The Barra Foundation

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TEMPLE UNIVERSITY

Friendship Across Cultures Program

Replication Manual

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The Barra Foundation
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This replication manual is designed for community-based organizations and refugee resettlement agencies interested in harnessing the skills and talents of retired women and refugee women to build welcoming relationships and support the long-term integration of refugees into American communities. The Friendship Across Cultures program (FAC), developed in collaboration by The Intergenerational Center at Temple University (IGC) and Lutheran Children and Family Services (LCFS) helps refugee women build on their strengths and talents, learn new skills, and access needed resources. At the same time it provides older adult women with compelling volunteer opportunities that leverage their experience and enable them to learn more about refugees living in their communities.

Since 1975 the United States has resettled over 3 million refugees. Challenges faced by recent refugees, though they may be similar to their predecessors—language and cultural dissonances which create barriers to financial security, health, education, long-term integration and cultural maintenance—are compounded by recent changes in policies and the downturn in the economy. Refugee resettlement agencies have long relied on extended families and/or ethnic community networks to support new arrivals, but changes in immigration policy have drastically limited the number of refugees who arrive through the family reunification program. Refugee groups who arrive now have fewer ties to the United States, and many cannot benefit from the support of an established ethnic community. Unfortunately, these challenges can only be addressed minimally during the 90 day resettlement period when families are supported by refugee resettlement agencies to find jobs and housing. After then, little formal support is available to help refugees develop critical life skills and build meaningful relationships with neighbors and others in the broader community.

Anti-immigrant/refugee feelings in some neighborhoods create additional challenges for refugees to integrate into the mainstream. Bridging racial and cultural divides can be a daunting proposition in communities where long-

1 All quotes are from an internal evaluation conducted by Hitomi Yoshida.
term residents may not wish to identify with newer communities. This is further exacerbated in a climate of anti-immigration and short-term policies that pit newcomers against long-term residents.

During the 2013–2014 pilot phase in Philadelphia, the program helped all women involved develop broader social networks based on caring and mutual respect. This manual outlines key elements of the Friendship Across Cultures pilot program along with tips and lessons learned along the way that can help other organizations interested in adapting the program for their communities.

Friendship Across Cultures is based on recent research, and designed to address the challenges outlined above. For example, recent federal reports recommend the importance of opportunities for established residents and families to engage with refugees to help demystify pre-conceptions and make long term integration more achievable. Additionally, a recent toolkit published by the Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning and Welcoming America highlights good practices in bridging cultures and calls for expanding opportunities to engage established community members as volunteers. These opportunities can promote interaction and lay the foundation for more unified community building efforts that build trust and recognize shared needs and desires.

The program uses a woman to woman model as many refugee women are responsible for managing household finances, securing healthcare, supporting children in school, and maintaining cultural traditions. A substantial number of refugee women report feeling isolated and often lack the necessary life and language skills to navigate complex systems and access services. Friendship Across Cultures taps the life experiences of older female volunteers to help refugee women build supportive networks, better understand American culture, communicate in English, and move towards self-sufficiency.

The program name was the idea of refugee women participants in the pilot program who were interested in the idea of learning English and life-skills in the context of relationship building and friendship. Based on a strengths-based model, Friendship Across cultures emphasizes mutual learning and personal connections. The program was developed based on a recognition of the need for new strategies to help refugee women build on their strengths and talents, learn new skills, access needed resources, including mental health services, and develop broader social networks based on trust and mutual respect. Mobilizing older women volunteers to serve as life skills coaches, family mentors, and advocates for refugee women is a concept that holds great promise for enhancing the lives of refugee families. While the pilot program focused on refugee women from Burma, Bhutan and Iraq who have been in the country from 5 months–5 years, we believe this approach has the potential to be expanded to other more recently arrived refugee communities as well as more long-term refugee communities.

We would like to acknowledge the invaluable contributions from the staff at the Intergenerational Center including Rena Harris, Patience Lehrman, Mady Prowler and Esha Thornton; Lutheran Children and Family Services staff Melissa Fogg and Peggy Fulda and bilingual program assistants / interpreters Zainab Alsawaf, Thagi Bastola, Naw Ta Blu Moo, Khin-Khin Cho and Fadia Hamza as well as all of the volunteers and refugee women program participants. Without their support, this manual would not be possible. The program was funded by a generous grant from the Barra Foundation.
Pilot Program Overview:
January 2013-June 2014

Over the past year, 26 older women volunteers met weekly with approximately 60 refugee women from Burma, Bhutan and Iraq at sites in South and Northeast Philadelphia to strengthen English language and life skills, as well as build trust, connection and friendship. Each group consisted of 12-25 refugee women from the same country, 5-8 volunteers and a bilingual program assistant/interpreter. The groups met weekly for 2 hour sessions over a 10 week period. Three 10-week cohorts were completed. Many volunteers and refugee women attended all three cohorts, others attended two cohorts and a small group attended only one cohort. Weekly sessions included discussions about how to make medical appointments, communicate with children’s teachers, access social services, and deal with community violence; activities that focused on sharing cultural traditions; and visits to local sites such as libraries, dentists, pharmacies and groceries.

Outside of the groups, volunteers:

- helped organize and attended field trips to cultural institutions for the refugee women and their families;
- engaged in interactive cooking, gardening, and arts activities;
- advocated for refugee women negotiating hospital bill payment plans;
- assisted women navigating a local health clinic;
- accessed scholarships for refugee children to attend a summer arts program;
- provided one on one tutoring; and
- connected children with culturally appropriate school services.

Early outcomes suggest that *Friendship Across Cultures* is a promising community engagement model for both refugee women and older women volunteers.
Pilot Program Timeline:
January 2013-June 2014

**January-March:** Establishing partnership structure and agreements between agencies; Identification of communities; location of venues for groups; recruitment and needs assessments with refugee women

**March-April:** Additional recruitment of refugee women; recruitment and training of volunteers

**April-June:** Cohort One—Burmese and Bhutanese groups (10 week cycle)

**July-August:** Summer break; field trips; evaluation of efforts to date; mid-course corrections as needed

**September-October:** Recruitment and training of volunteers; recruitment and needs assessments with refugee women

**October-December:** Cohort 2—Burmese and Bhutanese groups (10 week cycle)

**December-February:** Winter break; field trips; evaluation of efforts to date; mid-course corrections as needed

**February-March:** Recruitment and training of volunteers; recruitment and needs assessments with refugee women (recruit for additional Iraqi cohort)

**March-May:** Cohort 3—Burmese, Bhutanese and Iraqi groups (10 week cycle)

**May-June:** Complete program evaluation
The goals of the Friendship Across Cultures program are to foster intercultural and intergenerational relationships and support refugee integration \(^1\) through connecting refugee women with women age 55+ who are seeking opportunities for meaningful community engagement and cross cultural learning. The program taps the life experiences of older women volunteers and women refugees to build supportive networks and help refugee women better understand American Culture, communicate in English and move towards self-sufficiency.

**Anticipated outcomes for refugee women include:**

- increased knowledge of community resources and ability to access them
- increased perceived sense of support from the receiving community
- increased sense of connectedness with members of receiving communities
- increased confidence in ability to speak English

**Anticipated outcomes for volunteers include:**

- increased sense of purpose and meaningful civic involvement
- increased understanding of the refugee experience and needs of refugee families
- increased knowledge and skill in group interaction and communication strategies across cultural differences
- increased sense of connectedness with members of refugee communities

The program’s multiple goals and approaches should be clearly communicated from the beginning to all staff members, volunteers, and refugee participants in order to promote a shared understanding and sense of mission among participants.

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\(^1\) Refugee Integration is defined by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees as a two-way process involving efforts by the refugee and the host country to create the conditions that will allow individual refugees to start rebuilding their lives.
Establishing Cross-Agency Partnerships

Collaboration between organizations that have expertise and experience working with refugees and those that can engage older volunteers is critical to the success of this kind of intergenerational, intercultural program. The Friendship Across Cultures pilot program was developed as a partnership between the Intergenerational Center (IGC) and Lutheran Children and Family Services (LCFS), a refugee resettlement agency. The Intergenerational Center, the fiscal agent for the grant, was responsible for the program evaluation and reporting as well as recruiting, training and managing the older adult volunteers. Lutheran Children and Family Services was a subcontractor on the grant and responsible for hiring and supervising the bilingual program assistants/interpreters as well as recruiting and managing the refugee women participants. Staff from both agencies met on a regular basis to discuss the progress of the program and trouble shoot about mid-course corrections and program management issues as they arose.

Staff roles:

The roles will likely vary within each initiative, depending on organizational capacity and mission. Listed below are some major responsibilities of the Refugee Resettlement Agency and their non-profit partner.

*Note: As the fiscal agent, the Intergenerational Center assumed more responsibility for overall program direction and management. For replication purposes, however, either the volunteer management agency or the refugee resettlement organization could assume the role of fiscal agent, and take greater overall responsibility for program management.*

**Refugee Resettlement Agency**

**Program Manager/Coordinator**

- Negotiate subcontracts (if applicable).
- Provide fiscal oversight.
- Recruit and supervise bilingual program assistants.
Secure culturally appropriate space for group meetings. (For additional strategies for location selection see page 32)

Work with bilingual program assistants to identify the key issues and interests of refugee women.

Recruit and manage on-going participation of refugee participants.

Provide information and materials to volunteers to help provide context about refugee experiences in the home country and the United States.

Support the development of culturally appropriate and supportive behaviors among volunteers.

Identify opportunities for formal and informal events.

### Bilingual program assistant

- Support the identification and recruitment of potential participants.
- Make weekly reminder calls to refugee participants.
- Trouble shoot with staff on an as-needed basis.
- Provide cultural advising to volunteers and program staff.
- Interpret for groups and field trips, and translate written materials as needed.

### Non-Profit Partner/Volunteer Management Organization

#### Program Manager/Coordinator

- Negotiate subcontracts (if applicable) and provide fiscal oversight.
- Recruit and screen older volunteers.
  - Create and disseminate recruitment materials.
  - Identify key recruitment sites.
  - Conduct in-person screenings.
- Design and facilitate volunteer orientation, pre-service training and in-service meetings.
- Manage volunteers and group logistics.
  - Develop and maintain contact lists, records of attendance, etc.
● Document classes through photos, videos, etc.
● Communicate with volunteers as needed regarding concerns.
● Attend between 3-9 classes monthly.
● Coordinate logistics for volunteer trainings, orientations and in-service trainings.
● Organize volunteers into pairs to facilitate each class.
● Research engaging and creative materials (activities, icebreakers, possible small field trip) to support volunteers in the development of their class curriculum.
● Ensure that volunteers are prepared for each class with materials, lesson plan, etc.
● Send out copies of lesson plan to all volunteers in advance of class.
● Identify other resources as needed and share with volunteers.

■ Facilitate partner meetings to discuss plan and logistics.
■ Subcontract with outside evaluator/oversee evaluation process.

TIPS and LESSONS LEARNED

✓ Effective inter-agency cooperation requires a clear division of roles and responsibilities and transparent communication between staff at different levels. Managing collaborative relationships can be challenging at times because of the complex and demanding nature of community and volunteer work. Partnership work should factor in mid-course assessment of the collaborative structure to sustain a fair and mutually beneficial partnership.

✓ Ongoing cross-agency communication, culturally competent staff and organizational commitment to the refugee communities are the key foundations for cross-agency partnerships. The organization managing volunteers should have experience working with older adults and volunteer management. The refugee resettlement partner should have a strong connection to the refugee communities in which it is working.

✓ The bilingual program assistants play an important role in the program’s success. The project should consider enhancing their role by creating leadership development opportunities for them and allocating sufficient time for them to be fully immersed in the project. As refugees themselves, the program assistants in the pilot program sometimes faced some similar challenges to those the participants experienced. The volunteers also provided additional support to the program assistants including tutoring for college classes, finding employment and advocating for them regarding bill collection issues.
Volunteer Recruitment

The following section describes successful outreach strategies utilized for the program, as well as mid-course adjustments made in the recruitment process to improve the program quality.

Recruitment Strategies

Grounded in the mission of “baby boomer” civic engagement and networked with organizations working with retired or ready-to-retire professionals, the Intergenerational Center publicized the volunteer opportunity to a wide group of older women. Outreach strategies included publicizing the pilot project in outside and in-house e-newsletters, circulating e-mail announcements, presenting the opportunity in person at various organization meetings, and utilizing personal connections to spread the news by word of mouth.

Two groups which specifically target older adults for meaningful post-retirement opportunities played a key role for promoting the program: the Osher Institute, a lifelong learning academy for retired persons, and the Transition Network, an organization for professional women age 50+. More than 50% of the volunteers reported that they heard about the opportunity through one of these two organizations. Other organizations where you might recruit older women include: senior centers, faith-based groups, service groups, interest related clubs, pre-retirement workshops, AARP chapters, and professional associations.

Recruitment Messages for Volunteers

The recruitment target age was 55+, but candidates below this age were not excluded if they could commit to a day time volunteer schedule. The following aspects of the program were particularly appealing to female volunteer candidates age 55+. Consider integrating these messages into your flyers, email message, in-person recruitment meetings and other recruitment tools.

- **Meaningful and purposeful opportunities during a new life stage**
  The program responds to older women’s yearning for purposeful service opportunities. Volunteers in the pilot program often discussed both hopes and anxiety about the next stage of life (post-
retirement). This program provides meaningful opportunities for them to contribute their skills and talents. Some may be looking to volunteer in roles that are related to their previous professional work, while others may be exploring outside of their professional background.

- **Global and cultural engagement**
  An opportunity to meet and interact with people from different parts of the world had a strong appeal to many women. Some volunteers in the pilot program indicated that the opportunity to work with people from particular regions such as Southeast Asia or the Middle East attracted them to the program.

- **Supporting refugees**
  Some volunteers described a personal sense of commitment to help immigrants and refugees because their families had migrated to the United States and experienced similar struggles adjusting to life in a new land. They remembered the support given by local agencies and community members and wanted to give back.

### Screening of Volunteers

A critical step in the process is the one-on-one screening interview to select those who would be appropriate for the program. The recruitment and selection of volunteer candidates for the FAC program requires finding volunteers with cultural and religious sensitivity. The purpose of the interview is to clarify program goals, discuss the positive impact the candidates can make through the program, and communicate the challenging nature of the work as well as the flexibility and commitment required. Each volunteer should complete an application prior to the interview. You can use the screening interview to probe for additional information about their skills and interests in order to leverage the backgrounds of each volunteer to support program efforts and provide a tailored volunteer experience for the women.

Key characteristics to look for when screening volunteers include:

- Openness to other cultures and religions
- Sense of commitment, initiative, and creativity
- Adaptability and flexibility
- Reciprocity—willingness to learn from refugee women and embrace a bi-directional learning experience
Role of the Volunteer

- Collaborate with co-facilitator to develop curriculum and facilitate two sessions during 10-week cycle
- Attend the majority of the sessions and engage in small group work and relationship building
- Develop greater knowledge of the experiences of the new Americans\(^2\) in your group: their skills, assets and challenges
- Practice communicating across cultural differences with new Americans
- Attend in-service training and provide constructive feedback about your experience in the program
- Attend field trips and engage in informal relationship building with new Americans
- (Optional) Spend time with new Americans in a one-on-one capacity
- Provide support to other volunteers

“When you ask for help, they (volunteers) pay attention to you…. You can see actions (from them). When someone doesn’t speak English, people just ignore you, but the women’s group volunteers, they help. They really care about us.”

-Program participant

\(^2\) The refugee women in the pilot program mentioned that they preferred to be referred to as “new Americans” rather than refugees, so this was the language adopted. In replicating this program, it will be useful to consult with the refugee women about how they prefer to be referred to.
Volunteers Wanted

A Women’s Initiative
Make a difference in your life and lives of refugee women

Women of all ages needed to build relationships that create a welcoming environment and help newcomers practice English and learn life skills.

No special skills required. You will receive on-going training, support and translation services.

Group meetings held at:
Northeast Regional Library: 2228 Cottman Blvd.

For more information contact:
Corita Brown 215-204-4324 corita@templecil.org

This program, sponsored by The Intergenerational Center at Temple University and Lutheran Children and Family Services, is made possible through a generous grant from the Barra Foundation
Friendship Across Cultures:

Volunteer Application

Name:

Address:

Telephone (home): (mobile):

Email address:

**Work Experience**

Former or current occupation/job:

---

**Please tell us why you are interested in participating in this program and what you hope to get out of this experience.**

---

**Please tell us about any specific interests or skills you have that you would like to share with participants.**

---

**Please describe any experience you have had working with people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds and with immigrant and/or refugee communities.**

---

**What concerns, if any, do you have about participating in this program?**

---

**What is your availability now and over the summer?**
The following section describes successful outreach strategies utilized for the program, as well as mid-course adjustments made in the recruitment process to improve the program quality.

**Recruitment Strategies**

- **Tap networks.**
  Refugee resettlement agencies can recruit participants by tapping into existing networks of organizations that serve refugees, including other resettlement and social service agencies.

- **Mobilize the bilingual program assistants as program promoters.**
  The bilingual program assistants can play an integral role in recruiting and retaining community participants. Their role may also entail ensuring overall community buy-in. For example, the Bhutanese bilingual program assistant initially faced some sense of hesitation from male refugees when the launch of the women’s program was announced. She openly discussed this with the community and explained how the entire family benefits from the program. According to the bilingual program assistant, male community members eventually agreed by saying, “If women are educated, the whole house (bold) will be educated.” The assistants in the pilot program found that a personal invitation from a bilingual female staff member worked effectively for recruitment, particularly for participants who were less connected to community-based programs or agencies.

**Recruitment Messages for Refugee Women**

- **Tailor your message.**
  As refugee groups have very different histories and interests, it can be helpful to tailor outreach for each refugee group. For example, based on feedback from the bilingual program assistant, Lutheran Children and Family Service (LCFS) tailored outreach messages for the Burmese and the Bhutanese emphasizing the development of social connections with Americans and small group life-skill building. For Iraqis, the message highlighted concrete educational and career information and skill-building. LCFS already had established close connections with the Bhutanese and Burmese women through programs and events held at their community center in South Philadelphia and could easily connect with potential participants through ongoing programming. The Iraqi community did not have an established community site and was more dispersed geographically. Therefore, more intensive and intentional recruitment efforts were required, including outreach through other resettlement agencies, individual phone calls and follow ups.
Needs/assets assessment and ongoing feedback

An initial needs/assets assessment, conducted with the refugee women prior to the beginning of the program, will enable you to identify key issues to focus on in the groups, skills and interests of refugee women and resources that refugees want to learn more about. The content of the weekly group sessions can then be developed based on the data gathered from the assessment process.

■ Role of the bilingual program assistants

The program assistants can support the development of the needs/assets assessment in several ways. They can:

● review the overall assessment to ensure cultural relevance;
● translate the document;
● conduct assessments with future participants who prefer to complete the assessment without writing and reading; and
● conduct regular check ins with the participants to learn about their experiences and trouble shoot any issues that may be impacting program participation.

■ Responding to feedback

The group content and process is not one size fits all and should be adjusted to the interests and skill levels of participants. The feedback provided to the bilingual program assistants from mid-course check-ins will allow you to make on-going corrections that adjust the group content and structure, as needed. For example, retention issues arose in one group and the program assistant had a number of individual discussions with participants to find out why they had stopped attending. These sessions raised two key issues. First, many of the young mothers with small children had on-going child care issues and various medical and service appointments. They relied on bilingual friends and relatives to accompany them to these appointments which sometimes conflicted with the afternoon meeting time of the group. Second, the program assistant found out that the level and the didactic nature of English instruction in the initial sessions did not match participants’ skill and comfort level and contributed to an initial decrease in attendance. Staff from both organizations and the bilingual program assistant met to discuss strategies for adjusting the class time, content levels and instructional approach. They decided to incorporate more arts and culture sharing activities into the sessions, and the time of the group was changed to better accommodate the schedules of young mothers. As a result, attendance increased.

Sample Assessment Form, Next Page

Note

1 The survey has to be translated or orally interpreted for limited English speaking participants.
Friendship Across Cultures:
Assessment Form

Contact Information:

Name:
Address:
Phone Number:
Birthday:
Country and Language:
Date of Arrival in the USA:

What do you want to learn in these groups?

☐ ESL     ☐ Transportation     ☐ American Culture
☐ Money     ☐ Employment     ☐ Health and Wellness
☐ Safety     ☐ Children’s Programs     ☐ Programs for Elderly

Is there anything else you would like to learn?

What challenges are you facing?

Are there any places you would like to visit?

Are there any skills you would like to share?

What are your hobbies or interests?
The program’s successful volunteer recruitment suggests an increasing demand among 55+ professional women for community service opportunities that fosters cross-cultural engagement and meaningful self-exploration. However pre-training and on-going skill-building are critical for fostering effective and meaningful volunteer engagement. The following section outlines key components to cover in the pre-training and in-service training settings.

Volunteer Pre-Service Training

Part One: Overview of Refugee Issues, Team Building and Program Logistics

Minimum time frame: 4 hours

The first pre-service training session should preferably be held at the community site. This helps volunteers understand the environment they will work in before beginning their service and gives them an idea of the commuting time. IGC and LCFS staff co-facilitated a 4-hour pre-service training (part one) for the volunteers prior to each 10-week session. This could be extended as a full day or two half-days depending on the availability and interest of the volunteers. At a minimum, pre-service training should provide an overview of program goals and volunteer roles/expectations, information about the refugee resettlement system, the socio-political and cultural backgrounds of the refugee groups, and team building opportunities for the volunteers. Optionally, you can provide volunteers with a calendar of group sessions and group topics identified from your needs assessment. Volunteers can sign up for the groups they plan to co-facilitate, and begin getting to know their facilitation partners.

The emphasis on refugee backgrounds and the resettlement system is an important component of this training. In the pilot program, LCFS staff and bilingual program assistants (who are refugees themselves) provided content in this area. In a panel discussion, the program assistants shared their group’s migration journey and perspectives on their new life in America (“challenges and hopes”). The bilingual program assistants’ personal testimonials were powerful and deepened volunteers’ interest in domestic refugee issues. After the panel, the volunteers had an opportunity to share their reflections and questions. The presentation also helped establish a foundation for a mutual working relationship between volunteers and program assistants.

After each group cohort has completed a 10 week cycle, we recommend reflecting on the effectiveness of the pre-service training and adjusting its content as necessary.

3 Although the bilingual program assistants/interpreters’ personal testimonials were very effective, LCFS staff cautions the risks of publically interviewing any refugee staff or community members because the introduction of sensitive information could provoke overwhelming emotions for all participants, even if careful preparation is provided. Experienced staff members with in-depth social work or mental health background should provide guidance on how to facilitate this type of public personal testimonials.
Sample Agenda: Volunteer Pre-Service Training Part One

- 10-10:30 Group Introductions
- 10:30-11:00 Program introduction: goals of the program, role/expectations of the volunteer, logistics and communications protocol
- 11:00-11:45 Basic overview of Iraqi/Bhutanese/Burmese geography and history/ the refugee resettlement process and the role of the refugee agency
- 11:45-12:30 Q and A with Bilingual program assistant/interpreter who will supply cultural context of refugee communities
- 12:30-1:30 Working lunch: discussion of learning styles and cultural norms
- 1:30-2:15 Overview of class structure; Class sign up; connect with facilitation partner and begin discussion of co-facilitation strategies
- 2:15-2:45 Closing/Evaluation
Facilitation Training

1. On a scale of 1-10 how useful do you think this training overall will be for your work as a volunteer (now or in the future)? _______

   Please comment on your rating:

2. What were the most valuable parts of the training for you?

3. Do you have any suggestions for how to improve the training?
You will likely have volunteers with a range of experience developing and facilitating groups for limited English speakers. In the pilot program, some volunteers were retired professional educators or specialists in teaching English as a second language. For these volunteers, developing a class outline and facilitating a group was relatively simple. For others, it represented an entirely new type of work, and the class design and facilitation tasks provoked some anxiety and uncertainty. Providing an initial training on facilitation skills may help alleviate anxiety for those with less experience. If there are volunteers with more experience, you may choose to leverage their expertise through engaging them to design and facilitate the pre-service training and/or on-going in-service training with the other volunteers. In addition to deepening group facilitation skills and introducing curriculum design strategies, the facilitation training helps build trust and connection among the volunteers and further clarify to program goals and the role of the volunteer.

This training should provide an experiential opportunity for volunteers to practice developing class plans and facilitating groups. We recommend that the training be facilitated by someone with:

- Experience teaching limited English speakers
- Experience teaching experiential learning techniques for adults

During a portion of the training you can provide volunteers with a calendar of group sessions and group topics identified from your needs assessment. Volunteers can sign up for the groups they plan to co-facilitate and pair up with partners to begin discussing a class plan using the curriculum design and facilitation techniques from the training.

The facilitation training during the pilot program introduced the “four steps technique”, a structure for volunteers to use that helped support mutual learning, maximize engagement and create a safe learning environment. The “four steps technique” technique was introduced by Dr. Aili Pogust, one of the experienced volunteers that we tapped as a facilitator for this training (see facilitation training materials on pages 30-35). Broadly speaking, the four step technique helps group members reach out to each other and make connections at the start of each meeting. Incorporating a similar structure to begin each meeting creates a weekly and consistent institution of ritual which has been shown to provide security to group participants. While group members share personal information, the structure ensures that the individual will not be pressured to respond on a topic of a sensitive nature, which can be important when working with refugees. The structure also provides opportunities for each person to develop, exchange, and reinforce language in an authentic environment of conversation.
Sample Training Outline: Facilitation Training

Welcome 10:00-10:05

The focus of this workshop will address how to design presentations that build relationships between the volunteers and refugees who participate in the ESL/Life Skills training that the volunteers provide.

Introduce presenters, genesis of workshop, encourage questions

Ice Breaker 10:05-10:15

Sharing something about your name and briefly share something about it: Who gave your name? What is the meaning of your name? How did you come to get that name?

Sharing Information About the Program 10:15-10:25

Its focus:

☑ Building relationships through ESL/Life Skills training
☑ Field Trips to build connections across ages and cultures
☑ Home visits and/or informal gatherings with small groups

Anticipated Outcomes for Refugee Women:

☑ Increased knowledge of community resources and ability to access them
☑ Increased perceived sense of support from the receiving community
☑ Increased sense of connectedness with members of receiving communities
☑ Increased confidence in ability to speak English

Anticipated Outcomes for Volunteers:

☑ Increased sense of purpose and meaningful civic involvement
☑ Increased understanding of the refugee experience and needs of refugee families
☑ Increased knowledge and skill in group interaction and communication strategies
☑ Increased sense of connectedness with members of refugee communities

Four-Step Design to Encourage Building Relationships and ESL Skills 10:25-10:55

The following four steps would begin each presentation and range in time from 15-30 minutes depending on the number of participants and content. (Presentation will also touch on optimal room set up)
A Greeting

The purposes of the greeting are to learn and use everyone’s name and to become friendly caretakers who greet and welcome everyone to the room.

- Each person takes a turn around the circle to greet the person to her right. "Good morning or Good Afternoon and then say person’s name."
- The person greeted spells her name while a scribe writes it on the white board. (optional)

More creative versions of this will be discussed.

A Sharing

The purposes of sharing are to give participants opportunities to practice speaking to a group, to develop vocabulary and to learn more about the individuals in the group.

- Each person takes a turn around the circle to share a favorite food, a favorite color, a new word they learned in English, etc.
- Best to anchor a sharing to the content that will be taught after the four steps are completed.

A Group Activity

The purpose of the group activity is to allow everyone to contribute at their own level by building a repertoire of physical, intellectual or artistic activities that might include active games, math activities, choral and poetry readings, memorization, singing and chanting.

- The leader hits a gong or rings a bell and then gives directions for forming groups, such as "Get into groups of three." The leader hits the gong again and gives a different direction: "Get into groups where everyone is wearing the color red." The activity moves quickly and the participants form and reform groups as quickly as possible.
- Best to get people up and moving about and share categories that you call out.

A Message Chart

The purposes of a message chart are to help participants focus on what they will be learning, to develop and reinforce language, to build community through shared written information and to reinforce social skills.

- An example of what may be written on the chart:
Good Afternoon.

Today is Tuesday.

Do you know what the Thanksgiving holiday means?  Yes  No

(Participants come up to the chart and put a check under yes or no.

TIPS for the Message Chart

✓ The amount of writing is based on the language capacity of the group.

✓ Best to anchor the chart on the topic presented that day.

✓ Best to have a question written to which all must physically come to the chart and respond.

Optional Q and A 10:55-11:10

BREAK—11:10-11:20

Effective Strategies to Incorporate ESL Learning in Presentations 11:20-12:00

■ Using visuals — what types of visuals and how to use (example)

■ Repetition — practice repeating hello my name is [name] in Estonian using technique “Tehrreh-mihnu- nee mee - ohn - [Name]”

■ Total physical response

■ Large group techniques

■ Small group techniques

LUNCH 12:00-12:30
How to Reduce Information to Manageable Interactive Teaching Points 12:30-1:00

✓ We provide a packet of information about a particular life skill.

✓ Workshop participants are given time to pick out three concepts they want to teach the refugees.

✓ Groups of three discuss what they selected and why.

✓ Participants are provided various small group activities they can use to reinforce the concepts and build relationships.

PRACTICE: 1:00-1:30

Share back: 1:30-1:45

Split into small groups:

- Group 1 — greeting, sharing, group activity
- Group 2 — message chart, closing reflection
- Group 3 — large group activity
- Group 4 — small group activity

Closing 1:45-2:00

Closing reflection: Discussion of informal relationships outside of training
TIPS and STRATEGIES for Incorporating English in the Sessions

Developing materials

✓ Use visual support for learning, create colorful and striking visuals;
✓ Teach language that is relevant and useful for everyday life;
✓ Make a written translation available when possible;
✓ Develop activities with easily attainable materials; and
✓ Take time during each class to review previously taught skills and concepts.

Communicating with the group

✓ Gestures and signs support communication;
✓ Use open questions (questions that are not answered with yes or no) and guided answers;
✓ Use simple, relevant language;
✓ Be patient – always provide speaker with time and space to consider and process; and
✓ Keep directions simple, 1-2 steps.

Engaging participants

✓ Develop experiential activities that are fun and get people moving around;
✓ Create a learning environment that embeds and honors the participants’ culture;
✓ Be sure to ask learners how they learn best and do not interfere with learner’s choice of process;
✓ Conversation time: allow for organic process and flow of communication; and
✓ Provide choices for learners.

“I felt I can be honest with them.... they really like to help us. We felt that we love them and trust them.”
—Program participant

Developing Plans for Each Group
Facilitation Questions:

Questions to consider as you are developing your group outline

1. How will you adapt the 4 step model for the beginning part of your class?

2. What will you do to briefly review learning from the previous week at the beginning of class?

3. How will you structure small group activities so not much translation is needed? (i.e. visuals etc.)

4. How will you create some opportunities during the group for volunteers to learn some basic phrases in their native language?

5. What will you do to create an atmosphere of fun and connection as part of the learning experience?

6. What type of closing reflection will you facilitate at the end?

7. How will you work with the bilingual program assistant to get her feedback?⁴

⁴ In the pilot program, the program assistants were only funded for a few hours a week of work. Consequently, the program staff set clear boundaries with the volunteers about how to engage with the assistants so that the assistants were not over committed or over extended. If they are funded for more hours, they can be more engaged with the group design.
**Introduction to the Four Step Design**  
*Developed by Dr. Aili Pogust*

*The Four Step Design template offers an advantageous foundation for group meetings as the structure supports participants in their efforts to build relationships.*

The Four Step Design is a community building ritual encompassing several quick routines:

- Greeting fellow participants.
- Sharing and learning names of members.
- Group sharing of a common activity.
- Group building through learning about each other.

Key aspects of the design:

- Group members reach out to each other and make connections at the start of each meeting.
- Structure provides maximum engagement for all members.
- Each person contributes to the creation of learning community in a safe environment.
- Expectations for group members are clear and concrete; each person contributes at a comfortable level.
- While group members share personal information, the structure ensures that the individual will not be pressured to respond on a topic of a sensitive nature.
- The structure provides opportunities for each person to develop, exchange, and reinforce language in an authentic environment of conversation.
- Weekly and consistent institution of ritual provides security.
Example # 1 of Four Step Design
Developed by Dr. Aili Pogust

Using the steps to begin a class on the theme of relaxation and exercise

THE FOUR STEP MODEL

Greeting
Purpose: to learn and use everyone’s name and to welcome each participant to the room.

✓ Each person takes a turn around the circle to greet the person to her right.

Sharing
Purpose: to give participants opportunities to practice speaking to a group, to develop vocabulary and to learn more about the individuals in the group.

✓ Each person takes a turn to share how they feel about a topic (i.e. snow). They will share by giving a number from 1 to 10 with one indicating severe dislike and ten indicating great joy. Depending on the level of trust in the room and language level, people may share more or less.

Group Activity
Purpose: to allow everyone to contribute at their own level by building a repertoire of physical, intellectual or artistic activities that might include active games, math activities, choral and poetry readings, memorization, singing and chanting.

✓ We all stand in a circle. I will start a physical movement which is copied as it goes one by one around the circle. When the movement reaches me the person to my right starts a movement and so on.

Message Chart
Purpose: to help participants focus on what they will be learning, to develop and reinforce language, to build community through shared written information, and to reinforce social skills.

✓ Written on the chart will be the following:

Good Morning.
Today is Wednesday.
Do you exercise every day? Yes No

(Participants come up to the chart and put a check under yes or no).
Adapting the Four Step Design to 2-Hour Session

Greeting (5 minutes)
Sit in a circle. All participants should have a name tag on. We go around the circle, greeting each other by name.

Sharing (10 minutes)
*Today we are going to focus on weaving. Weaving can be all different colors. What is your favorite color?*

Participants: *My favorite color is ________*

Group Activity Finding colors (10 minutes)
Facilitator will explain that when she says the name of a color, everyone will move around the room and touch something (or someone) that has that color. Repeat this with about 5-10 colors. Say “*Everyone touch something with the color _____*”

Message Board (10 minutes)
Write: *Good morning. Today is Wednesday, March 19.*

*Do you know how to weave?* Write Yes and No on the board. Each person comes to board and checks off Yes or No.

The person says, “*Yes, I know how to weave.*” OR “*No, I do not know how to weave.*”

Large Group Activity (45 minutes)
*Today we are going to talk about weaving.*

Looms are set up and language related to weaving is introduced: Weaving, loom, patterns, woven bag, and yarn. If possible, a handout is created with a word and its corresponding picture. Refugee women share their traditional looms and weaving and everyone gets a chance to try weaving. Facilitators model questions to weavers using weaving and color vocabulary, other volunteers engage participants in discussion using vocabulary. Take pictures to share at future meetings.
Small Group Activity (20 minutes)
Facilitators review vocabulary. Gather in small groups that include at least one volunteer and several participants. Practice reading, writing and speaking sentences. (Often participants request a particular sentence and volunteer will write the sentence for the participant to read, read aloud and copy. Note: volunteers should always write in complete sentences.)

Closing (5 - 10 minutes)
We gather in a circle. Invite a few comments from group about highlights from today’s time together. We go around the circle saying, “Good-by, [name of person next to you]. Have a nice day.”

Materials:

- Message board
- Worksheets for everyone with vocabulary words and pictures
- Weaving materials
Adapting the Four Step Design for a Field Trip

Greeting (5 minutes)

Facilitators will say “Good Afternoon, My name is_______”

Everyone will go around the circle and say “Good Afternoon, My name is_______”

Sharing (10-15 minutes)

We will briefly discuss the upcoming Nepali New Year, which is on April 14th.

We will ask each woman to name one special food that she will eat or make for her family on New Year’s Day.

Activity (60 minutes)

We will then walk as a group to the Nepali grocery store and the Bhutanese Community Center.

Volunteers and refugee women gather in small groups and walk together. Volunteers create opportunities for women to speak English during the walk, while visiting the corner grocery store and when we visit the community center.

Topics for potential discussion on the walk: Nepali and American New Year celebrations; families; cooking. Include general vocabulary, e.g. street, sidewalk, house, store, food, etc.

At the store refugee women will share with the volunteers the foods that they buy, particularly for the New Year celebration. Volunteers will ask questions to learn more about the holiday and enable refugees to practice English.

Sample questions: Is this sweet or spicy? How much does this cost? How often do you cook this? What is your favorite food here? What foods here do you not like?

Return: walk back to the community center.
Message Chart (10 minutes)

Did you learn something new about American New Year celebration?
Did you learn something new about Nepali New Year celebration?       Yes       No

(Participants come up to the chart and put a check under yes or no.)

Closing Circle (10 minutes)

We will have a closing circle and ask each woman to name one thing she hopes will happen in the New Year.
**Weekly Groups**

**Group Structure**

After completing the pre-service training, all volunteers sign up to co-facilitate 2 or more of the sessions during the 10 week cycle. The sessions are held weekly for 1.5–2 hours.

Instead of creating classes with multiple ethnic/language based groups, the *Friendship Across Cultures* model subdivides participants into groups where all women are from the same country (though among some refugee groups there are multiple languages spoken and cultures represented). Each group includes 10–25 refugee women, a bilingual program assistant who can explain the culture and experience of the specific target group in detail, and 5–10 volunteers. This structure is designed to create a safe learning environment for refugees and help deepen the volunteers’ knowledge and empathy for the specific refugee groups with whom they work. Having this many volunteers creates greater opportunity for personal connection in small groups and permits the volunteers, many of whom have multiple commitments, to miss several groups during the 10 weeks without any programmatic disruption. Many refugee participants from the pilot program reported that the close connections they felt with the volunteers was distinctly different from regular ESL programs in which different refugee groups were mixed and there was only one instructor.

**Location Selection**

Finding an appropriate location for the group meetings is an important element of the program. We recommend selecting a geographically accessible place that is not located in a refugee resettlement office. We observed that the accessibility, comfort and familiarity of the space contributed substantially to the program’s ability to create a safe and trusting environment for the program. If your agency has to use its own space, we recommend creating a separate area that is differentiated from the place where traditional “service provision” is conducted. LCFS operated the weekly sessions for the Burmese and Bhutanese at a community center located in a rented store front space in South Philadelphia. The Iraqis met at a local library in Northeast Philadelphia.

**Group Content**

Groups often combined several of the following four key components: ESL/Life-Skills, Cultural Exchange/Arts, Community Building/Story Sharing, and Information/Resource Sharing. For example, depending on the interests of participants, you might consider including an arts-based strategy for story telling which provides opportunities for ESL learning and practice. Below is an explanation of each component, including examples from the pilot project and suggested implementation strategies.
Identify group topics that are aligned with the skill levels and needs of refugee women

You can gather this information from the needs/assets assessments and from the bilingual program assistant. For the Bhutanese and Burmese refugees who spent years in a refugee camp, adjusting to urban life has been challenging. These two groups appreciated a group focus on basic life-skills related to American housing, household items, seasonal outfits, reading street signs and understanding directions. The Iraqi group came from a more urban environment and with greater levels of formal education. As a result, they were more interested in learning English and gathering information about local resources, and less concerned with learning life skills.

Create opportunities to learn from real life experiences

Engaging refugee participants in real life contexts was particularly effective. Volunteers took participants on field trips to a local library, a pharmacy and a food market. They explained things on site and demonstrated how to interact with others in English. These neighborhood outings also enabled volunteers to learn more about refugee participants’ lives that supported further session planning. One volunteer described it this way:

*Our trip to the drug store was phenomenal because we were teaching there… We just got there and there are all sorts of visuals to point out at the store… they were asking me why are there so many different kinds of Shampoos (in America)… and we told them if you buy Johnson and Johnson’s shampoo all family members can use it. Also, they were afraid to talk to the pharmacist and we broke the ice.*

Create opportunities for language learning in the context of culture sharing

English as a Second Language (ESL) was incorporated into sessions on life skills and American culture. Refugee women appreciated the practical and personal English language learning, as compared to a traditional ESL classroom. The Burmese participants noted:

*“ESL usually is about vocabularies and reading and writing, but in this group you learn about American things along with English.”*

*“The way they taught English in this program was great. They bring pictures, visuals; I learned how to make sentences.”*
Cultural Exchange, Arts and Crafts

Emphasizing cultural exchange (both American and refugee cultures) can help motivate refugees and volunteers, and sustain their involvement. Celebrating the cultures of refugees’ native countries helps to establish a strengths-based (vs. deficit based) approach to the program and provides opportunities for reciprocal learning.

During the pilot program, arts and crafts, cooking and cultural activities were incorporated into the weekly sessions and became key components of the program. These activities were intentionally designed to build more bi-directional interaction and develop mutual relationships among women. Engagement in crafts, such as knitting, has been shown to contribute to positive mental health outcomes as well. Volunteers initially questioned the educational outcomes of these activities. However, through experimentation in the groups and reflection during the in-service sessions, they learned how to effectively incorporate English language learning into these creative, social activities and began to see a range of benefits.

Cooking demonstrations were among the most successful activities. The refugees learned how to make fruit and vegetable salads from the volunteers and some reported that they introduced these salads into their own families as their first American dish. All three refugee groups shared their ethnic foods with the volunteers and practiced English while teaching them about their traditional celebrations and foods.

Through showcasing their own cultures to American volunteers, refugee women began to take a more active role in the program as teachers and mutual relationships developed among participants. Many refugee women expressed appreciation of the volunteers’ interest in their traditions. As a Karen (Burmese) participant expressed:

*We showed Karen dress and weaving. They (the volunteers) loved it, the love the color and the design of our weaving. They showed their interest in our culture, dress. We feel like they care about Karen culture and have become friends.*

For many Iraqi participants, a cultural celebration they organized at a local museum was described as the best moment in the program. As one participant described:
I felt like I was home again in my country. Everything was great, food, dance, music. All the Iraqi and Americans together, it was the most beautiful day.

All groups also enjoyed sessions on American holidays such as Thanksgiving, Valentine’s Day and Mother’s Day. These holiday celebrations were well received because they were designed to be educational and promote shared connections among participants. For example, for the Thanksgiving Celebration, the volunteers not only brought the entire traditional Thanksgiving meal, they also explained the meaning of the holiday in relatable terms. One volunteer explained:

*We made the American tradition of Thanksgiving relatable for them by emphasizing the journey to a new country, new freedom… we thought about what is relevant to Americans and what is relevant to the Bhutanese and found connecting points.*

The groups also took cultural field trips to the zoo, local museums, dance performances and live music.

**Community Building and Story Sharing**

Weekly sessions at the Bhutanese and Iraqi sites incorporated photo and storytelling as techniques for all participants to learn more about each other’s families and personal experiences. These and other cultural and creative activities helped develop personal, reciprocal relationships among participants and enabled refugee women and volunteers to assume the role of both teacher and learner.

For example, the Bhutanese women introduced Diwali, a religious and cultural celebration. At this session, all the participants brought family photos and some started to share memories of their upbringing in Bhutan. American volunteers also shared some family histories. The bilingual interpreter for the program said that she believes that sharing these photos and stories led the group members to deepen their relationships with each other. She describes the session below:

*One day we each brought a family picture. One (volunteer) had a photo of her grandmother immigrating to the US and coming on a ship. Their journey took 64 days and we all listened and were amazed at how difficult it was. We shared and understood that everyone goes through difficulties… you just don’t know by looking at American people. But when we shared stories with each other and released some thoughts, we were able to relate*
to one another. That day, we saw tears, shared difficult stories from the past. In the end we hugged and felt hope for the future.

Story sharing often happened spontaneously, especially for the Iraqi group. The group was open to sharing their stories from the beginning. Nevertheless, volunteers and staff were very careful in gauging the comfort level and capacity of the group to handle difficult stories. The volunteers consulted with the refugee resettlement agency staff members regarding when to ask questions of a sensitive or personal nature about families. They had a session on developing family trees and asked participants to share family photos which generated active story sharing.

Another group of refugees required a different approach. The Burmese bilingual program assistant informed the volunteers that the traumatic nature of stories from Burma were too heavy and complex for the women to share in this type of program context. The volunteers established relationships and trust with this group by extending personal help to individuals and families, instead of facilitating public storytelling. Through personal support, some volunteers learned Burmese women’s stories and circumstances, which generated more mutual understanding. One volunteer describes the following:

*It took time to get connected with the Burmese women. They are shy…it wasn't until this summer, I helped one child get a scholarship to go the Fleisher Art School. All of a sudden they seem to be trusting us all more. They did not share their stories until one had a water leak at her house and we helped….And now I hear some stories….*

**Information and Resource Sharing**

All groups hosted several guest presenters including medical doctors, health educators, city representatives, an insurance navigator, and community college representatives. Participants also reported that the volunteers’ personal guidance on local resources that took place outside the group was also helpful. Volunteers accompanied some women to a health center where they had experienced mistreatment and struggled to make an appointment. One volunteer who has special education and counseling background helped a mother navigate a special education assessment process for her son. Others helped with bill collection issues with hospitals and utility companies. Volunteers should communicate about the individual assistance they are providing for refugee women to the resettlement staff, so they are aware and can provide appropriate advice.
In-Service Training

Ideally volunteers, volunteer management staff, refugee resettlement staff and bilingual program assistants should all attend these trainings. At a minimum the volunteer management staff and volunteers should attend.

Time frame: 45 minutes-90 minutes.

We recommend scheduling several of these sessions over the course of the 10-week period.

The in-service sessions should be designed to support a productive volunteer environment and make mid-course corrections as needed. The in-service trainings can be facilitated as formal workshops on topics of interest to the volunteers or as informal discussion groups that focus on successes and challenges the volunteers are experiencing in the program. In-service volunteer meetings were held during the pilot program for 1.5 hours every three weeks. While your time frame may vary based on availability and interest, it is valuable to provide opportunities for feedback that can be addressed in real time, rather than after the completion of the group. We recommend the sessions include the following:

- **Gathering information about volunteer capacities and skill sets:**
  While you will gather initial information about volunteers’ skills and abilities during recruitment, the in-service can enable you to deepen your understanding of the volunteers’ skill sets, and potentially identify those who you may tap to provide peer-consultation and training for others as needed.

- **Creating opportunities for self-reflection:**
  The volunteers who took the challenge of community service work as an opportunity for self-reflection seem to have gained the most from the program. The in-service meetings should incorporate discussions on the nature of community work, challenges, and insights volunteers are discovering in their new role. A review of the program goals and expectations and individual ideas about “success” for themselves and the program can help facilitate a deeper sense of their own contribution and benefits.

- **Building a collaborative team**
  Each in-service should deepen the collaborative team building process among the volunteers and bilingual program assistants. Topics for discussion may include:

  - How does each volunteer communicates her group design plans with the rest of the volunteers?
What can do as the volunteer facilitators do to maximize the skills/time for all volunteers present at each session?

What can be done to build an effective collaboration between volunteers and the program assistant?

## Individual support

During the course of the 10 week sessions, staff from the organization responsible for managing volunteers connects weekly with the two volunteers scheduled to facilitate the upcoming session to help them develop an outline, and send their outline in advance to the other volunteers.

*Within the body of research focused on 55+ civic engagement, a recommended best practice is to provide volunteers choice in their level involvement based on their schedule and expertise.*

Volunteers will likely vary in terms of their ability and comfort designing sessions, and the amount of time they want to devote outside of the groups to planning. Some volunteers will require intense individual assistance to develop an outline for the groups they are facilitating, while others will need very little help. We recommend tailoring individual assistance to accommodate each volunteer’s capacity, time and preference for guidance. It can be helpful to provide the week’s facilitators with a spectrum of support opportunities for volunteers including help drafting session outline and agenda, and locating supplemental materials. Some volunteers may be very interested in the freedom to design their own sessions, and have the time and skill to do so. Others may want to simply put their own flourishes on an outline that is already developed.

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### TIPS and LESSONS LEARNED

- **Clearly communicate program goals and expectations from the beginning and reiterate throughout the program.**

- **Openly discuss with volunteers the need for flexibility.**
  Because many volunteers may come from professional backgrounds, they may be unaccustomed to the organic challenges that typically arise in community-based work, especially with refugees (i.e. participants showing up late, need for last minute changes in group content, and other unexpected circumstances.) The ability to cope with these contingencies and uncertainties should be framed as a critical skill set necessary for working in community-based settings.

- **Address anxieties about cross-cultural interaction early on and throughout the program.**
  Initially, volunteers may avoid putting themselves in embarrassing or awkward cross-cultural interactions with those who do not speak English. As a result, during informal “down-time” (before or after the program, or during breaks) you may notice that the volunteers are more comfortable and have the tendency to congregate and chat with each other rather than approaching the refugee women. To address engagement, the training sessions should openly discuss the awkwardness of cross-cultural interactions across language barriers, and identify a range of non-verbal and verbal strategies for developing conversations with limited English speakers.
For the pilot program, an outcomes and process evaluation was conducted to assess the program’s impact on participants. The evaluation also served as a systemic documentation of the pilot’s successes and challenges. The evaluation data were primarily collected through qualitative methods including program observations, stakeholder interviews and participant focus groups. Simple surveys were conducted with both refugee and volunteer participants to triangulate the qualitative data. Evaluation tools such as interview and focus group questions and survey questionnaires were designed to align with the set of intended program goals for each target group (See page 6 for intended program goals for each group – volunteers and refugees). Surveys for refugee participants were translated into their native language and interpretation was provided at the focus groups with refugee participants.

In addition to the summative evaluation effort designed to capture the overall outcomes of the pilot program at the end, the staff members also conducted a formative assessment during the course of the pilot period to reflect and adjust the operation of the program. Group feedback sessions and individual check-in phone calls were arranged with volunteers, bilingual case aids and refugee participants. Below is a set of recommendations for program evaluation:

**Evaluation involves team work.**

- Make the goals of evaluation clear to all project members including program participants. Evaluation is an important part of program operations as an accountability measure for funding, as well as a mechanism for on-going program improvement. Meaningful evaluation should provide relevant data for all stakeholders who actively participate in the program.

**Don’t wait until the end.**

- Although evaluation data may not be required until the end of program period by the funder, we recommend conducting a formative evaluation during the course of the program. Mid-term reflection and check-ins are necessary to identify the areas of adjustment and improvement necessary to ensure satisfactory outcomes in the end.

**Focus on unique needs and motivations of older women volunteers.**

- *Friendship Across Cultures* specifically targets a group of older (55+) American-born women. The evaluation of volunteers needs to focus on the unique characteristics and motivations of this volunteer cohort. Existing research and survey tools on Generativity (Erikson, 1963) could inform evaluation design such as the Loyola Generativity scale LGS developed by the Northwestern University [http://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/foley/instruments/lgs/]
Language and cultural considerations are a key part of evaluation.

- Just like the program operation, language and cultural considerations are essential for the program evaluation. The program should select an evaluator who is experienced in working with immigrant and refugee communities. Mixed methods (surveys, interviews and program observations) are recommended for a program evaluation, with special attention to language translation and interpretation for refugee participants. Evaluation with refugee participants can be challenging due to language diversity, unequal access to reading and writing and the nature of trust and relationships that refugee participants have with the staff and the evaluator(s).

- The program staff and the evaluator(s) need to assess the feasibility of conducting a survey with the refugee groups they are working with. The survey needs to be accurately translated into the refugee’s native language. Depending on the education level of refugee participants, survey questionnaires need to be written in simple language. Some participants may not be literate in their native language, therefore, oral interpretation and one-on-one assistance by an interpreter may be needed.

- Interviews and focus groups with refugee participants should be facilitated and analyzed with cultural sensitivity and awareness. Focus groups and/or interviews should be preferably conducted at a program site which is accessible and familiar to the refugee participants.

- Surveys, interviews and focus groups should ensure confidentiality and not identify names so participants can have an honest discussion in the focus group.

“We are like one family.”
—Program participant
For information on strategies for supporting refugees and immigrants, see the toolkit below developed by Welcoming America and the Spring Institute. The toolkit highlights promising efforts that have helped successfully bridge divides between immigrants and longer-term residents in communities across the country. These efforts have built meaningful connections between immigrants and the native born through contact, improved communication and leadership in order to foster stronger and more unified communities.

**The Receiving Communities Toolkit: A guide for engaging mainstream America in immigrant integration**


The Making your Way curriculum, developed by the Cultural Orientation Resource Center at the Center for Applied Linguistics, provides lesson plans, tools, and techniques to help refugees develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will help with the resettlement process. The curriculum has been designed to be a culturally and educationally appropriate model for orientation that can be used in a group, workshop, or classroom setting.

http://www.culturalorientation.net/providing-orientation/toolkit/r-p-orientation-curriculum

The U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) developed the Journey of Hope cultural orientation packet to provide more in-depth, targeted materials for refugee women living in the United States. This guide covers the topics such as parenting, childcare and public benefits and community service.


See other USCRI resources for refugees at http://www.refugees.org/resources/

The Refugee Health Technical Assistance Center (RHTAC) offers health and mental health resources. http://www.refugeehealthta.org/

For more comprehensive descriptions of culturally competent evaluation see:

**American Evaluation Association Statement on Cultural Competence in Evaluation**

http://www.eval.org/p/cm/ld/fid=92
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