

Private Sponsorship and Intersection with the ORR-Funded Refugee Resettlement Program

September 25, 2023

Dear Colleague Letter 23-35

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ORR is releasing this Dear Colleague Letter (DCL) to clarify the intersection of private sponsorship with the Refugee Resettlement Program (RRP), including program administration and coordination, services, and benefits.

I. Background

In response to increasing arrivals, the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) and ORR are continuing to develop innovative methods to augment the capacity of the United States to serve refugees¹, in complement to the national refugee resettlement network Reception and Placement (R&P) grants. Such federal resettlement initiatives² are designed to leverage additional partners and channel the support of receiving communities through novel resettlement programming; increase the use of community partners, including institutional commitments; and tap into the benefits and opportunities that private sponsorship, established under a federal framework, can provide incoming refugees.

Note that the information included here does not represent new policies. ORR would like to remind States³ that 45 CFR Part 400 applies to the provision of benefits and services to all eligible individuals, including individuals arriving through private sponsorship. As such, ORR is issuing this DCL to highlight key existing policies, resources, and requirements.

II. State-wide Administration and Coordination

- A. As stated within 45 CFR 400.2, the State Refugee Coordinator (SRC) must ensure coordination of public and private resources in refugee resettlement. Within this DCL, ORR clarifies that this includes the coordination of public and private resources in communities that have not historically resettled refugees.
 1. ORR advises States to assess and have an awareness of locations where there are new resettlement groups, to the maximum extent possible, such as private sponsorship groups through the Welcome Corps, that impact the state RRP. Based on the results of these assessments, such as information on population needs and state/local capacity, States may need to adjust their programming and state plan.
 2. States are reminded that state-wide administration and/or coordination of public resources may include not only programs funded by ORR but also benefits and services funded by other programs (e.g., TANF, Medicaid, CHIP, SNAP).

¹ In the context of this PL, ORR uses the term “refugees” to include all ORR eligible individuals as described in ORR PL 16-01.

² Examples include the Afghan Placement and Assistance (APA) program, the State Administered Placement Assistance (SAPA) program, the Virtual Afghan Placement and Assistance (VAPA) Program, the public-private Sponsor Circle Program for Afghans, and the Welcome Corps.

³ “States” throughout this DCL refers to States and Replacement Designees.

- B. ORR notes that its existing policy on administrative costs for Cash and Medical Assistance (CMA) allows States to use CMA funding for outreach and navigation positions to support the education and expansion of community partners and local/state government operations. ORR reminds States that individuals hired for these positions can:
1. Provide education, conduct outreach, and develop resources to increase access to ORR and mainstream benefits for individuals eligible for ORR RRP benefits and services. This may include developing resources on eligible populations, ORR programs, mainstream services, and state-specific information. This may also include trainings and technical assistance (TTA) to public assistance offices, new service providers, and new communities about enrollment in benefits and services and special considerations for ORR populations. Finally, these resources and trainings may be directed towards private sponsorship partners, such as Welcome Corps Private Sponsor Organizations (PSOs)⁴, to help ensure refugees' access to systems and services.
 2. Coordinate new partners, including mainstream providers in communities welcoming refugees through private sponsorship. As necessary, states may coordinate with organizations, such as Welcome Corps PSOs to support Private Sponsor Groups (PSGs)⁵ with transition plans that connect cases to long term services beyond the 90 days of initial reception services. Coordination may include hosting events that highlight available resources and long-term services, including ORR programs and mainstream services. Coordination cannot supplant private sponsor group transition plan responsibility.
 3. Assess need for and support the provision of remote or virtual services to eligible refugees across the state, as addressed within [ORR PL 22-04](#).
 4. Ensure proper data collection by guiding newly ORR-funded service providers (e.g., new health clinics) on how to submit required data and provide recommendations on adjustments to data management systems funded by ORR.
 5. Promote the involvement of all relevant organizations in quarterly consultations. In the context of the Welcome Corps, for example, this includes PSOs connected to the local refugee serving communities but is not anticipated to include PSGs.

III. Refugee Cash Assistance

ORR would particularly like to note the following regulations and policies:

- A. Existing regulation 45 CFR 400.50 indicates that a State or its designee agency must provide any individual wishing to apply for cash assistance the opportunity to apply. This includes refugees arriving through private sponsorship, and the application can be done in person or remotely.
- B. Existing regulation 45 CFR 400.75 requires States serving refugees who arrived through private sponsorship to adhere to the same requirements as for other refugees receiving cash assistance, unless the refugees are otherwise exempt. This includes registration with an appropriate agency providing employment services as defined in 45 CFR 400.71 and the development of an Individual Employability Plan as part of a family self-sufficiency plan (FSSP) for each recipient of cash assistance. These services can be provided either in person or through remote or virtual provision.
- C. [ORR PL 23-01](#), "Waivers and Flexibilities for Capacity Management," describes flexibilities that States may choose to apply to offer support to privately sponsored refugees, including flexibility in determining

⁴ For general information on Welcome Corps, refer to the following link: <https://welcomecorps.org/about/> For specific information on PSO's, refer to the following link: <https://welcomecorps.org/information-for-organizations/private-sponsor-organizations/>

⁵ For specific information on PSG's, refer to the following link: <https://welcomecorps.org/get-started/>

applicants' eligibility and the ability to conduct eligibility determinations over the phone.

- D. [ORR PL 23-04](#), "Expanding Income Disregards Under RCA," addresses the ORR requirement that States disregard cash grants that a refugee receives under a program equivalent to R&P (such as the Welcome Corps), as well as under R&P itself. Please refer to PL 23-04 for more information about the grant amounts that can be disregarded.

IV. Refugee Medical Assistance

ORR would like to note the following guidance:

- A. Existing regulation 45 CFR 400.93(a) requires a State to provide any individual wishing to apply for medical assistance the opportunity to apply; it also requires the State to determine the eligibility of each applicant. This includes refugees arriving through private sponsorship.
- B. Existing regulation 45 CFR 400.93(b) requires a State to adhere to relevant Medicaid regulations for application, termination, and furnishing of Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA) for privately sponsored refugees.
- C. Existing regulation 45 CFR 400.105 require a State to provide at least the same services in the same manner and to the same extent as under the State's Medicaid program to RMA recipients. This includes privately sponsored refugees.

V. Domestic Medical Screening

ORR would like to note the following key documents:

- A. [ORR State Letter 12-09](#) encourages that all ORR eligible individuals, which includes privately sponsored refugees, receive the domestic Medical Screening to identify communicable diseases and personal health conditions that could adversely impact resettlement. ORR also encourages that they receive vaccinations necessary for school, employment, and adjustment of status, and that they be connected to ongoing primary care. ORR expects domestic Medical Screenings to occur within the recommended timeframe of 30 to 90 days from date of eligibility for ORR benefits. ORR also encourages refugees to go to designated medical screening clinics that are reasonably accessible to receive their exam. ORR will continue to support CMA administrative costs necessary for the provision of medical screening, including data collection, needs assessments, establishment of new clinics, and the examples outlined under section II of this PL, on Administration and Coordination.
- B. [ORR PL 16-05](#) delineates ORR's expectation that SRCs and Refugee Health Coordinators (RHCs) collaborate regularly to assess developing situations that could impact their state's domestic Medical Screening program, including refugees resettled to new or remote locations in their states. ORR also expects SRCs and RHCs to consider the results of these assessments when adjusting their programming to meet the domestic medical screening needs in their state.
- C. [ORR DCL 23-08](#) outlines the domestic Medical Screening program flexibilities to address any heightened demand on a state's domestic Medical Screening program. This includes expanding services through establishing new medical screening clinics or providing outreach and education to community clinical partners.

VI. Refugee Support Services

ORR would like to note the following guidance:

- A. Existing regulation 45 CFR 400.145(a) requires that a State must provide any individual wishing to apply for services the opportunity to apply; it also requires the State to determine eligibility. This includes

refugees arriving through private sponsorship. This applies to base Refugee Support Services (RSS) and, where there is an existing RSS set-aside program, to the set-aside program.

- B. As required by the state plan and per existing regulation at 45 CFR 400.5(b), ORR requires States to describe how they will coordinate services among resettlement agencies, state and county agencies, and service providers in the community to promote employment and self-sufficiency. In addition, ORR encourages States to have a clear strategy in conducting needs assessments and prioritizing services within RSS base and set-aside programming for those resettled through WC. ORR expects States to include locations with new private sponsorship groups and the refugees they resettle in their state-wide assessment of where RSS base and set-aside services are needed, and communicate concerns regarding access to services to PSOs or other private sponsorship organizations.
- C. [ORR PL 22-04](#) authorizes recipients to use both RSS base and set-aside funding to support remote or hybrid services (e.g., staffing, agency technology, client equipment and/or hotspots) in locations where in-person services may be limited, but States should use these funds strategically to maximize the priority services of the respective programs. Since these funds are likely not sufficient to fund purchases of equipment and supplies for a large number of participants, ORR advises States to carefully consider the extent to which they are able to offer remote assistance.

It is important to note that in the context of the Welcome Corps, PSGs commit to providing assistance to the refugees they sponsor. These private sponsors are expected to provide primary housing and food assistance to refugees for the first 90 days. However, per [ORR PL 16-07](#), grantees may use RSS base funding to fill gaps in housing beyond the initial 90-day resettlement period, if there is a need for transitional housing.

VII. ORR's Competitive Grants

Other ORR refugee programs (e.g., Preferred Communities, Refugee Family Childcare Microenterprise Development, Ethnic Community Self Help, Survivors of Torture, Services to Afghan Survivors Impacted by Combat) can implement some flexibilities to guidelines and eligibility requirements when authorized by the ORR Director.

ORR will authorize Matching Grant recipients to extend the enrollment period from 30 to 90 days, for those refugees resettled through private sponsorship, to allow more time to access to services that they may not be fully aware of; ORR will also allow remote Matching Grant benefits and services provision. Similarly, the Preferred Communities funding can be used to support remote services, including for refugees resettled through private sponsorship.

VIII. Data and Reporting

States must apply the same reporting requirements for clients that arrived through private sponsorships as would be applied for any other eligible client served with ORR funding.

If you have questions about the information contained in this DCL, please contact your ORR programmatic contact. Thank you for your support of this important work.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Tota
Director, Refugee Program
Office of Refugee Resettlement