



U.S. TIE TO C⁺-SPONSOR TOOLKIT

A Staff Guide to Empower and Equip U.S. ties as Co-sponsors



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Introduction and Importance of Co-sponsorship in Refugee Resettlement

The U.S. tie to Co-sponsor Toolkit provides steps, knowledge, and advice for community engagement (CE) staff and case managers to assist U.S. ties who want to participate in the community co-sponsorship experience with their local resettlement office. This toolkit is designed to assist resettlement staff in enabling U.S. ties to become active participants in welcoming their friends and family. It provides guidance and best practices for facilitating successful collaboration local resettlement staff and U.S. ties, helpful resources, and an overview of promoting long-term integration, belonging, and self-sufficiency for newcomers.

Co-sponsorship is an indispensable and essential part of refugee resettlement. It fosters a supportive environment for newcomers by facilitating collaboration and leveraging resources. Co-sponsors help newcomers with financial support, integration, establishing a social network, and empowerment.

Toolkit Purpose

The purpose of this toolkit is to approach sponsorship skillfully and intentionally, uniting U.S. ties and local resettlement staff for optimal success and integration of the newcomer.



Benefits of Involving U.S. Ties in Co-sponsorship

Including U.S. ties in co-sponsorship is crucial for fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment within the resettled community. U.S. ties, with their firsthand experience of navigating life in the United States, serve as invaluable guides and mentors for newcomers, offering cultural insight, language support, and practical assistance. By actively involving U.S. ties in the resettlement process, local resettlement staff can leverage a U.S. ties existing relationships and community connections while also promoting a collaborative approach to integration. This inclusion not only benefits newcomers by providing them with personalized support and resources but also enriches the fabric of the community by fostering cross-cultural understanding and solidarity. Ultimately, involving U.S. ties in co-sponsorship strengthens the resettlement process, enhances newcomer well-being, and promotes long-term self-sufficiency and integration.

Benefits for the U.S. tie

- U.S. ties become an ambassador for the community and a part of a newcomer's growing social capital in a new place.
- U.S. ties empower newcomers to take an active role in shaping their own integration process and the integration of others in their community. U.S. ties gain valuable skills and experience in areas such as mentoring, advocacy, and navigating their local community. These skills can be highly beneficial for personal and professional growth.
- U.S. ties foster cultural exchange and understanding with newcomers. Having U.S. ties introduce newcomers to cultural differences and similarities of the local community versus their country of origin can help deepen the newcomer's sense of belonging in their new community.
- U.S. ties allow newcomers to form meaningful connections with their new community while U.S. ties reconnect and strengthen their already existing connections.
- When U.S. ties contribute and participate in local resettlement efforts it enhances the resettlement process by ensuring those with lived experience are involved in shaping and executing the programs supporting newcomers.
- Involving U.S. ties in sponsorship fosters community ownership as U.S. ties can support as welcomers in a process that once welcomed them.

Benefits for the Newcomer

- Newcomers are equipped with the best mentorship and resources when their U.S. tie brings in their experience and strengths to the process.
- Newcomers benefit from cultural community support from their U.S. tie. U.S. ties often already have an extensive cultural network, and community resources that would help the newcomer acclimate to their new surroundings. These networks assist newcomers in making new friends, learning about job/education opportunities, and provide an increased feeling a sense of belonging in their new community.
- Newcomers benefit from the U.S. tie's language support. U.S. ties know the newcomer's language which helps expedite all processes of integration. The newcomer can quickly understand each step of resettlement with the language support of the U.S. tie. This is an important and unique strength that U.S. ties bring to the resettlement process.
- Newcomers are being guided by family or a friend. There is no replacement for a mentor that has a history, trust, and special relationship to the newcomer. The resettlement process is an exceedingly difficult and vulnerable time for newcomers. However, if the newcomer is guided by someone they trust, there is an increased opportunity for the newcomer to experience a greater sense of confidence as well as an increased sense of belonging in the process.

Benefits for Local Office Staff and Community Engagement Staff

- U.S. ties bring real-world practical strategies and resources to the table that case managers may not be aware of from their own lived experience.
- Many U.S. ties have familiarity with local organizations and expectations that can support the resettlement process and provide local office staff with additional availability to focus on other tasks such as housing, employment, and community integration.
- U.S. tie co-sponsors create a partnership not only with the newcomer and staff, but also serve as a bridge between the office and their community. When U.S. ties connect local offices to cultural networks in the community it fosters greater allyship between the office and diverse communities.
- Case management and community engagement is complex and time-limited, especially with many offices having high arrivals. When U.S. ties bring lessons learned through their lived experience it can rejuvenate the approaches to resettlement work and improve overall integration.
- Co-sponsorship expands capacity to welcome, releases pressure on staff during high arrivals, and creates community resiliency.



Strategies for Equipping U.S. Ties as Co-sponsors

In engaging U.S. ties as co-sponsors the office equips the U.S. tie to be the first line of community welcome for the newcomer. This partnership between case managers and U.S. tie co-sponsors enables a more comprehensive and tailored approach to maximizing skills and resources for the newcomer well-being and integration. Below are some strategies for equipping U.S. ties as co-sponsors.

Strategies for Supporting Service Delivery Logistics

Case managers should explain the option of co-sponsorship in the first call and first in-person meeting with U.S. ties. This is an essential introduction to co-sponsorship that should focus on highlighting the U.S. ties strengths, the requirement to support a newcomer in a group of five or more, and the existing resources. The Co-sponsor Guide for U.S. ties is a great resource to share with U.S. ties through email or in person as a quick explainer. During the first in-person meeting, the case manager or community engagement staff should go through the [Co-sponsor Agreement Form](#), [Weekly Co-sponsor Technical Guide](#), and the [Co-Sponsorship One-Pager](#) to highlight the delegable core services and expected timelines. This first meeting should assess the U.S. tie's skills/experience, interests, and availability. Honesty in the time requirements and reporting for core service will determine the level of support the U.S. tie can provide for the newcomer. A printed copy The [Co-sponsor Manual](#) is a reference for the U.S. tie; do not go through the entire manual together, it can be exhaustive and will overwhelm the U.S. tie.

Building a Co-sponsor Team

It is essential to discuss how the U.S. tie can mobilize their community. Evaluate how the U.S. tie can form a group of five or more to fulfill the requirement of co-sponsorship. Assess the U.S. tie's network with the U.S. tie and help them highlight possible team members, including but not limited to family, friends, cultural clubs, sports team, or a local faith community. The [Co-sponsorship One Pager](#) is a resource that can be shared with their networks to explain the responsibilities for welcoming the newcomer. Once the U.S. tie has identified potential co-sponsorship team members, invite the team to the office for an inspiring co-sponsorship introduction and provide support for the delegation of responsibilities. If the U.S. tie does not have family in the city or family willing to participate, considering partnering a group of four or more volunteers to work directly with the U.S. tie as a co-sponsor team. Other considerations when forming a team include family dynamics, availability, team dynamics, and financial resources.

Fundraising

One of the biggest challenges in resettlement is funding, especially for most U.S. ties that may not have generational wealth. Fundraising can make a crucial difference in the resettlement process for the newcomer. A fund for the newcomer could relieve financial and emotional pressure for the U.S. tie and could drastically change how quickly a newcomer reaches self-sufficiency by helping with bigger needs such as a car or housing. Fundraising with a co-sponsor team, local network and local office could open doors of support beyond financial support; organizations or companies may choose to partner with the resettlement office in additional ways. Staff should remember that there may be some U.S. ties with personal/cultural uneasiness or embarrassment about fundraising for the newcomer. Local staff can remind U.S. ties that it is an acceptable and encouraged practice in the U.S., that there are ways to keep their privacy and they should not have to face the financial pressure alone. U.S. tie co-sponsor teams can use the following the [Sponsor Fundraising Guide](#) by Welcome.US and the [Fundraising Guide](#) by Refugee Welcome. Some other general fundraising ideas are to set up an online fundraiser, collaborate with individual/corporate/faith donors or host a special event that highlights the U.S. ties culture to fundraise for the newcomer to join the community.

Housing

Safe and secure housing is a crucial part of the resettlement process that U.S. ties can play a valuable role in acquiring. The U.S. tie co-sponsorship team should be connected and in regular contact with the housing coordinator and case managers. It will be essential to talk to U.S. ties about housing crisis in the U.S. and how housing provides a base from which newly arrived newcomers can seek employment, education opportunities and make connections with the wider community. Local staff can help establish housing expectations with the U.S. tie and newcomer. Oftentimes U.S. ties can provide temporary support in hosting a newcomer in their home. However, expectations should be discussed and a firm timeline for the newcomers' stay should be clearly established to respect other members in the home, limited space, and family dynamics. It is ideal for the newcomer to eventually have their own home to avoid any misunderstandings, establish boundaries and for them to have a greater sense of autonomy. Local staff should equip U.S. ties with guides and toolkits that could help the U.S. tie co-sponsorship team provide support finding housing. Refugee Housing Solutions has [tenant toolkits](#) for recruiting housing providers, for landlords and for tenants in 10 languages that can be useful for CE staff, U.S. ties, and newcomers to create lasting relationships with landlords and other housing partners. For questions about all Refugee Housing Solutions resources, including one-on-one technical assistance and information-sharing, contact [Technical Assistance - Refugee Housing Solutions](#). This [Housing Expectations Orientation Template](#) is helpful when giving housing orientations. The [Landlord Opportunities Guide](#) is helpful to share with U.S. tie co-sponsor teams to share with landlords. This [Co-sponsors Assisting with Housing Webinar](#) and [Community Sponsors Assisting with Newcomer guide](#) are useful in housing orientations. Finally, this [Managing Newcomers' Housing Expectations guide](#) can help gauge where the newcomer is in relation to the U.S. housing knowledge and how to help them set goals toward an accessible housing.



Strategies for Training U.S. ties as Co-sponsors

Once U.S. ties form a co-sponsor team and sign the [Co-sponsor Agreement Form](#) it is important to train the U.S. tie co-sponsor team before they begin service delivery. This will help build confidence and set expectations while also providing an additional opportunity for U.S. ties to ask questions and receive guidance.

Consideration:

Consider translating the materials to the U.S. tie's native language or having an interpreter will help with the training.

Use the [Weekly Co-sponsor Technical Guide](#) to provide instruction on each core service. It is recommended that co-sponsorship teams individually break into different areas of focus, such as education, employment, housing, benefits applications, and fundraising. Aside from weekly progress monitoring, focus area training should be applied for gaps in knowledge. Each training course should be accompanied with materials, resources, connections to partners and best practices. Assess the co-sponsor's strengths to determine what gaps in knowledge exist. The local staff and U.S. tie should schedule regular check-in meetings and set clear goals and priorities for the co-sponsorship period.

The local staff working with the U.S. ties should seek reciprocity in knowledge sharing. Here is a [Community Engagement Strategy Guide](#) for ideas on cross training. Local staff should connect the U.S. tie to local partners that can provide wrap around support. The U.S. tie co-sponsorship team should do their own outreach simultaneously; local staff can help create flyers, go-fund me accounts, social media posts, and other ways they can engage for support in their community. Partnering with faith communities can provide a large network of material support, as well as emotional support.

As a best practice, the two main areas of greatest urgency and priority should be fundraising and housing. Sharing printed materials of best practices for fundraising and housing and helping with campaigns and searches will relieve a lot of stress and worries of the U.S. tie co-sponsorship period. With fundraising and housing support and training, local staff can include training on how to create a budget and recommendations for what to do with raised funds and what housing options are available. The development team at the local resettlement office may already have fundraising presentations they can share with community engagement staff and U.S. ties. Keeping training efficient, constant, and prioritized will help guarantee U.S. tie co-sponsorship success.



Strategies for Supporting U.S. Ties as Co-sponsors During Service Delivery

During service delivery local staff should be maintaining communication, addressing questions, gathering feedback and leading toward eventual case closure with the co-sponsor team. While core services are being delivered it is important to consider which means of communication works best for the U.S. tie co-sponsorship team. Some common communication forms are email, video calls, phone calls, WhatsApp, text, or in-person meetings. Be flexible and strategize with the U.S. tie to establish the best tool and ensure boundaries and expectations are clearly communicated. Another important strategy is to choose a liaison at the office as the primary contact and establish a secondary one in case the main contact is out of the office or unavailable. This normally would be community engagement staff or/and another case managers. This will minimize confusion and improve consolidated communication.

The local resettlement office liaison should establish trust between the agency and the U.S. tie co-sponsorship team through active listening, efficient problem solving, clear communication of expectations. Local staff should keep professional boundaries with the U.S. tie co-sponsorship team and newcomer. Boundaries are important to protect the newcomer, the U.S. tie, and the local staff. Clear communication minimizes power differentials that exist in helping professions, ensures services do not harm clients, and maintains professional codes of ethics within helping professions. For example, reminding U.S. ties co-sponsors and newcomers of active working hours and sticking to those hours. Common boundary violations are intimate relationships, personal benefit, and crossing emotional and dependency boundaries.

Consideration:

Various challenges and difficult conversations may arise during the U.S. tie co-sponsorship. The [Challenging Conversations Guide](#) can help local staff develop effective tactics to diffuse, understand and respond to situations.

Throughout the Reception & Placement period local staff should be collecting feedback. Collect evaluations on positive and negative outcomes from the co-sponsor group and the newcomer. All feedback should be documented to improve future programming and systems. It is important to not only get feedback from U.S. tie co-sponsors and newcomers, but to also express and show how the agency is willing to act on the feedback.

As the 90th day of service delivery approaches there should be a meeting to discuss the progress made and the transition for the U.S. tie to move away from a service delivery support role to that of a family/friend. The [Co-Sponsor to Neighbor Plan](#) can help understand this transition and have the necessary conversations with all parties. In the 90th day meeting, case managers should gauge U.S. tie role and newcomer expectations, level of newcomer self-sufficiency and share post-90-referrals to other non-profits, education resources, and employer programs. The first year for newcomers can be difficult, it is imperative to ensure the newcomer knows how to access and navigate the community resources available to them. Healthy boundaries between the local resettlement office, the U.S. tie, and the newcomer are important to maintain self-sufficiency of the newcomer. Local staff should make sure to continue inviting the former U.S. tie co-sponsor to events and network referral opportunities. This will encourage newcomers to discover opportunities beyond the scope of their U.S. tie's network. Also, following up with referral network organizations about the family will encourage collaboration.



Strategies for Raising Refugee Voices

It is important to celebrate successes and invite U.S. ties and newcomers to share their story if they desire. Centering the expertise, experiences and voices of refugees and recognizing newcomers' narratives is an essential catalyst for driving systemic change. When refugees and newcomers uplift their stories, challenges, and triumphs, they can not only influence policy shifts but also create a transformation in community perspectives that spark a change in collective viewpoints, empathy and understanding.

The emotional labor of sharing personal stories can be significant. It is crucial to acknowledge and address the toll it may take on individuals repeatedly revisiting experiences of displacement and trauma. Alongside amplifying voices, it is equally important to prioritize the well-being of those sharing their narratives. Providing a supportive framework involves creating spaces that validate emotional experiences and offering resources for psychological support, such as counseling services or support groups are essential.

By combining robust U.S. tie sponsorship and newcomer narratives of the newcomer refugee experience, bridges are built that connect people, deconstruct stereotypes, and co-create inclusive spaces where every individual belongs and contributes to the collective community. These collective efforts foster a more inclusive, equitable society, where refugee/newcomer voices play a pivotal role in co-creating and shaping a shared vision of belonging and community transformation.

Consideration:

If you have the newcomer's permission to take images of their journey, local offices can use the [Photo and Video Release form](#) to equip sponsors with technical guidance and best practices.



Potential Challenges to Involving U.S. Ties as Cosponsors

U.S. tie co-sponsorship dynamics may present challenges because of the bonds and expectations of family or a close friend. It is important to be aware of these challenges, mitigate certain situations and remedy them accordingly. A healthy family or friend sponsorship has the potential sense of belonging with shared understandings and guidance. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) states:

"The family unit has a better chance of successfully... integrating in a new country than do individual refugees. In this respect, protection of the family is not only in the best interest of the refugees themselves, but also in the best interest of States." (UNHCR, 1999 p.159)

It is important to note changing family dynamics because of war, flight, violent displacement, death, separation from relatives all have profound impacts on a healthy family structure. The arrival to the U.S. with a new social, cultural, economic, and institutional context presents even more stressors and changes to the family dynamic. Resettlement programs tend to focus on self-sufficiency, short-term case management, job readiness and employment, however there are no direct provisions for family support and family networks which are crucial for the newcomer. U.S. tie co-sponsorship is the incredible opportunity to fuse case management with family support. Local staff should assess the family with the following considerations below with suggestions of methods to mitigate the challenges.

Challenges Involving U.S. Ties as Co-sponsors

CHALLENGE 1: RESOURCE CONSTRAINTS

Co-sponsorship requires a commitment of time, energy, and resources. Some U.S. ties may face resource constraints, such as limited funding, lack of adequate time to dedicate to sponsorship, or access to support services, which can impede their ability to fully participate.

STRENGTHS-BASED SOLUTIONS OR COUNTERMEASURES

U.S. ties may have limited resources due to being previous newcomers themselves. After determining existing resources and constraints, consider how to counteract these limitations. For example, a U.S. tie may be working two jobs and have little time to dedicate to core services for the newcomer. Determine what days they have off, which core services might easier for them to fulfill according to their skills, availability, and strengths. Another limitation could be lack of funding and the need for fundraising. It is important to provide tools and resources to the U.S. tie to assist in this space. Additionally, U.S. ties may have limited networks and community partners. Consider introducing ties to important stakeholders who can provide support and wrap around services for newcomers.

CHALLENGE 2: EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

Supporting newcomers who have experienced trauma, loss, and displacement can be emotionally demanding for co-sponsors. It is important to remember that U.S. ties often have their own trauma from their displacement experience. Welcoming the family member or friend could resurface emotions and feelings that have been suppressed.

STRENGTHS-BASED SOLUTIONS OR COUNTERMEASURES

Local staff should ensure efforts are trauma informed in U.S. tie co-sponsorship. Staff should be aware of possible trauma, of potential paths for recovery, and recognize the signs and symptoms of trauma and secondary or vicarious trauma. There are six key principles of a trauma-informed approach that we can consider in U.S. tie co-sponsorship: safety, trustworthiness and transparency, peer support, collaboration and mutuality empowerment, voice, and choice, cultural, historical and gender issues. Please see the [SAMHSA Concept of Trauma and Guidance for Trauma Informed Approach](#) for more information. Local resettlement staff can also utilize the [CWS Trauma Informed Approach](#) tool. Many newcomers have experienced loss of family, family separation, reconfigured family units, eroding trust, unrealistic expectations, and unprocessed traumatic experiences. It is important to understand that each family has a unique story, and staff should actively listen to identify possible emotional and psychological challenges. Within the first meetings, local staff can have a family assessment to establish trust, identify the family's expectations and strengths, and learn about possible challenges that might arise as a preventive approach. Additionally, staff should consider support that can be provided if during the service delivery period there is a sponsorship breakdown due to trauma or mental health stress.

CHALLENGE 3: EXPECTATIONS AND BOUNDARIES

There may be differences in expectations and boundaries between U.S. ties and newcomers regarding the extent and nature of support provided. Clarifying roles, responsibilities, and boundaries upfront is essential to avoid misunderstandings or dependency dynamics.

STRENGTHS-BASED SOLUTIONS OR COUNTERMEASURES

A fundamental way to establish understood expectations between the U.S. tie and newcomers is to first define roles explicitly and clarify that success, self-sufficiency and boundaries look different for each person. Create a shared language, shared principles, and goals for the partnership. Setting boundaries early and referencing them often with a tone of inevitability, humility, and accountability can assist with boundaries. This can be accomplished by establishing points of contact, creating a routine communication schedule and checkpoints on goals, utilizing principles as a code of conduct and clearly delineating roles and limitations.

It will be necessary to establish benchmarks that are achievable, while implementing strategic increases in skill building and educational opportunities. U.S. ties can also encourage newcomers to learn new skills by sharing their own trials experienced during their integration journey.

CHALLENGE 4: ROLE REVERSAL AND TRUST

Navigating power dynamics, role reversals within family, confidentiality, and establishing trust between U.S. ties and newcomers can present significant challenges during co-sponsorship.

STRENGTHS-BASED SOLUTIONS OR COUNTERMEASURES

U.S. tie co-sponsorship can present complex family power dynamics such as role reversal and new unexpected roles. This can cause conflict, fading of trust, and hesitation to participate in the cooperation of U.S. tie co-sponsorship. Local staff can use mutual respect and trust nurturing strategies to countermeasure these challenges. It is important to define roles and expectations during co-sponsorship and explicitly have an open conversation of how they are different than in the past. Consider any discomfort or lack of trust or credibility that may be present in the family history. The local resettlement office can assist the U.S. tie and newcomer to set boundaries and respect individual roles. Especially, in collectivistic cultures, family dynamics have a hierarchal and cooperative approach that have been defined for years. A role reversal, such as a son sponsoring a mother, may cause conflict and confusion. Please see the [Confidentiality 101 Guide](#) that can help local staff determine privacy terms and how to communicate these terms to U.S. ties co-sponsors.

Paternalism is a power imbalance where a person limits another person's autonomy based on what they think is for their own good. The U.S. tie that may take on a paternalistic role in co-sponsorship, it is important to remind U.S. ties that their role is to guide and teach the newcomer the options and pathways they can take to reach certain goals. It is not doing the U.S. ties job to do tasks for the newcomer.

Lastly, many newcomers arrive to the United States having experienced persecution for their faith or believes system. It is important that U.S. ties respect and abide by the requirement to not participate in proselytism. The arriving newcomer may not have the same beliefs as the U.S. tie. It is crucial that the U.S. tie respects the autonomy and personal beliefs of the newcomer and that the support they provide is not contingent on whether the family member has the same faith.

Conclusion

U.S. tie co-sponsorship is a valuable and unique opportunity to utilize the experience and strengths of U.S. ties to increase integration for newcomers. The newcomer benefits immensely from this partnership due to existing interpersonal and cultural community connections. Additionally, U.S. tie co-sponsorship provides previous newcomers with a way to participate in building a more sustainable and equitable resettlement process for future newcomers, while also allowing former newcomers to give back to resettlement offices that once welcomed them.

Additional Resources and Tools

[Co-Sponsorship Guide for U.S. ties](#)

[U.S. Tie Commitment Form](#)

[U.S. Tie Verification and Commitment Form](#)

[U.S. Tie Assessment Form Guidance](#)

[Co-Sponsor Agreement Form](#)

[Co-Sponsorship Manual](#)

[Video: What Newcomers Can Expect During the Co-sponsorship Journey](#)

[Chart of Key Considerations for a Strengths-based Approach to Involving U.S. Ties as Co-sponsors](#)