF COLLABORATION

between

& Workforce Investment
& Refugee Resettlement
Stakeholders

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Following World War II, Congress passed the country's first refugee legislation and enabled more 250,000 displaced Europeans into the United States. Since then, the US has continued to allow refugees of special humanitarian concern entrance into our country, reflecting our core values and our tradition of being a safe haven for the oppressed.

Upon arriving in the United States, refugees require support from a range of programs and services. As refugees begin the process of working towards self-sufficiency, employment investment services are chief among the services they access. Refugees can be strong contributors to the workforce. They frequently demonstrate a sense of loyalty, dedication, and commitment that employers value. However, helping refugees enter the workforce often requires support from and collaboration between multiple service providers due to the educational, cultural, and linguistic barriers refugees often face.

In 2012, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) and the U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration (ETA) began collaborating on issues pertaining to refugee employment opportunities.¹ This report was jointly commissioned by ORR and ETA to highlight three models employed by workforce investment and refugee resettlement stakeholders that are collaborating to support refugees in finding employment. Each model contains elements that could be replicated in any number of settings throughout the country. Specifically, the pages that follow illustrate how:

- A consortium of organizations works together in St. Louis, Missouri to coordinate services;
- A highly integrated state agency in Utah works across programs and partners; and
- A Sacramento County, California agency offers both refugee and workforce investment services.

¹ In August 2013, ORR published State Letter 13-04 highlighting some of results of this collaboration. State Letter 13-04 is available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/resource/state-letter-13-04-0>.

St. Louis Consortium Links Groups Helping Refugees Find Jobs

Through the work of a handful of service providers, thousands of refugees have resettled in the St. Louis area over the past few decades. One such provider, the International Institute of St. Louis (IISTL), has helped more than 21,000 refugees resettle since 1979. Many of these refugees are now business owners, home owners, and self-sufficient professionals who contribute positively to the St. Louis economy. However, the road to self-sufficiency can be challenging for refugees. Although refugees receive short-term public assistance to aid with resettlement, they frequently need longer-term assistance in order to successfully acquire in-demand skills and navigate the job market. To help refugees with this endeavor, IISTL formed collaborative partnerships with other stakeholders.

Birth of a Consortium

To find a job, many refugees and other immigrants need culturally and linguistically appropriate employment services. IISTL began working with St. Louis-area American Job Centers (AJCs) to provide interpretation services as a result of a marked increase in the number of limited English proficient (LEP) refugees and immigrants seeking services from the region's AJCs. In 2002, this partnership led to the formation of a consortium focused on enhancing the employment services available to refugees and immigrants.

Linking More Organizations

Today the consortium of organizations includes IISTL, the St. Louis County Division of Workforce Development (which operates the county's AJCs), the county Workforce Investment Board (WIB), St. Louis Community College, and two local social service providers: the Urban League and Better Family Life. Partners and WIB members regularly hold a "Performance and Customer Satisfaction" meeting. Here, partners have a chance to exchange best practices and job development leads, coordinate job fair activities, and share other knowledge leading to seamless service provision among partners. Ultimately the goal is placement into permanent employment for all participants seeking services from consortium partners.

Opportunity and Impact

The consortium has greatly increased communication and the exchange of information among partner organizations, leading to increased opportunities for refugees. The regular sharing of information has grown from formal quarterly meetings to include informal daily emails and phone calls when new employment and employability opportunities are identified. The consortium has also become known as a resource for large employers seeking to bolster their workforce. For example, when a large real estate development project needed support filling construction-related positions it reached out to the consortium for help. Additionally, IISTL continues to partner with the county's AJC. Through this partnership IISTL has provided employment services to nearly 1,800 refugees and immigrants, helping nearly 1,200 find job placements.

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Integrated State Agency Ensures Coordination for Refugee Job Seekers

Refugees in the United States are eligible for a range of assistance that can aid in the resettlement process. In fact, there are so many programs available that navigating them all can often be a daunting challenge. Refugees in Utah benefit from the integration of services by the state's Department of Workforce Services (DWS) that administers refugee assistance, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Workforce Investment Act- (WIA) and Wagner-Peyser-funded services as well as the state's AJCs. Additionally, DWS actively partners and coordinates with other agencies organizations that interact with and can help improve the lives of refugees around education, English language skills, housing, transportation, disaffected youth, and physical and mental health services. An underlying pillar of this interagency collaboration is the passion of DWS leadership to work together to best serve refugee populations.

Case Management across Programs

Because DWS provides all of its services at its AJCs—which are locally branded as Employment Centers—refugee clients are easily able to access a range of co-located services and supports. In fact, the Salt Lake City metro AJC has a specialized team of employment counselors that works only with refugees. This team case manages all refugee services, including TANF, and co-manages WIA services with another employment counselor. DWS can do this because its case management system allows for a primary and a secondary employment counselor. Refugees each have employment counselor for workforce development services and an employment counselor from the refugee team that manages other DWS programs as well as provides referrals to domestic violence, mental health, and other services.

Partnering with Other Organizations

In addition to administering its own programs, DWS looks for opportunities to partner with organizations to offer enhanced coordination of services that benefit refugees. DWS actively networks with businesses, community colleges, school districts, and other organizations that could partner with DWS to provide new opportunities for refugees. Through one such partnership with a local high school, DWS has used the Jumpstart/WIA Youth program to help refugee students (ages 14-21) graduate high school and prepare for employment or postsecondary education after graduation. In summer 2013, 53 students participated in the program and more are expected in 2014. More generally, DWS and its AJCs along with partner agencies, and refugee community organizations support refugees in finding jobs in the Salt Lake City area through placement services. They also provide job development support, ESL and English skills support, on-the-job English language training with employers, and informational workshops for employers and chambers of commerce.

Strengthening Outcomes for Refugees

The integration of refugee, employment, and work support services in Utah has provided a comprehensive roadmap and approach for refugees being resettled in the state. The immediate needs of refugees are integrated from start to finish across the state beginning with navigating their new area to finding housing, public assistance supports, and receiving healthcare through the leveraging of partnerships and resources across the state. Consistent and regular communication due to co-location and the purposeful integration of services from start to finish help refugees receive ongoing supportive case management and navigate their individual paths through education, training, job development soft skills, and English language skills development to find not only employment but pathways toward careers and self-sufficiency.

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Sacramento Works America's Job Center System Helps Refugees Find Employment

Nation-wide there are nearly 3,000 federally funded AJCs, each of which offers a single access point for key programs that help people find jobs and training. Though they are frequently in need of the services provided by AJCs, refugees often have a difficult time navigating them due to linguistic and cultural barriers. Agencies across the county employ a variety of strategies for helping refugees access AJCs. In Sacramento, refugees benefit from a unique array of services offered by both the area AJCs and partnering organizations.

Supporting Refugees in Sacramento

Sacramento County has an extensive history of welcoming refugee groups from all over the world. Since 1983, the Sacramento Employment and Training Agency (SETA) Refugee Program has served refugees from Southeast Asia, the former Soviet Union, and most recently the Middle East. SETA's Refugee Program provides services through local agencies to assist refugees in achieving economic self-sufficiency and reduced dependency on public assistance through employment and acculturation services.

Sacramento Works

In addition to providing direct services, all of SETA's Refugee Program service providers are required to provide refugees with a tour and orientation of an area AJC intended to introduce and inform refugees of the multitude of integrated services and training opportunities available to help increase their employability and competitiveness in the workforce. As the designated administrator of the Sacramento Works AJC system, SETA offers a network of job and training centers addressing both job seeker and business customers' workforce needs and challenges. The Sacramento Works AJC system, which houses multilingual staff offering 15 different languages, provides universal access to a variety of tools and services including in-depth assessments, career coaching, labor market and career exploration, basic to advanced education, and occupational skills training.

Cross-Funding through Collaboration

Through the Sacramento Works AJC system, SETA offers a robust On-the-Job Training (OJT) program intended to engage prospective employers in providing appropriate and meaningful training opportunities to refugees and others accessing the Sacramento Works system. Currently, three of SETA's Refugee Program service providers are WIA-funded OJT providers. As a result of this cross-funding relationship, many refugees have successfully participated in the OJT program, gaining skills and work experience in specific occupations while earning wages. Due to the intensive job coaching and substantial employer involvement provided during an OJT, better employment outcomes are achieved. For example, co-enrollment of refugees in SETA's OJT program results in a 30% higher entered employment rate for those participants.

Sacramento Employment & Training Agency

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