

Supporting Higher Education in Refugee Resettlement

Building the capacity of colleges and universities to support resettlement.

SHERR COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE AND ACTION

OVERVIEW

The Supporting Higher Education in Refugee Resettlement project ([SHERR](#)) is excited to announce the launch of four **Communities of Practice and Action (CoPAs)** which will **meet 7 times from February through December 2024**. The SHERR CoPAs combine the premise of a traditional community of practice and a working group, by providing a space to build community and share expertise, as well as by focusing on specific deliverables – creating and/or planting the seeds for new resources that others around the country can use as they develop their own local approaches. They aim to strengthen engagement in refugee resettlement on the part of higher education institutions, with the larger goal of growing and enhancing the domestic capacity for placement of refugees in communities across the United States.

The themes of the four CoPAs are aligned with engagement pathways identified by SHERR as ways for colleges and universities to support refugee resettlement efforts. Each CoPA will be led by an experienced higher education/resettlement practitioner.

1. **English Language Learning and Career Pathways Support** (Lead Facilitator: Sara Haghighi, Pima Community College)
2. **Housing and Campus Utilization** (Lead Facilitator: Dr. Diya Abdo, Every Campus A Refuge)
3. **Developing Refugee Educational Opportunities: Reducing Barriers to Enrollment** (Lead Facilitator: Marina Chakmakchi, University of Southern Maine)
4. **Service Learning, Volunteer Engagement, and Staffing** (Lead Facilitator: Dr. Carina Black, Northern Nevada International Center & University of Nevada Reno)

Who should join the SHERR Communities of Practice and Action:

- Representatives of higher education institutions (including community colleges, technical & vocational schools, and 4-year colleges and universities) who are or want to be involved in programs around the topic area.
- Representatives of National Resettlement Agencies, their affiliates, and other non-governmental or governmental organizations focused on refugee resettlement and interested in collaboration with higher education institutions.

The Communities of Practice and Action aim to:

Goal 1: Facilitate regular community building meetings composed of college and university staff, campus stakeholders, refugee resettlement organizations, and other local partners that offer support for refugees in one of the four CoPA focus areas (as listed above).

Goal 2: Share successes and challenges encountered by higher education in efforts to run programs focused on refugee populations; actively consider and apply ideas or solutions within such programs, and relay these efforts and lessons learned back to the CoPA group and beyond, including about the progress or challenges experienced.

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Empowering refugees
and immigrants
since 1983



Goal 3: Develop resources such as model examples, toolkits, messaging points, and identify gaps in trainings to guide further resource development aligned with the CoPAs to be made available through the Presidents' Alliance Higher Ed Immigration Portal – [Refugee Resource Hub](#) and shared in other strategic ways that support engagement of higher education institutions in refugee resettlement.

Participation: Participation in the SHERR Communities of Practice and Action is voluntary but a serious commitment to attend at least six sessions is requested. Experts and practitioners from across higher education and resettlement are invited to participate to ensure balance of perspectives and breadth of expertise. SHERR seeks to form a group of core members, who commit to actively participate in meetings and to contribute to action-item activities that may require additional time outside of meetings (estimated commitment time is 3 hours per month).

SHERR Communities of Practice and Action vs. the Welcome Campus Network (WCN):

SHERR supports the growth and expansion of the Welcome Campus Network, a network of practitioners dedicated to creating welcoming campuses across the United States. At biweekly meetings, members of the WCN share updates related to their work with refugees, and guest speaker presentations cover a variety of general topics related to supporting refugee students and non-students. Anyone is welcome to join the WCN. The SHERR Communities of Practice and Action are an opportunity to join a group focused on a specific topic of interest. Understanding that not everyone is able to commit to all seven sessions and to active participation in CoPA activities, SHERR invites interested individuals to join the Welcome Campus Network. SHERR will provide regular updates on the work of the CoPAs to Welcome Campus Network members. CoPA members will also be invited to join the Welcome Campus Network. To learn more, please visit: <https://welcome.us/more-ways-to-help/welcome-campus-network>

CoPA Core Members (invited by the SHERR consortium) represent higher education institutions and resettlement agencies/ affiliates who are currently implementing programs related to a specific CoPA theme; community stakeholders involved in helping to develop such programs; individuals who are active members in the Welcome Campus Network (WCN) or agree to join the WCN.

Responsibilities include:

- Agree to participate in the series of 7 CoPA meetings over 11 months (approximate time commitment is 3 hours per month)
- Share problems of practice, ideas, experiences, and expertise
- Engage productively during the meetings (listen, query, discuss, support fellow members to learn and grow in their practice)
- Come prepared, having completed any previously agreed upon action steps (applied ideas or potential solutions to their work)
- Support with development of deliverables as discussed during CoPA meetings
- Suggest topics and experts/external guest speakers;

Guests / additional attendees/ interested parties from the higher education sector or refugee resettlement community (to include: student leaders; volunteers in thematically related programs; representatives of supporting organizations; refugee background individuals who can share their experiences with relevant higher education or resettlement programming/ services) may be invited to join individual CoPA meetings that relate to their area of interest or expertise, without the expectation of being part of the core group. Requests and suggestions will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

For any questions, please email us at: SHERR@worldlearning.org

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Community of Practice and Action 1: English Language Learning and Career Pathways Support

Lead Facilitator: Sara Haghighi, Program Manager at Pima Community College Refugee Education Program (PCC REP) in Tucson, Arizona

Description: SHERR *English Language Learning and Career Pathways Support* Community of Practice and Action brings together practitioners at colleges and universities and resettlement organizations who run programs for refugees at the intersection of English language instruction and specific career tracks / vocational training. Group members will meet seven times between February and December 2024 to share their expertise, discuss successes and challenges of existing language programs for refugees, identify resource gaps, and co-create or support creation of new resources.

Need: Based largely on the results of the June 2023 SHERR Needs Assessment Survey, the SHERR team has confirmed English Language Learning (ELL) and Career Pathways Support as one of several engagement pathways in which higher education institutions have the potential to engage with refugee students and non-students. Many schools that responded to the SHERR survey have developed programs that combine ELL with specific career tracks/ vocational training programs and uniquely serving refugee populations. Such programs are key to refugees gaining employment, accessing health care, education, and in turn contributing as members of their local communities.

Led by an experienced practitioner and facilitator, the group will review the following preliminary ideas for deliverables, which were identified during the 2023 SHERR National Workshop.

Preliminary Proposed Deliverables:

1. Help build out the online [Refugee Resource Hub](#) of best practices by collecting and sharing campus models and resources, including:
 - sample teaching curricula
 - funding opportunities
 - effective approaches to linking ELL and Career Pathways
 - stories of impacted refugee families to serve as outreach/inspiration and knowledge sharing
2. Develop **messaging** designed to encourage college and university (including career center and administrative staff) participation in ELL and Career Pathways and greater understanding of newcomers' distinct experiences and needs.
3. Develop **toolkits and materials**, including:
 - How to design and implement effective newcomer-tailored teaching curricula;
 - How to get started with program design for ELL/Career Pathways;
 - How to build partnerships between colleges/universities and local resettlement organizations to drive community support for the ELL programs.

Virtual meeting calendar for the “English Language Learning and Career Pathways Support” CoPA

Session 1: Tuesday, February 27 @ 12:00 – 1:30 p.m. EST

Session 2: Tuesday, April 9 @ 12:00 – 1:30 p.m. ET

Session 3: Tuesday, May 7 @ 12:00 – 1:30 p.m. ET

Session 4: Tuesday, June 11 @ 12:00 – 1:30 p.m. ET

Session 5: Tuesday, September 10 @ 12:00 – 1:30 p.m. ET

Session 6: Tuesday, October 22 @ 12:00 – 1:30 p.m. ET

Session 7: Tuesday, December 10 @ 12:00 – 1:30 p.m. EST

If you are interested in joining the “English Language Learning and Career Pathways Support” CoPA, please review the above dates. If you are able to commit to attending at least six sessions, please submit your [RSVP](#) by February 10, 2024.

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Community of Practice and Action 2: Housing and Campus Utilization

Lead Facilitator: Dr. Diya Abdo, Founder, Every Campus A Refuge, Guilford College, North Carolina

Description: SHERR *Housing and Campus Utilization* Community of Practice and Action brings together practitioners at U.S. colleges and universities and resettlement organizations who have successfully navigated the complexities of housing and offered temporary and long-term on-campus housing solutions to refugee students and non-student refugees. Group members will meet seven times to facilitate connections, share successes and challenges, and co-create resources for colleges and universities who offer or wish to offer available campus housing (dorms, faculty housing, vacant buildings) for temporary use by refugees.

Need: Given the anticipated number of up to 125,000 refugees being resettled in fiscal year 2024 (up from roughly 60,000 resettled the previous year) and recognizing the need for temporary housing solutions for newcomers to communities across the U.S., the Housing and Campus Utilization engagement pathway seeks to encourage higher education institutions to consider ways in which they can and should contribute their (sometimes under-utilized) campus facilities to support refugee resettlement.

Led by an experienced practitioner and facilitator, the group will review the following preliminary ideas for deliverables, which were identified during the 2023 SHERR National Workshop.

1. Help build out the online [Refugee Resource Hub](#) of best practices by collecting, developing and sharing **campus models** and resources including:
 - examples of campus utilization and temporary on-campus housing for refugees
 - funding sources and fundraising options (by state)
 - stories of impacted refugee families to serve as outreach/inspiration and knowledge sharing
2. Review existing and develop complementary **operationally focused resources** related to utilizing campus housing for temporary use by refugees and establishing partnerships with resettlement organizations and community partners.
3. Complement and/or supplement SHERR team's ongoing efforts to **engage relevant groups** such as university housing professionals and other associations for sharing perspectives and identifying operational opportunities.

Virtual meeting calendar for the "Housing and Campus Utilization" Community of Practice and Action:

Session 1: Thursday, February 29 @ 1:00 – 2:30 p.m. ET

Session 2: Thursday, April 11 @ 1:00 – 2:30 p.m. ET

Session 3: Monday, May 6 @ 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. ET

Session 4: Monday, June 10 @ 12:00 – 1:30 p.m. ET

Session 5: Monday, September 9 @ 1:00 – 2:30 p.m. ET

Session 6: Monday, October 21 @ 1:00 – 2:30 p.m. ET

Session 7: Monday, December 9 @ 1:00 – 2:30 p.m. ET

If you are interested in joining the "Housing and Campus Utilization" CoPA, please review the above dates. If you are able to commit to attending at least six sessions, please submit your [RSVP](#) by February 10, 2024.

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Community of Practice 3: Developing Refugee Educational Opportunities: Reducing Barriers to Enrollment

Lead Facilitator: Marina Chakmakchi, University of Southern Maine

Description: SHERR *Developing Refugee Educational Opportunities: Reducing Barriers to Enrollment* Community of Practice and Action brings together practitioners (faculty, staff, students) from U.S. higher education institutions and resettlement organizations with a track record of providing support systems that assist refugees seeking educational opportunities to begin or continue tertiary education in the United States. Group members will meet seven times (February – December 2024) to facilitate connections, share successes and challenges, and co-create new resources with the goal of building greater capacity of higher education institutions to serve refugees in their communities to support the national refugee resettlement effort.

Need: Given the anticipated number of up to 125,000 refugees being resettled in fiscal year 2024 (up from roughly 60,000 resettled the previous year) and recognizing the need to increase capacity of U.S. communities to successfully resettle refugees, the Refugee Educational Opportunities engagement pathway highlights how engaging with refugees meets the core educational goals for colleges and universities.

Led by an experienced practitioner and facilitator, the group will review the following deliverables, which were identified during the 2023 SHERR National Workshop:

1. Help build out the online [Refugee Resource Hub](#) of best practices by collecting, developing, and sharing **campus models** and resources including:
 - policy briefs that offer a practical and replicable model of what a campus is doing to support refugee students;
 - models that support enrollment
 - ways to promote **student success** (e.g. “student-navigator” position to support refugee students on campus)
2. Support and encourage the formation of **statewide coalitions** and networks of colleges and universities engaged in refugee resettlement to better leverage state support, policies, and resources; and
3. Explore solutions to establish a **baseline report of refugee student enrollment** in the U.S. This addresses the lack of data, and the need to understand who the refugee students on campus are. Research and data collection are necessary for meeting the needs of students, advocating for enrollment and supports, and leveraging funding.

Virtual meeting calendar for the “Developing Refugee Educational Opportunities: Reducing Barriers to Enrollment” Community of Practice and Action

Session 1: Wednesday, February 28 @ 12:00 – 1:30 p.m. ET

Session 2: Monday, April 8 @ 12:00 – 1:30 p.m. ET

Session 3: Wednesday, May 8 @ 12:00 – 1:30 p.m. ET

Session 4: Wednesday, June 12 @ 12:00 – 1:30 p.m. ET

Session 5: Wednesday, September 11 @ 12:00 – 1:30 p.m. ET

Session 6: Wednesday, October 23 @ 12:00 – 1:30 p.m. ET

Session 7: Wednesday, December 11 @ 12:00 – 1:30 pm ET

If you are interested in joining the “Developing Refugee Educational Opportunities: Reducing Barriers to Enrollment” CoPA, please review the above dates. If you are able to commit to attending at least six sessions, please submit your [RSVP](#) by February 10, 2024.

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Community of Practice 4: Service Learning, Volunteer Engagement, and Staffing

Lead Facilitator: Dr. Carina Black, Northern Nevada International Center, University of Nevada Reno

Description: SHERR *Service Learning, Volunteer Engagement, and Staffing* Community of Practice and Action brings together practitioners (faculty, staff, students) from U.S. higher education institutions, resettlement and community organizations with a track record of providing refugee-related service learning opportunities, designing credit-bearing programs that include internships at resettlement organizations, and supporting student-led humanitarian assistance initiatives. Group members will meet seven times (February – December 2024) to facilitate connections, share successes and challenges, and co-create resources in support of the national refugee resettlement effort through service learning and meaningful engagement of college students.

Need: Given the anticipated number of up to 125,000 refugees being resettled in fiscal year 2024 (up from roughly 60,000 resettled the previous year) and recognizing the need to increase domestic capacity (including staffing) to successfully resettle refugees in communities across the U.S., the Service Learning, Volunteer Engagement, and Staffing engagement pathway highlights the need for resources around service learning, volunteer training and addressing staffing shortages. It also stresses the importance and transformational aspect of community engagement and welcoming of forcibly displaced community members on university students, staff, and faculty.

Led by an experienced practitioner and facilitator, the group will review the following deliverables, which were identified during the 2023 SHERR National Workshop:

1. Help build out the online [Refugee Resource Hub](#) of best practices by collecting, developing, and sharing campus models and resources including:
 - Examples of service learning and volunteer engagement programs at colleges and universities and resettlement agencies/organizations;
 - Best practice examples in different **formats** (such as infographics or podcasts)
 - expanding a **point-of-contact list** at participating RAs and HEIs interested in refugee resettlement collaboration.
2. Identify potential targets or avenues to share **messaging language and strategy** designed to encourage higher education participation in service learning and volunteer engagement in refugee resettlement.
3. Develop user-friendly “rapid response” **playbooks** for resettlement agencies and schools to launch strategically **during times of humanitarian crises and high refugee arrivals**, including identifying a point of contact for basic needs and services, developing unified message/response to media, identifying volunteers, etc.

Virtual meeting calendar for the “Service Learning, Volunteer Engagement, and Staffing” CoPA

Session 1: Friday, March 1 @ 12:30 - 2:00 p.m. ET

Session 2: Friday, April 12 @ 12:30 - 2:00 p.m. ET

Session 3: Monday, May 6 @ 12:30 - 2:00 p.m. ET

Session 4: Friday, June 21 @ 12:30 - 2:00 p.m. ET

Session 5: Friday, September 13 12:30 - 2:00 p.m. ET

Session 6: Monday, October 21 @12:30 - 2:00 p.m. ET

Session 7: Monday December 9 @ 12:30 - 2:00 p.m. ET

If you are interested in joining the “Service Learning, Volunteer Engagement, and Staffing” CoPA, please review the above dates. If you are able to commit to attending at least six sessions, please submit your [RSVP](#) by February 10, 2024.

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APPENDIX: LEAD FACILITATOR BIOS

Sara Haghighi serves as the Program Manager at Pima Community College Refugee Education Program (PCC REP) in Tucson, Arizona. She oversees instruction to adult language learners with refugee, SIV, Asylee, and Humanitarian Parole status. She is a passionate educator who believes in empowering learners and raising their critical consciousness about social conditions—both their own and those of others. Her experience as a former refugee and her passion for education have influenced her thinking and interest in social justice for culturally and linguistically diverse learners.

Diya Abdo is the Lincoln Financial Professor of English at Guilford College in Greensboro, North Carolina. A second-generation Palestinian refugee born and raised in Jordan, Dr. Abdo's teaching, research, and scholarship focus on Arab women writers, Arab and Islamic feminisms, and refugee studies. Her book AMERICAN REFUGEE: True Stories of the Refugee Experience was selected as a North Carolina Reads 2024 Book. In 2015, Dr. Abdo founded Every Campus A Refuge (ECAR), which advocates for housing refugee families on college and university campus grounds and supporting them in their resettlement. The flagship chapter at Guilford College, now one of several ECAR campuses, has hosted nearly 90 refugees thus far. Dr. Abdo is the recipient of several awards including the J.M. Kaplan Fund's Innovation Prize (2021); she sits on the Advisory Board of the Community Sponsorship Hub.

Marina Chakmakchi is a multilingual international professional with a passion for service dedicated to delivering meaningful services to people from diverse backgrounds and cultures. She has worked as a women's rights lawyer in Russia, a student advisor in England, and an ESL teacher in Turkey. Marina first came to Maine in 2003 as an international student to study at the University of Maine School of Law, where she is currently an LL.M. candidate. Armed with a Master's in Public Policy and Management (University of Southern Maine), Marina guides immigrant-origin students and internationally-trained professionals as a Global Talent Navigator at the University of Southern Maine's Office of Equity, Inclusion, and Community Impact. Her understanding of barriers faced by immigrants seeking higher education, coupled with her firsthand experience navigating different cultures, allows her to advocate effectively for their needs. Before USM, Marina was employed at Portland Adult Education and the Office of Maine Refugee Services, focusing on providing support and resources to refugees, asylum seekers, asylees, and other immigrants in Maine. Originally from Russia, her story extends beyond borders: Cambridge, UK, and Istanbul, Turkey, played their parts in shaping her global citizen perspective. Today, Marina makes Yarmouth, Maine, her home, alongside her husband and two daughters.

Carina Alejandra Black received her Ph.D. in Latin American politics and democratization. She has served as the director of the Northern Nevada International Center (NNIC) at the University of Nevada (UNR) since 1998, initially working primarily in the realm of professional and cultural exchanges. In 2016, NNIC became a refugee resettlement agency under USCRI and Black initiated a series of partnerships with local community agencies to provide wrap-around services for refugees, asylees and victims of trafficking. Black has also established deep connections with various programs on the UNR campus, recognizing that refugee resettlement can be a tool for internationalizing the campus as well as serving as an avenue for higher education for youth with refugee background. As an immigrant herself, Black was born in Argentina and also holds Swiss and US citizenships. She is married and has five children and four grandchildren.

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