

Rescue.org

2025 STATE POLICY GUIDE



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Introduction

Each year, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) works closely with state elected leaders to ensure that the communities in which we work are welcoming places for refugees and other new Americans. In addition to educating legislators, we assess [introduced legislation through our state tracker](#), identify new model policies and identify emerging legislative trends. This annual guide represents the culmination of these ongoing activities.

This year's state policy and advocacy guide reflects efforts by states to build and strengthen infrastructure and resources to welcome refugees and other newcomers to their communities. These measures not only help ensure that new Americans can achieve economic self-sufficiency and integrate more smoothly, but that they positively impact the broader community as well. We share in the personal and professional successes of our new neighbors, who strengthen our economy, workplaces, schools and communities.

Please check out previous editions of this guide for additional policy ideas, including approaches to securing access for in-state tuition for new Americans and reducing barriers for professional recertification and licensure processes:

- ▶ [2024 State Policy Guide](#)
- ▶ [2023 State Policy Guide](#)
- ▶ [2022 State Policy Guide](#)

How to Use This Guide

This guide is designed for advocates with any level of experience. Drafting and supporting welcoming policies should be done in coordination with the local agencies serving refugees and other newcomers as well as impacted communities to identify and address the most pressing needs. Each policy theme in this guide includes two sections:

- 1. Policy recommendations**, which include issue summary, policy-diplomacy-drafting best practices and model policies already introduced and advanced in other states.
- 2. Strategic engagement guidance** specific to the political environment of your state, including a checklist of strategic considerations and key targets within legislative committees and local and national partners.

When reviewing our suggestions for advancing legislation, reflect on the following key questions:

- ▶ **Have you assessed how these issues impact newcomer communities in your state?**
- ▶ **What are your own gaps in knowledge? Do you need to consult with a policy specialist to learn more about how to address an issue in your state?**
- ▶ **What is your capacity to engage stakeholders and elected leaders and advance policy through the legislative process?**

It is important to remember that, while we propose model examples in this guide, each state is different, with its own state code, legislative and regulatory processes and procedures, constituencies, advocacy landscape and other interested stakeholders. Perform a detailed review of these components before pursuing policies.

If you have questions about any of the content and recommendations, please contact:

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Strengthening Resettlement & Integration Infrastructure

Issue Summary

In recent years, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) and other humanitarian programs intended to welcome newcomers to the U.S. have proven to be highly vulnerable to shifting political leadership. States can play an important role in safeguarding humanitarian programs by taking steps to fortify and supplement existing federal-level policy and funding.

In the U.S., the most consequential refugee and immigration policy decisions are under the authority of the Executive Branch—and, ultimately, the President. This is well illustrated by the annual Presidential Determination on refugee admissions, in which the president makes an all-but-unilateral decision about the number of refugees to be admitted to the U.S. over the coming year. However, there is increasing recognition of the role that states play in preserving the infrastructure of the public-private partnership. Under the Trump administration, Executive Order 13888 on Enhancing State and Local Involvement in Refugee Resettlement mandated that refugees may be resettled only in U.S. jurisdictions where both the state and local governments have provided their affirmative consent. Though blocked by the courts, this presidential directive was a stark reminder of both the fragility of the country's long-standing tradition of welcome and the urgency to bolster state commitments in the face of ambivalent federal leadership.

At the state level, there are a number of tried-and-tested legislative interventions available. Legislation that codifies a state's commitment to the USRAP protects against the possibility that a governor would move to withdraw the state from participation. Messaging resolutions are a key way to demonstrate support for refugees and other newcomers and signal policy priorities in political environments rife with harmful and hateful rhetoric. Legislation that funds research and learning initiatives can be an important way to build the evidence base around programs serving newcomers. Appropriation measures can provide resourcing to supplement existing federal pass-through funds and shore up critical reception and integration services for refugees and other newcomer populations.

Codification of State Participation in the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program

Codifying a state's commitment to USRAP serves as a reinforcement and strengthening of the state's established infrastructure against waning political support now or in the future. Legislation that requires consent by the governor in the case of a future adversarial executive order and enshrines a state's participation in the USRAP will act as an affirmation of current support and a safeguard going forward.

Recommended Best Practices

- ▶ Include language that allows for the possibility of additional services and assistance to support resettlement and integration of newcomers so as to not preclude future favorable expansions and flexibilities.
- ▶ Explicitly include a provision mandating that withdrawal from the USRAP must be authorized by the legislature and signed by the governor to safeguard against unilateral, politicized actions.

Alternatives and Compromises

- ▶ Where codification is not politically feasible, consider pursuing a lower-stakes supportive resolution instead, led with bipartisan support.
- ▶ Consider municipal options to affirm commitment as a welcoming municipality.

State Policy Examples

State & Bill Number	Details
California A.B.3133 <i>Refugees; Resettlement</i>	Prohibits a refugee from being denied resettlement in California due to discrimination on the basis of specified protected characteristics.
New York A.69/S.6070 <i>Relates to Refugee Resettlement Program</i>	Would, if passed, codify New York's participation in the USRAP.
Washington H.B.2368 <i>Assisting Refugees and Immigrants</i>	Codified the role of the Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance within the Washington Department of Social and Health Services in administering the USRAP.

Celebrating the State's Tradition of Welcome

A resolution is a messaging document that is introduced by a legislator and ceremonially advanced through a committee hearing to passage. These are nonbinding but the number of sponsors and the level of support for passage (unanimous or not) can serve as a valuable temperature check to gauge existing sentiment.

Recommended Best Practices

- ▶ Highlight the positive economic impact of refugees and other newcomers through state-specific examples and data on entrepreneurship, labor force needs and tax revenue—while also emphasizing the social contributions, cultural diversity and inherent value of these communities.
- ▶ Craft a narrative about refugees and other newcomers that highlights their strengths, dignity and humanity.
- ▶ Include history and framing specific to the state context such as by recognizing the original patterns of migration that contributed to the state's existing diversity and highlighting significant contributions and innovations by refugees and other newcomers.
- ▶ Note the support and efforts of volunteers, ethnic community-based organizations, faith-based groups and everyday Americans in welcoming and assisting refugees and other newcomers.

Alternatives & Compromises

- ▶ Center the resolution around a specific event or moment, such as an annual advocacy day or World Refugee Day, to limit the conceptual scope of the bill text and make it more specific and palatable in a challenging political environment.
- ▶ Broaden the resolution to explicitly name more newcomer populations (e.g., international students and immigrants on work visas) to expand the number of constituents recognized and increase the appeal and relevancy of the resolution for more legislators.

State Policy Examples

State & Bill Number	Details
Utah H.C.R.9 <i>Concurrent Resolution Celebrating Utah's History of Welcoming Refugees</i>	A resolution to celebrate Utah's history of welcoming refugees
Arizona S.R.1002 <i>A Resolution Honoring the Contributions of New Americans to the State</i>	A resolution honoring the contributions of new Americans to Arizona
Texas H.R.1175 <i>Recognizing Refugee Advocacy Day at the State Capitol</i>	Recognized a Refugee Advocacy Day at the Texas State Capitol

Building the Evidence Base

State-level research initiatives are an exciting way to contribute to the evidence base for programs serving refugees and other newcomers. The data and learnings coming out of these efforts can support inclusive, pro-refugee narratives and help build better programs that, in turn, yield improved integration outcomes.

Recommended Best Practices

- ▶ Outline the intended areas of research; for example, economic impacts on state and local communities (rates of entrepreneurship, tax revenues, impact on labor shortages) or integration outcomes (language acquisition, digital literacy, naturalization rates, education attainment).
- ▶ Mandate the input and inclusion of refugee and other newcomer communities into the design and methodology of the study.
- ▶ Note the importance of protecting respondent privacy and ensuring rigorous protocols for data collection, storage and sharing. Safeguarding experts can be consulted, and all research should comply with Department of Health and Human Services [policies for the protection of human subjects](#).
- ▶ Specify how and in what format the final results will be disseminated transparently.
- ▶ Include funding to enable the successful completion of the study.

Alternatives & Compromises

- ▶ Expand the focus of the study to examine a broad set of newcomer populations to increase the number of constituents recognized and widen the appeal and relevancy of the study for more legislators.
- ▶ Target the study toward economic impacts to garner private sector support and partnership in advocating for the legislation.

State Policy Examples

State & Bill Number	Details
Maryland H.B.0961 <i>Commission on New Americans</i>	Establishes a Commission on New Americans to study and report on the contributions of new Americans and the availability of government services for new Americans.
Massachusetts S.99 <i>Creating a Special Commission to Study Current Resettlement Infrastructure</i>	Establishes a special commission to study the current refugee resettlement infrastructure and ensure the successful integration of refugees in Massachusetts.

Supplementing and Extending Programming with State Appropriations

State appropriations can supplement the federal pass-through funds (e.g., the State Department's Reception & Placement program and the Office of Refugee Resettlement's array of programs, among other funding streams) that support resettlement and integration services for refugees and other newcomers. Case management, ELL classes, employment services and workforce development and school support, among others, are all integral services for newcomers that can be bolstered through both broad-based and targeted funds.

Recommended Best Practices

- ▶ Support long-term integration outcomes for resettled refugees and other newcomers through general appropriations to supplement the existing federal funding for resettlement agencies.
- ▶ Support integration programs of particular interest to the state and local communities; for example, workforce development for particular industries facing labor market gaps, such as grants for business development and technical assistance for refugee entrepreneurs to address child care shortages.
- ▶ Appropriate funds for the express purpose of offering extended case management for resettled refugees. Consider building in a monitoring and evaluation component to establish metrics and accountability mechanisms for the delivery of quality programming. This will build an evidence base for more robust supports for newcomers (see section above).
- ▶ Bill language should not limit the receipt of funds to a particular population (e.g., by nationality or legal status) to give service providers the maximum flexibility to meet the needs of evolving and diverse client populations.

Alternatives & Compromises

- ▶ Pursue funding for a broad set of service providers (e.g., ethnic community-based organizations) to maximize impacted constituencies.
- ▶ Target the appropriations request toward a timely and topical issue faced by communities beyond new Americans, such as assistance in procuring affordable housing or training to meet the need for increased digital literacy in the post-pandemic era.
- ▶ Partner with the business community to identify where workforce development training can meet specific labor market needs to bring in private sector support for the legislation.

State Policy Examples

State & Bill Number	Details
New York A.8803 <i>Aid to Localities (NYSESRP Funds)</i>	Appropriates funds to supplement R&P services for eligible populations.
California S.B.85 <i>Immigration; Case Management & Social Services</i>	Provides a 90-day extension to existing R&P services within the first 12 months of arrival in the United States.
Iowa H.F.286 <i>A Bill for an Act Relating to Refugees and Resettlement and Making an Appropriation</i>	Appropriates funds in the form of grants to eligible agencies to supplement R&P services and dedicates funds for workforce development programming to both provide entrepreneurship training and meet child care needs in local communities.

Advocacy Checklist

- Understand the capacity and interest of resettlement agencies and refugee supporting organizations to engage on this policy. identify partner targets and gauge the potential extent of their support.
- Socialize the policy with impacted community members and secure their support. Without support from newcomers themselves, the policy cannot move forward.
- Gather the necessary demographics and economic impact. [View Switchboard for research on best practices](#) and evidence for motivating policy.
- Prepare to support the policy AND defend it against attacks. This means bipartisan engagement with legislators who will vote on the policy in committee.
- Keep counting those votes—for both committees and the floor. Who is guaranteed to support, who will oppose and who is unknown? Avoid wasting limited capacity on known legislative allies or immovable opposition.

Options for Targeted Political Environments

Red Option: Messaging resolutions are an option for more conservative environments. Resolutions may reflect on the [state's immigrant history](#); recognize existing programs, leaders and/or a [specific moment in the state capitol](#); or message on a specific policy and serve as a temperature check for the coming year. These efforts should be bipartisan.

Purple Option: Codifying a commitment to USRAP is a practical mechanism for building resiliency into the resettlement program. Resourcing can also be invested toward programs that support resettlement through [extended case management](#) or to reinforce [program provision](#) over the long term.

Blue Option: Codifying a commitment to USRAP to include state resources that strengthen service delivery or extended case management. In addition to building programmatic resiliency by certifying the commitment, states will then be positioned to maintain the infrastructure should refugee arrivals dip.

Prepare to defend against actions that discriminate against refugees or seek to dismantle the programmatic infrastructure. [Request access to this resource](#) designed by the IRC, AIC and the Refugee Advocacy Lab for further guidance.

Legislative Committee Targets

Depending on the specifics of the policy, measures that impact the infrastructure of the resettlement program in a given state could be affected by any number of committees.

- ▶ Resolutions and policies to strengthen/codify a commitment to the resettlement program may pass through committees such as State Affairs or State & Federal Affairs, which would review policy impacting separation of powers.
- ▶ For programs administered through a state-level Department of Social Services/Human Services/Health and Human Services, look to committees reflecting that language, such as Health & Human Services.
- ▶ Appropriations, Budget and Ways and Means committees will exercise direct oversight over the federal pass-through funding for USRAP and will also be the committees that consider any additional state resourcing. (See page 14 for more details on state budget advocacy.)

Coalition-Building and Partner Targets

- ▶ Impacted community members and local resettlement offices may already be connected to ongoing legislative advocacy initiatives. Also consider reaching out to [Refugee Congress](#) or a state refugee speaker's bureau.
- ▶ Resettlement agencies across the state maintain sponsorship networks including those who have expressed interest in the program but have not yet received a placement. Sponsorship networks have expanded the footprint of potential resettlement in states and brought in new potential advocates from diverse backgrounds, professions and motivations. These individuals can bring new, compelling perspectives to your advocacy.
- ▶ Employer networks, chambers of commerce and other external validators from the business sector can speak to both the immediate and long-term impact of resettlement on the local and state economy. These groups can speak to the state and local workforce needs and economic impact and the return on investment for resourcing programs.
- ▶ Faith community leaders are often well practiced in engaging with social issues and can bring a moral and humanitarian lens to the responsibility to preserve welcome for persecuted individuals.

Creating a Reception System for Asylum Seekers

Issue Summary

Since 2019, the federal government has provided some funding to localities and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to support immediate stabilization and short-term shelter for the reception of newcomers. However, case management and other reception programming that can help move newcomers toward self-sufficiency and onto pathways to integration remain a gap in federally funded services. Since many newcomers are not eligible for employment until six months after they file an asylum application, services for families and individuals who do not have strong family or community ties to support them during this period can help them to stabilize, orient to new communities and prepare for the workforce.

With the right opportunities, newcomers can play a vital role in contributing to state and local taxes through employment in the workforce. Refugees and immigrants make up [17.2% of the U.S. workforce](#)—filling critical roles, opening businesses and contributing to the success of communities across the country. However, the skills, training and education of newcomers are often underutilized, and opportunities for them to build new skills can be limited.

Through dedicated newcomer coordination structures, states can better marshal available federal and local resources, provide technical support to state agencies and make key policy recommendations to state legislators and governors. In addition, states can establish or extend existing case management and other reception services to recently arrived populations to reduce costs associated with ad hoc emergency responses, improve access to support for newcomers – particularly those who lack family or community ties to assist them – and promote early pathways to integration. This includes workforce development programs, which not only help newcomers develop new skills and move into employment but can address labor shortages in key sectors.

- ▶ Ensure the population eligible for reception support is clearly defined and covered services are compatible with local humanitarian needs and relevant steps in the immigration legal process. Legislation should avoid duplication of services that populations may be eligible for through the federal government.
- ▶ Consult and coordinate with the governor, non-profit service providers, informal and volunteer associations providing assistance, ethnic-community based organizations, the newcomers themselves, and other local stakeholders in key jurisdictions with new arrivals.
- ▶ Adapt safeguards for the collection, storage and sharing of newcomers' personally identifying information. Ensure that any information that might be shared with federal immigration authorities is under limited circumstances, such as to confirm eligibility for federally funded services. Ensure that service providers follow informed consent procedures explained in the newcomer's primary language.

Creating Infrastructure for Newcomer Reception

In the US, there is no federal framework for reception of asylum seekers and other newcomers who arrive via the southern border or other points of entry that are outside of the U.S. refugee resettlement programs. Simultaneously, states, municipalities, community based organizations society organizations and immigrant communities themselves have been providing reception services in the absence of a federal system. These services range from information and shelter upon arrival at the border to case management, legal assistance and workforce development in destination communities across the U.S.

Recommended Best Practices

The reception infrastructure should:

- ▶ Serve as a focal point for state agencies, the governor's office and the state legislature on issues related to newcomers, including federal funding, policies, programs and legislation.
- ▶ Have the authority to convene relevant state agencies and to liaise with local and federal entities.
- ▶ Coordinate comprehensive service response, including: intake; data collection and analysis; legal assistance; case management; employment and workforce development services; healthcare; education; language access; housing; local transportation; asylum and work authorization support; relocation assistance within the state and to other states; and accessing federal programs.
- ▶ Build the evidence base through pilot programs with clear goals that support coordinated reception services.
- ▶ Be housed in a state Office of New Americans (ONA), Office of Refugee and Immigrant Affairs (ORIA) or similar state agency.

The legislature and governor should also ensure that:

- ▶ Funding is requested and set at a level commensurate with staffing needs and sufficient for implementation and staffing needs.

- ▶ Leadership is appointed, where appropriate, in consultation with the locality(ies) experiencing the greatest number of new arrivals.

Alternatives and Compromises

- ▶ Where resources are limited, carefully defining eligibility of the newcomer population for services can help direct support to the most acute needs. For example, some states may limit services to those who have arrived in the state or country within a set time frame, set a maximum service period or authorize a more limited set of services.
- ▶ ONAs have experience in convening stakeholders and developing policy relevant to refugees and other immigrant communities and could be tasked with convening meetings of an ad hoc state task force on asylum seeker services with participation by relevant state agencies, local governments, federal entities and community stakeholders.
- ▶ Where the adoption of a legislatively created position or office is not feasible, work with the governor’s office and executive officials to create a cabinet position or task an existing cabinet official with coordination duties for newcomers.

State Policy Examples

State & Bill Number	Details
New York S.8558 <i>Relates to Establishing a Coordinator for Asylum Seeker Services</i>	Established a statewide coordinator for asylum seeker services.
Arizona Operation Secure <i>Creating a Border Security Office</i>	Maintains security, safety, and humane asylum seeker processes.

Creating Case Management and Reception Services for Newcomers

Case management services assist newcomers with navigating the health care system, legal resources, employment, housing and financial services, education systems and more. They connect individuals with public and private agencies that provide direct support while coaching them as they adjust to life in America. Case management has proven to be a highly successful and cost-effective approach to assisting resettled refugees in adapting to their new communities and is beginning to be recognized as an important important to working with other newcomer populations, including asylum seekers.

Recommended Best Practices

- ▶ Authorize a state ONA, ORIA or nonprofit organization to administer case management and other reception services, including through subcontractors or grants to nonprofit entities and community-based organizations, that have experience with immigrants pursuing legal status.
- ▶ Consider a comprehensive range of reception services, including intake and assessment, cultural orientation, case management, employment and workforce development, language instruction, housing, school enrollment assistance, local transportation, relocation assistance, immigration legal assistance and referrals to available services.
- ▶ Include a monitoring and evaluation component to establish metrics and accountability mechanisms for the delivery of quality programming.

- ▶ Create or utilize an existing advisory council that includes representatives from the ONA, ORIA or other state agency, city and county governments, NGOs implementing the reception program, community-based organizations serving the immigrant community and impacted asylum-seeking communities to share information, ensure consultation with impacted communities and develop recommendations.
- ▶ Expand state case management programs to include refugees who have been granted asylum protection (i.e., asylees) and are residing in the state to ensure culturally appropriate and linguistically responsive cultural orientation, referrals and service navigation assistance.

Alternatives and Compromises

- ▶ Where resources are limited, carefully defining eligibility of the newcomer population for services can help direct support to the most acute needs. For example, some states may limit services to those who have arrived in the state or country within a set time frame or set a maximum service period or authorized a more limited set of services.
- ▶ Municipal-level ORIAs could serve as an alternative for providing case management and reception services. If politically viable, consider engaging your mayor or city council to authorize services at the local level.

State Policy Examples

State & Bill Number	Details
Washington H.B.2368 <i>Assisting Refugees & Immigrants</i>	Expanded the scope of assistance administered by the Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance (ORIA).
Colorado H.B.24-1280 <i>Creating a Welcome, Reception and Integration Grant Program</i>	Created a grant program to fund community-based organizations that provide newcomer services.
California A.B.2218 <i>Enhanced Services for Asylees and Vulnerable Noncitizens</i>	Reauthorized a case management program for asylees.

Expanding Access to Workforce Development

Newcomers are eager to enter the workforce but face barriers to employment. States can take steps to ensure that the skills, training and education of these newcomers do not go underutilized and expand opportunities to build new skills. At the same time, while some newcomers receive work authorization relatively rapidly under their immigration legal status, others face delays in receiving permission to work due to federal law that requires asylum seekers to wait 6 months after filing an asylum application to receive employment authorization.

Recommended Best Practices

- ▶ Integrate support for legal assistance to eligible individuals applying for employment authorization into newcomer service models, including as a part of initial arrival reception.
- ▶ Increase training and education opportunities for newcomers to build skills that meet vital workforce needs. Invest in such programs as experiential learning, workforce training, apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships and vocational English classes that help build needed occupational and language skills.
- ▶ Consult with relevant industry professionals for contextualization, feedback, and endorsement of policies.

Alternatives and Compromises

Legislative efforts may not always be possible. When that is the case, advocates should consider pursuing administrative solutions and targeted interventions that address specific occupations or industry needs.

- ▶ Consider engaging the governor to assess options regulating the application of executive Workforce Innovation and Opportunity (WIOA) funding to programs that specifically serve newcomers.
- ▶ Resources received through American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and still remaining unspent may be used for low and pro bono legal services providers to assist eligible newcomers with applications for employment authorization documents (EADs). (See also p. 14 for more details on the state budget process).
- ▶ Introduce a resolution calling for federal resources or action on expanding access to federal work authorization for individuals with pending asylum or other legal immigration processes.

Select State Examples

State & Bill Number	Details
Arizona S.B.1563 <i>Establishing the New American Talent Study Committee</i>	Established New American Study Committee to review best practices for the economic integration of newcomers and reduce unnecessary barriers to employment.
Illinois H.R.0081 <i>Support Asylum Seekers</i>	Urged federal government to expand legal protections for asylum seekers and expedite authorization for them to join the workforce.
Maine L.D.1169 <i>Creating a Foreign Credentialing and Skills Recognition Program</i>	Created a grant program fund to improve foreign credential and skill recognition.

Advocacy Checklist

- Research existing reception infrastructure for new arrivals in your state. If they exist, are there barriers to accessing its services? Tools [created by IRC](#) or the [American Immigration Council's asylum information page](#) can help identify resources and understand variable asylum barriers.
- Consult with NGOs, state government agencies, local municipalities and impacted community members to understand what kinds of humanitarian services and opportunities exist and what, if any, government support could streamline state reception.
- Define your target population to ensure that service delivery will encompass vulnerable populations, including families and children.
- Identify bipartisan relationships for critical support and pool efforts around key swing voters and committees.
- Anticipate opposition messaging and prepare talking points accordingly. Use data such as a [recent economic analysis](#) that suggests the positive effect newcomers have on state economies.

Options for Targeted Political Environments

Red Option: Resolutions that recognize the economic contributions of asylum seekers in a state are most likely to succeed in supermajority red states. Ideally these are introduced with bipartisan sponsorship. Messaging could be strengthened by calling on the federal government to expedite access to work authorizations (EADs). Workforce contribution and a focus on the economy is advisable.

If passage of such a resolution is not viable at the state level, consider a welcoming resolution at the municipal level, especially if you live in a purple to blue municipality.

Purple Option: Develop a strategy focused on work accessibility and eligibility across a state. A study committee to assess workforce development and accessibility could generate locally based evidence to catalyze positive change.

Establishing an Office for New Americans is one mechanism for harnessing the strengths of a state government in response to the arrival of asylum seekers and new Americans arriving through other pathways. In some cases, they have proven integral to the workforce development of the state.

Blue Option: Invest in the creation of a State Coordinator's Office to streamline services and processes for supporting asylum seekers. Programs that provide initial reception services and case management for asylees can expand upon existing structures within ONAs and ORIAAs. Blue states can strengthen existing state infrastructure to expand language access services, access to legal services and more.

Coordinate with municipalities and community based organizations (CBO) to ensure safeguarding practices, education of available services and infrastructure and standardized service provision across the state.

Legislative Committee Targets

- ▶ Resolutions will likely be advanced by topically relevant committees such as Health and Human Services or Business and Professional Workforce Committees (for those resolutions focused on economic impact).
- ▶ Reception legislation that requires state funding will typically be assigned to committees titled Budget Committee, Ways and Means or Appropriations. Find key champions within budget-oriented committees who can assist in refining the message that efficient, streamlined reception has a positive fiscal impact on state-wide economies.
- ▶ Legislative caucuses that historically have weighed in on issues related to resettlement and immigration—such as Latino, Jewish, Black and African American and Asian American and Pacific Islander caucuses, can be strong champions of reception policies and will engage other members from a cross-section of committees and chambers.

Coalition Building & Partners

- ▶ Impacted community members often will have the strongest platform to share person experiences on reception and the challenges and hurdles they have overcome with the help of local services, individuals and partnerships.
- ▶ Local employers, particularly those struggling to fill jobs and who would be eager to access a newly arrived workforce, could be valuable external validators. They may further link to local small business associations or chambers of commerce, which are influential legislative constituencies.

Securing Appropriations to Welcome Newcomers

State policymakers are charged with drafting a state budgets and, as such, must determine how to spend the taxes they collect as well as how to allocate pass-through money provided to the state under federal programs. Budgeting occurs during the state's legislative session, which generally begins in January and can occur annually or biennially (every other year). In most states, the governor submits a proposed executive budget before session or at the very start, and then the legislature debates and ultimately passes a revised version of that budget. The budgeting process is an excellent opportunity for advocates to influence how tax dollars are spent. Advocacy asks can be made directly to the governor's office during budget development or via legislators during legislative session and hearings on appropriations.

It is often said that a budget is a moral document. By ensuring that sufficient funds are allocated to welcome newcomers, a state can demonstrate that the success of all its residents, including refugees, asylum seekers and other newcomers, is part of its fundamental values. Specifically, states can allocate funds to fill gaps in federal support to refugees to improve resettlement and integration, stand up well-functioning reception systems and prioritize immediate and long-term needs of new residents.

The federal government provides initial support to resettled refugees through Reception and Placement (R&P) funds and integration support through programs funded by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). These funds, while critical for helping refugees take the first steps to rebuild their lives in their new homes, do not fully cover the costs to guarantee that refugees have the best chance of success. Targeted or general state and local investments can multiply the impact of federal funds and ensure that all newcomers have the opportunity to thrive while culturally and economically benefiting the state that chooses to invest in their lives.

When states spend tax dollars to welcome newcomers, they also invest in the long-term health of state and local economies. A [recent study](#) by the U.S. HHS found that, over the past 15 years, refugees and asylum seekers contributed a net fiscal benefit of \$92.3 billion to state and local governments. Evidence-based investments in the reception and integration of newcomers will help to speed the process by which families feel at home in their new communities and become self-reliant.

Supplementing Federal Investments in Refugee Resettlement and Reception of Asylum Seekers

When the U.S. government resettles refugees in local communities, it works with resettlement agencies to ensure that refugees' immediate needs are met. This coordination is funded primarily through R&P grants issued by Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), which provides a one-time fixed amount per person to pay for housing and other expenses in the first 90 days after arrival. Refugees and certain other newcomers are also eligible for support from the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), which administers various grants that may support additional integration services beyond ninety days. A separate source of federal funding, the Shelter and Services Program (SSP) administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), helps defray the costs for border communities providing humanitarian services, including food, acute medical care, personal hygiene supplies, transportation and the sheltering of noncitizens who have recently been released from CBP custody.

These programs are critical to ensuring that newcomers have the necessary support to rebuild their lives in their new homes. Yet, funding gaps persist. Due to the rising costs of housing and other necessities, R&P grants do not cover the full costs of resettlement, even during the first 3 months. ORR funds are restricted to certain populations, and many asylum seekers and parolees are unable to access any federal support. For these reasons, state and local funds are instrumental in ensuring newcomers have the support they need.

Recommended Best Practices

- ▶ It is important that budget requests be data-driven and backed by evidence. Advocates should develop a formula that breaks down funding needs based on provision of services and number of individuals to be served to ensure the request accurately addresses the identified funding gap.
- ▶ Consider sustainability and growth during budget request design, with preference given to specific and ongoing line items in the state budget that are resourced year-over-year commensurate with need and to keep pace with inflation.

- ▶ Design requests with a clear change objective in mind, transparent metrics to measure impact and reporting requirements on outcomes.

Alternatives and Compromises

- ▶ If applicable, include oversight by your state’s Office of New Americans/Office of Refugee and Immigrant Affairs or state refugee coordinator, with input from resettlement agencies, other service providers, and impacted communities.
- ▶ Broad, unrestricted funding pools may be administered by the ONA or ORIA and made available to refugee-led and community-based organizations as well as RAs (resettlement agencies) and NGOs, to supplement federal R&P and ORR funds and respond to estimated budget shortfalls as well as emergency situations.
- ▶ Establish funding that meets targeted and specific needs, such as affordable housing that specifically targets newcomers. Fully fund state and local reception programs, with state resources plugging gaps in FEMA funding and offices of coordination fully staffed to ensure communities can provide human reception services to new arrivals. Allocate funding for workforce development, vocational training, and educational initiatives for newcomers.

Select State Examples

State & Bill Number	Details
New York S.8303B / A.8803B <i>Aid to Localities Budget</i>	Established in 2017, the New York State Enhanced Services to Refugees Program (NYSESRP) provides enhanced services to certain new arrivals. Resources are distributed through the State Refugee Coordinator.
Maryland S.B.0360 / H.B.0350 <i>Budget Bill</i>	The Maryland Office for Refugees and Asylees (MORA) provides support and services to refugees to ease their transition into the United States and serves as a resource to the Governor and General Assembly on refugee and immigrant policy.
Washington S.B.5950 <i>Budget Bill</i>	Included resourcing to supplement workforce development programs, initiate service provision for asylum seekers, offers housing support and legal services and also provides administrative funds for the Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance.

Advocacy Checklist

- Do your homework on your state’s unique budget process. Contact your state budget office to ensure you understand the timeline, procedures and roles of responsibility that are specific to your state. You can also review the National Association of State Budget Offices’ (NASBO) 2021 report on [Budget Processes in the States](#) or the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities’ [State Budget Basics](#) page.
- Understand and take into consideration your state’s overall budget health and forecast for the next budget cycle. Research and analyze whether your state’s fiscal condition will lead to a budget surplus, deficit or balance for the next fiscal year.
- Most importantly, review the language of your state’s proposed and enacted budgets. Compare the needs of your organization to what was included in the current fiscal year’s enacted budget. This will provide you with an idea of the increases, maintenance or new lines of funding that you would like to request in the proposed budget for the next fiscal year. View NASBO’s [“Proposed & Enacted Budgets”](#) tracker to navigate to your state’s budget bills and review the text.

- ❑ In formulating your budget request, take into consideration the needs voiced by impacted populations as well as gaps in program funding that can be filled. Requesting unrestricted funds allows your organization the freedom of discretionary spending and flexibility to disburse funds to various programs or initiatives. This request can be made in the name of your organization or for resettlement agencies in the state generally. Requests with specific language that lays out detailed parameters for the use of funds and projected outcomes limit such flexibility but sometimes serve to prevent non-resettlement organizations from being mistakenly granted funds for uses specific to resettlement services.
- ❑ A request should be as specific as possible, but napkin math should be introduced in the beginning at the very least. The complete request should provide detailed information regarding:
 - funding goals
 - the number of clients that will be served
 - amounts that will be used toward office supplies, travel, staff salary, etc.
 - metrics for success
 - outcomes lawmakers can expect
- ❑ Once finalized and introduced, track your request as it moves through the chamber it has been introduced in and keep in consistent contact with the appropriation request sponsor. You will need to conduct additional outreach to relevant legislators at each stage the bill passes through and prepare testimony should the appropriation receive a public hearing.

Options for Targeted Political Environments

Red Option: Instead of pursuing state-level funding, consider opportunities at the county, metropolitan or municipal level. Advocates may consider securing funding that supports the implementation of legislation related to workforce development outcomes depending on the programs offered by the advocate's organization. Bipartisan support will be a necessity for any state asks.

Purple Option: Work with the relevant state agency (e.g., Department of Social Services, HHS) to pursue inclusion in the state agency's proposed budget. Reinforce the agency request or submit your budget request via the legislature or governor's office based on their respective political alignment with the request. Consider a two-year approach wherein the fund is established and state resources are allocated in subsequent budget cycles.

Blue Option: Establish a line item in the state budget that offers a broad pot of funding (e.g., unrestricted funds) that empowers service providers or CBOs with greater discretion over fund utilization. Funding can go not just toward programming but also toward direct financial assistance, and eligibility can be inclusive of various immigration statuses.

Executive & Legislative Committee Targets

- ▶ It is important to have the interest of relevant state agencies that may be impacted by a budget request. This includes commissioners and deputy commissioners of state agencies including state variations of Health and HHS or social services departments, directors on the governor's executive team and directors of ONAs or ORAs.
- ▶ Building a relationship with relevant targets in the state's governor's office provides the opportunity to include a request in the governor's proposed budget for the next fiscal year or biennium before it is introduced to the senate and house/assembly for consideration.

- ▶ The chairs and co-chairs of the senate and house/assembly committees on Finance, Ways and Means, Budget, or Appropriations will play key roles in the budget creation process and should be involved from the outset.
- ▶ The chairs and co-chairs of the senate and house/assembly subcommittees relevant to your budget request, such as HHS, Education, Workforce Development, etc., will be important voices on the technical aspects of proposals.
- ▶ You should also involve members of the senate and house/assembly Rules Committee, which considers all bills reported from fiscal and policy committees and determines whether and when a bill gets on a chamber's calendar for consideration.

Coalition Building & Partners

- ▶ Valuable partners in the process could include members of impacted communities, ethnic community-based organizations, resettlement agencies and organizations providing services to refugees and immigrants, directors of ONAs or ORIAs, state refugee coordinators and other stakeholders with interests related to the thematic content or purpose of the funding.

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The International Rescue Committee (IRC) helps people affected by humanitarian crises to survive, recover and rebuild their lives. We deliver lasting impact by providing health care, helping children learn, and empowering individuals and communities to become self-reliant, always with a focus on the unique needs of women and girls. Founded in 1933 at the call of Albert Einstein, we now work in over 40 crisis-affected countries as well as communities throughout Europe and the Americas.

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