



NEIGHBORS TOGETHER:

Promising Practices to
Strengthen Relations with
Refugees and Muslims

WELCOMING
AMERICA



BUILDING A NATION OF NEIGHBORS



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our nation's founding principles, including freedom of religion, are as important today as they have ever been. Today, we have the opportunity to reaffirm these values by creating welcoming communities that embrace and engage people no matter where they come from or how they choose to worship. Yet, many Americans remain ambivalent about the demographic changes happening in their communities, and world events have contributed to heightened fears about refugees and Muslims—including immigrant, refugee, and U.S.-born Muslims. Research and practice have shown that such fears and concerns are made worse by a lack of information and engagement from trusted sources and champions, especially at the community level.

In contrast, there are also many bright spots in places that, with intentionality, have successfully created more cohesive and welcoming environments. Efforts to welcome refugees and Muslims are inspiring people to build a different kind of community. While economic and cultural concerns can create barriers for and threaten the inclusion of newcomers, civic and community leaders continue to build relationships and coalitions that counter anti-Muslim backlash and help integrate refugees as new Americans.

Today we witness negative rhetoric, bullying, violence, and discrimination, yet we also see communities welcoming Muslims and refugees through simple gestures, statements of alliance and protection, acts of basic humanity and at times stepping out of their comfort zones to stand with their neighbors for the first time. It is vital to lift up these promising practices that are preventing and responding to anti-Muslim backlash in an effort to build welcoming and inclusive communities. Building welcoming and inclusive communities is critical to ensure that all Americans are free from fear, and have the freedom to express themselves and practice their religion.

Recognizing that the prevailing concerns about economic, cultural, and physical security are shared by newcomers and long-term Americans, Christians and Sikhs, Jews and Muslims in small towns, rural communities, and urban areas across the United States, this toolkit provides promising practices to counter anti-refugee and anti-Muslim backlash and work towards a positive vision for our communities. These promising practices demonstrate how: **building meaningful contact between diverse populations; positive communications strategies; and engaging civic and community leaders** can help create a climate in which all people can thrive. The stories in this toolkit illustrate how multi-ethnic and socioeconomically diverse communities are welcoming Muslims and refugees and, in turn, how Muslims and refugees are active civic participants and working alongside their neighbors to build stronger, more resilient, and welcoming communities.

We invite you to adapt these promising practices to prevent and address anti-refugee and anti-Muslim sentiments in your local community by: acknowledging the uncertainty experienced by all groups; investing in ongoing partnerships; sharing your successes and challenges with regional, state and national networks; and helping strengthen a movement of inclusive communities across the nation.

STRATEGY AREAS FOR PROMISING PRACTICES:

1 Building meaningful contact between diverse populations

2 Positive communications strategies

3 Engaging civic and community leaders

INTRODUCTION

Welcoming America's Welcoming Refugees project, funded by the Office of Refugee Resettlement, provides technical assistance and training to the nation's refugee resettlement network to help foster greater community support for refugees. War, violence, and persecution in recent years have resulted in an unprecedented number of refugees fleeing Muslim-majority countries, creating a more visible emergency and leading to many people seeking refuge in the United States and Europe.

The growing size and prominence of this population has meant that community members are encountering unfamiliar neighbors and customs, and new narratives are taking hold that create an association between those fleeing violence abroad and those perpetrating it. This can create fertile ground for concerns among the receiving community and, at its worst, this has resulted in increased anti-refugee and anti-Muslim



sentiments in the United States, converging to trigger a backlash against both groups as well as an increase in hate crimes and hateful incidents against those perceived to be refugees or Muslim. At its best, many community champions and groups have stepped forward to welcome their new neighbors and help them build a new life that offers safety, opportunity, and a place to belong. Recognizing that fears and misunderstandings of Muslims, refugees, and those perceived to be either have challenged communities in recent months, this toolkit highlights promising strategies to engage the receiving community and welcome refugees from all backgrounds.



WHY WELCOMING PRACTICES MATTER

According to the Pew Research Center, there are about 3.3 million Muslims in the United States representing 1% of the population, and this percentage is expected to double by 2050. This increase in the Muslim population is part of a broader demographic shift in the United States, as forecasts indicate by 2050, or even 2043¹ the United States will not only be more populous, it will also be a “majority-minority” country. This demographic shift is embraced by some and may be cause for concern or anxiety for others. Anti-refugee or anti-Muslim bias thus exists within the context of fear and anxiety about shifting demographics and in some cases real economic challenges. A 2014 study² of state legislative efforts found that the handful of state legislators who have created anti-Muslim bills³ are also ones who have supported bills that may be viewed as detrimental to the interests of other communities of color.

Many Americans may not recognize that most American Muslims were born in the United States, and if they arrived as immigrants and refugees, they did so in search of the freedoms and opportunities that form the American ethos. Even as perceptions of Islam have turned more negative over the past few years, 60% of Americans have never met a Muslim and few report knowing a lot about the religion.⁴ According to a May 2016 public opinion poll⁵ of American attitudes on refugees from the Middle East, 59% of Americans support taking in refugees from Syria and other Middle Eastern countries if the United States screens them for security risks, and 55% of Americans think refugees would be welcome in their communities. This poll also found that while only three of the 750,000 refugees admitted since the attacks of September 11, 2001 have been arrested on terrorism charges, most Americans think it is more, and many Americans think it is substantially more.

Fear and distrust of Muslims in the United States and discrimination against them pre-dates the attacks of 9/11, but the level of fear and concern among American Muslims about the safety and future of their families is at the highest level it has ever been—higher even than the immediate weeks and months after 9/11. In the months since the November 2015 Paris attacks, there have been nearly 100 publicly reported hate crimes⁶ against American Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim. Among the examples of recent hate crimes, in separate incidents, one American Muslim female was shot as she was leaving an Islamic center.⁷ A Muslim man was assaulted and beaten after leaving a

President Eisenhower’s remarks in 1957 at the dedication of the Islamic Center in Washington, D.C.



I should like to assure you, my Islamic friends, that under the American Constitution, under American tradition, and in American hearts, this Center, this place of worship, is just as welcome as could be a similar edifice of any other religion. Indeed, America would fight with her whole strength for your right to have here your own church and worship according to your own conscience. This concept is indeed a part of America, and without that concept we would be something else than what we are.

1 Hope Yen, “Census: Whites No Longer A Majority in US by 2043.” Associated Press, December 12, 2012, <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/census-whites-no-longer-majority-us-2043>.

2 Community Brief Manufacturing Bigotry: A State-by-State Legislative Effort to Pushback Against 2050 by Targeting Muslims and Other Minorities

3 Also referred to as “anti-sharia” bills.

4 Daniel Cox, Ph.D., Robert P. Jones, Ph.D. Nearly Half of Americans Worried That They or Their Family Will Be a Victim of Terrorism, Public Religions Research Institute Poll, December 2015

5 “American attitudes on refugees from the Middle East”, Public

Opinion Poll by Shibley Telhami A survey sponsored by the Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World at the Brookings Institution and the Sadat Chair for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland and fielded by Nielsen Scarborough

6 Recent Incidents of Anti-Muslim Hate Crimes, MUSLIM ADVOCATES (2016), <https://www.muslimadvocates.org/map-anti-muslim-hate-crimes/>.

7 Travis Gettys, Muslim Woman Shot At and Another Nearly Run Off the Road in Tampa After Leaving Mosques, RAW STORY, Dec. 11, 2015, <https://www.rawstory.com/2015/12/muslim-woman-shot-at-and-another-nearly-run-off-the-road-in-tampa-after-leaving-mosques/>.

mosque.⁸ An elderly Sikh man was stabbed to death while working at a convenience store⁹ and while a Muslim family was shopping for a home, a man in the neighborhood pointed a gun at them saying they “should all die” because they are Muslim.¹⁰ A Muslim woman wearing a headscarf had hot liquid poured on her by another woman shouting “Muslim piece of trash.”¹¹ In addition, zoning permits for the construction and expansion of mosques, cemeteries, and community centers have been challenged by coordinated local efforts.

One of the most concerning impacts of anti-refugee and anti-Muslim rhetoric and bias has been bullying of school-aged children. According to a 2013 study by the California chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR-CA)¹² nearly half of Muslim students say they have been subjected to some form of bias-based bullying. According to one survey of students by the Montgomery County (Maryland) Public Schools, twenty percent of the respondents “felt intimidated, harassed, humiliated, bullied or emotionally/physically abused by classmates because they are Muslim” and ten percent of respondents “felt like a teacher or school administrator has treated them unfairly because they are Muslim.”¹³

School bullying is not unique to refugee or Muslim students, and the continued negative representations and assumptions in the public sphere serve as obstacles to cultivating a safe, healthy and nurturing school environment for all students. According to recent reporting in St Cloud, Minnesota, Somali students in the public school “were targets for flying food in the lunchroom. Hallways were rampant with pushing and shoving, hijab-pulling and name-calling. It all came with persistent demands that they go back to their own country.”¹⁴

Implicit and explicit biases that affect our understanding, actions and decisions do not always lead to violence, but can have an impact on people’s lives and policies that affect them. Implicit or unconscious biases develop over the course of a lifetime through exposure to direct and indirect messages and unlike explicit bias may not align with our declared beliefs. Research indicates that implicit associations that we have formed can be gradually unlearned.¹⁵

Anti-Muslim backlash in the United States is one expression of fear and anxiety about changing demographics, felt or fueled by certain segments of the population. At the same time, civic and community leaders continue to build relationships and coalitions that counter anti-Muslim backlash and help integrate refugees as new Americans. Furthermore, both American Muslims and refugees are an important component of the national fabric, contributing economically, socially and civically.

As the promising practices in the following pages demonstrate, these challenges have also inspired interfaith and civic partnerships upholding the right of Americans to practice their religion.

8 Laurel Raymond, Assault of Muslim Man in NYC Comes Amid Rising Islamophobia Nationwide, THINKPROGRESS, June 6, 2016, <http://thinkprogress.org/justice/2016/06/06/3785049/muslim-man-attacked-queens/>.

9 Charles Lam, Sikh Man Stabbed to Death in Robbery of Central California Convenience Store, NBC NEWS, Jan. 5, 2016, <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/sikh-man-stabbed-death-robbery-central-california-convenience-store-n490786>.

10 Kevin Killeen, Affton Man Charged With Anti-Muslim Hate Crime, CBS ST. LOUIS, Feb. 29, 2016, <http://stlouis.cbslocal.com/2016/02/29/muslims-wait-for-bob-mcculloch-to-file-charges/>.

11 Steve Birr, Police Release Video of Assault on Muslim Woman Outside DC Starbucks, THE DAILY CALLER, May 3, 2016, <http://dailycaller.com/2016/05/03/police-release-video-of-assault-on-muslim-woman-outside-dc-starbucks/>.

12 Growing in Faith: California Muslim Youth Experiences with Bullying, Harassment and Religious Accommodation in Schools

13 “Impact of Bullying in Montgomery County”, survey of Montgomery Public Schools Survey conducted by the International Cultural Center, <http://www.worde.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Impact-of-Bullying-in-Montgomery-County.pdf>

14 Susan Du, “St Cloud is the Worst Place in Minnesota to be Somali”, City Pages, January 20, 2016 <http://www.citypages.com/news/st-cloud-is-the-worst-place-in-minnesota-to-be-somali-797683314> For more on implicit bias in the context of immigrant integration see “America Needs All of Us” https://www.welcomingamerica.org/sites/default/files/Implicit_Bias_Toolkit_FINAL_web.pdf

15 “Section 9524 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (“ESEA”) of 1965, as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, requires that, as a condition of receiving ESEA funds, a local educational agency must certify in writing to its State educational agency that it has no policy that prevents, or otherwise denies participation in, constitutionally protected prayer in public schools as set forth in this guidance.” According to the guidance prayer is allowed during non-instructional times, or during instructional times at the discretion of the schools. This guidance also states that students may organize prayer groups/activities to the extent that all students are allowed to organize non-curricular activities http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/religionandschools/prayer_guidance.html

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

The toolkit is designed to be an easy reference guide for those interested in proactively building bridges between Muslims, receiving communities, and refugees of all backgrounds. It is based on Welcoming America's Receiving Communities framework, which has been shown through research and practice to help overcome divisiveness and create more welcoming communities. Through three strategy areas—**building meaningful contact between diverse populations; positive communications; and community leadership engagement practices**—organizations and community groups can help create a community climate in which all people can thrive.

We encourage you to consider which strategy or combination of approaches is most appropriate for the specific context in your community. These promising practices are offered to inspire you to replicate, adapt or create new practices to prevent and counter backlash.

Because effectively communicating about these issues is the foundation of all of this work, readers are encouraged to use this toolkit in conjunction with Stand Together: Messaging to Support Muslims and Refugees in Challenging Times which is a companion piece to this toolkit, and the Reframing Refugees Toolkit (<http://www.welcomingrefugees.org/reframing-refugees-messaging-toolkit-0>)

This is not an exhaustive list of promising strategies, and given the dynamic nature of the issue—we expect to continue to hear stories of proactive strategies not included here. Please share your stories at <http://www.welcomingrefugees.org/promising-practices>.



As you adapt these strategies to envision, plan and implement local welcoming efforts it is important to:

- 1 Acknowledge the fear and uncertainty experienced by ALL groups
- 2 Model authentic and equitable partnering with Muslim and refugee communities and receiving community members
- 3 Provide a safe space for all partners to share their stories and ask challenging questions
- 4 Invest in ongoing relationship building, not just one-time partnerships
- 5 Connect local efforts to regional, state and national networks to share lessons and broaden the impact of your work

PROMISING PRACTICES

The specific suggestions are informed by lessons learned from communities across the United States that are combating anxiety, tension, and fear of the “other” through meaningful contact between longer-term residents and newcomers; positive communication strategies; and leadership engagement to create welcoming, immigrant-friendly and economically vibrant communities where immigrants, refugees and U.S.-born residents can thrive and transform their communities. The examples below confirm that the key to success is recognizing that there is no replacement for individual relationship building before a crisis erupts, or for sustained engagement after the crisis passes.

CONTACT

In some communities, longer-term receiving community members may have little significant interaction with Muslims or refugees. This lack of real connection has the potential to exacerbate concerns and fears. However, when people are intentionally connected with each other on an individual level, so often they recognize their common humanity and differences diminish.



INVEST IN PREVENTATIVE RELATIONSHIP AND ALLIANCE BUILDING

› **TIP: Don't wait for a negative incident, hate crime or backlash to occur, but invest in relationship building between Muslim neighbors, local mosques, community organizations or local governments. Examples include:**

The River Road Islamic Center in Louisville, Kentucky

Worked side-by-side with the local secular, Jewish and Christian communities on service projects to support local food banks, domestic violence shelters, and tornado victims in Kentucky, as well as earthquake victims in Haiti and Pakistan. Dr. Muhammad Babar worships at the Islamic Center, is a civic leader, and serves as a board member of the Center for Interfaith Relations. He has also led the Islamic community's efforts to become civically engaged and build relationships with local governments and community organizations. As a result, when the Islamic Center was vandalized in 2015, hundreds of community members turned out to clean up the graffiti, and community and religious leaders of different faiths denounced the act. Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer called the act one of ignorance and extremism, one that hit “like a punch in the gut.” “To our Islamic center, I want to apologize on behalf of the entire community for this unacceptable incident here,” Fischer said, adding that intolerance harms all of Louisville, not just Muslims. As home to boxing legend Muhammad Ali, Louisville was the site of the June 2016 interfaith memorial for Ali, attended by world leaders. In addition, scores of people of all faiths and races packed River Road Mosque at the Louisville Islamic Center for an interfaith service to celebrate Ali as a global goodwill ambassador.

PROMOTE BETTER INFORMATION SHARING AND CONNECTIONS BETWEEN REFUGEES, MUSLIMS AND THE RECEIVING COMMUNITY



- › **TIP:** Personal interaction can help reduce perceived or real fear or uncertainty about the “unknown” or “other” and might create a safe space to ask questions of each other that can help bridge gaps and build trust. Examples include:
-

Meet a Muslim: Combating Stereotypes One Person at a Time

Inspired by “This American Life” story on “Talk to an Iraqi,” Sebastian Robbins and Mona Hayder in Massachusetts decided to replicate the concept by initiating an Ask a Muslim event locally. Inspired by their efforts, a group of volunteers in Southern California and Northern California asked to replicate the idea and hosted similar events in their community. The Massachusetts event was outside a library, the Northern California events at local coffee shops, and the Southern California event at a shopping mall an hour west of San Bernardino. While the questions people ask may be challenging—ranging from, “How do you pray?” To “Why aren’t more Muslims speaking out against terrorism?” and “Why are Muslim women oppressed?” to “Why is there so much violence in Muslim countries?” the goals of these events are to connect at a personal level, move beyond stereotypes of each other, and potentially discover commonalities. According to the organizers, “This allows us to reach the masses that wouldn’t normally come to an interfaith event or even know about the interfaith events happening in their community” (<http://thewhitestone.org>). A similar approach was used in “The Muslims Are Coming” (<http://themuslimsarecoming.com>) a film by Negin Farsad and Dean Obeidallah that features stand-up comedy and an Ask a Muslim Booth across the United States.

Our Muslim Neighbor (OMN) Initiative

This Nashville, Tennessee pilot of a national effort to advance understanding of Islam and Muslims convenes individuals from varied backgrounds and perspectives to engage in public diplomacy, media training, and interfaith education. The initiative includes a network of over 80 partner organizations across Middle Tennessee and a 12-person steering committee, and organizes religious leaders’ conferences, interfaith community Iftars (breaking of the fast during Ramadan), media training, and community forums. Its A Seat at the Table (ASATT) program aims to create safe venues for thoughtful conversation among neighbors from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds. The conversation is organic and topics explored in these dialogues include areas such as race, faith, culture, and ethnic background. Venues range from neighborhood restaurants to a private home or a church, with targeted outreach to engage youth as well as adults in Middle Tennessee. Participants can share their first-person accounts of getting to know their Muslim neighbors on the Initiative website. Local partners include Family of Abraham, Nashville International Academy, and the Tennessee Immigrant & Refugee Rights Coalition, and national partners include Religions for Peace USA. <http://www.rfpusa.org/our-muslim-neighbor-initiative>

Refugee Sundays

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) invites congregations, schools and communities to set aside one Sunday to lift up the stories of refugees fleeing violence and war and celebrate their contributions in their new home communities. The Refugee Sunday materials include a: Worship and Activity Guide, a Refugee Factsheet, a Refugee Simulation Game and a video library that includes “Courageous Journeys” that tells the stories of those seeking safety and protection. <http://refugeesunday.lirs.org>

Global Friends Coalition

This community-centered effort builds connections between New American and longer-term Greater Grand Forks, North Dakota residents through events including: community presentations on refugees, a community-refugee picnic, World Refugee Day Fair held in the Town Square during the Farmers Market, and international nights at the University of North Dakota. <http://www.gfcoalition.org>

SUPPORT AND ENHANCE INTERCULTURAL ALLIANCES



► **TIP:** The diversity within Muslim communities, and historical or recent experiences of bias has stimulated alliances among diverse community leaders. Japanese Americans continue to stand with the Muslim community, and Sikh communities who often get mistakenly identified as Muslim are at the forefront of combating Anti-Muslim backlash in communities across the country. And an increasing number of Christian Evangelical Congregations are speaking up for and standing by their Muslim neighbors. Specific examples include:

Christian Response to Anti-Sharia Laws in Alabama

The Christian Coalition of Alabama spoke up against the anti-foreign law/anti-sharia law ballot measure considered by the Alabama state legislature in 2014. Even though the ballot measure was approved, Christian leaders including Randy Brinson, the president of the Christian Coalition of Alabama—one of the state’s largest network of conservative evangelicals—spoke up against passing the ballot measure. The Christian Coalition opposed this ballot measure because “the law would jeopardize adoptions, marriages, and religious liberty in our state.” The Greater Birmingham Ministries, an African-American ministry alliance with a focus on direct service and social justice work, joined the Christian Coalition to oppose the ballot measure in 2014 and continues to partner with the Muslim community in Birmingham including issuing joint statements in response to violence at home or abroad. <http://gbm.org/muslim-and-interfaith-partners-in-alabama-stand-united-after-paris-attacks/>

Shoulder-to-Shoulder

Nationally, Shoulder-to-Shoulder is an interfaith organization dedicated to ending anti-Muslim sentiment by strengthening the voice of freedom and peace. Founded in 2010 by over 20 national religious groups, it offers resource materials—worship materials and curricula, new data, and research—and connects leaders and organizations engaged in countering anti-Muslim bias. <http://shouldertoshouldercampaign.org>

Welcoming Michigan

Communities across Michigan have been home to Muslims dating back to at least 1921 when the first “purpose-built” mosque in the United States was built near the Highland Park Ford Motor Plant in Detroit. In recent decades, communities in Southeast Michigan have welcomed immigrants and refugees of different faiths from a range of countries including Bangladesh, Bosnia, Iraq, Sudan and Syria. In some cases, these immigrants and refugees may be fleeing religious intolerance in their home countries and at the same time have an opportunity to build inter-faith relationships in their new home communities. In September 2015, a special land agreement to build a mosque in a residential area in the Detroit suburb of Sterling Heights was denied. During the protests leading up to and following this decision, community members—including Christian refugees from Iraq—voiced strong anti-Muslim sentiments. Despite the recent local tensions, the community responded to the aftermath of the attacks

in Paris and Brussels in November 2015 with a Thanksgiving Community Gathering intended to reaffirm American values of freedom, diversity, and unity. This interfaith, multicultural alliance included religious leaders from the local Muslim and the Iraqi Christian communities, the city of Sterling Heights, the Interfaith Center for Racial Justice, the InterFaith Leadership Council of Metropolitan Detroit, Lutheran Social Services of Michigan, the Buddhist Meditation Center, Unity Sikh Society of Michigan and the Memorial Signing Choir.

This symbolic event was possible in part due to years of trust building among religious and civic leaders. It was also a constructive step towards healing and building longer-term relationships between communities that might have viewed each other with suspicion or fear. <http://welcomingmichigan.org>

Unite Oregon

Unite Oregon is yet another example of alliance building for the 21st century. The organization is a merger between Center for Intercultural Organizing (CIO) and Oregon Action. Founded by Portland-area immigrants and refugees to address anti-Muslim sentiment after 9/11, CIO built strong multicultural alliances through community education, civic engagement and policy advocacy, organizing and mobilization, and intergenerational leadership development. Formed in 1980 as Oregon Fair Share, Oregon Action was a statewide broad-based, multi-racial community organization dedicated to addressing economic and racial justice issues. This merger is a way to connect the state's urban and suburban immigrants, refugees, and people of color with low-income rural communities to address issues of common concern, including growing economic inequality and lack of access to opportunity. <http://www.uniteoregon.org>

PARTICIPATE IN JOINT COMMUNITY PROJECTS

► **TIP: Working together on community building, service, or organizing projects can be an opportunity to get to know diverse community members. Examples include:**



Community Garden in Boise, Idaho

Congregation Ahavath Beth Israel's (CABI) home is the oldest synagogue in continuing use west of the Mississippi. In 2003, the 108-year-old building moved from its cramped downtown location to a four-acre site. The original master plan envisioned a community garden to share with the synagogue's new neighbors. At the same time, the Idaho Office for Refugees (IOR) was initiating a plan to develop community garden sites for new Americans in their own neighborhoods, including a large community living near the synagogue. IOR approached the congregation about the benefits to refugees, particularly those from agrarian cultures, of supplementing their food with high-quality, low-cost produce and the opportunities of social interaction, language learning, and community building. With CABI members hard at work on building their new facility, it made sense for the large tract of land to be used by the refugee neighbors, too.



A small committee of current and former Synagogue board members joined IOR staff to design the garden and find grants from public and private sources. The synagogue's contractor donated a garden shed, a landscaper donated an irrigation timer, and two members secured donations of manure and wood chips. The synagogue day camp children created a hand-painted sign for the garden, the Bar Mitzvah class created raised beds to make gardening more accessible for elders, and the synagogue's Sukkah canopy provides shade during the hottest days as adult members continue to work alongside and welcome refugees new neighbors from Afghanistan, Liberia, Somalia and the Ukraine.

This garden flourishes as a part of a broader effort to integrate refugees including Neighbors United, a collaborative of state and local agencies, community leaders, policy makers, resettled refugees, volunteers, and educators helping refugees successfully integrate and thrive in Boise. <http://neighborsunitedboise.org>

For more examples on joint service projects that use language learning; common interests like art, music, and dance; or opportunities to address shared concerns about such issues as education quality or the environment, see the Receiving Communities Toolkit at <https://www.welcomingamerica.org/content/receiving-communities-initiative-toolkit> or visit www.welcomingrefugees.org



BUILD RELATIONSHIPS FOR THE LONG-TERM

› **TIP: Building relationships as a long-term investment engenders trust and can facilitate partnerships as needed.**

Tri-Faith Initiative

In 2006, in Omaha, Nebraska, a group of Jewish, Muslim and Christian leaders came together to build a tangible project—a Tri-Faith Campus with a synagogue, mosque, church, and secular community center. They began the partnership by addressing their greatest fears and concerns right away. These concerns included: how would they keep their unique faith identities? Who would own and control the buildings? And perhaps, the greatest fear—that members of one faith group would try to convert members of the other groups. As they worked out their questions, the delegates developed a Memorandum of Understanding (<https://trifaith.org/memorandum-of-understanding-2/>) that stands as the framework for collaboration today.

Temple Israel’s congregation was founded in 1871 and its new synagogue on the Tri-Faith campus was dedicated in October 2013. Founded in Omaha in 2006, the American Muslim Institute (AMI) is a non-denominational, nonprofit organization and its mosque at this site is planned to open in 2017. The Countryside Community Church was founded in Omaha in 1949 and is a part of the United Church of Christ, which is known as the oldest denomination in the United States. Countryside continues with the planning and design process for becoming the Christian presence on the Tri-Faith campus. <https://trifaith.org>

COMMUNICATIONS

Muslims are in the headlines, and too often the stories are negative. The frequent stories can lead community members to make unfair and stereotypical assumptions. However, negative messages can be counteracted, and the fact that the vast majority of Muslims and refugees are neighbors, colleagues, and contributing members of American society must be emphasized.

REFRAME THE MESSAGE



› **TIP: Using stories that connect Muslims and their neighbors based on what they have in common and their shared values to demonstrate how welcoming and supporting Muslims are other ways of building stronger communities for everyone. For more please see *Stand Together: Messaging to Support Muslims and Refugees in Challenging Times*.**

Share the Story of Promising Practices Broadly and Often

Communications about relationship-building efforts described above can dispel misconceptions, inspire replication and nurture welcoming communities. Use appropriate channels – newsletters, listservs, social media and press including community and ethnic media outlets.

Examples of Print, TV and Social Media Communications About Promising Practices

Welcoming Michigan Blog

<http://welcomingmichigan.org/blog>

Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition

<http://www.tnimmigrant.org/press-room/>

Refugees Welcome in Idaho

<https://www.facebook.com/refugeeswelcomeinidaho/>

USE THE ARTS

► **TIP: Draw on the Arts as a way to connect people and create a forum for education and cultural exchange**



Art Therapy Institute

In collaboration with the Transplanting Traditions Community Farm, Durham Public Schools, and Chapel Hill/Carrboro City Schools the Art Therapy Institute is expanding its already successful art therapy program for newcomers to other schools by connecting with ESL classes. This project will help refugee adolescents share their stories of hope and resiliency with the broader community through visual and written narratives by providing art therapy groups in the Chapel Hill/Carrboro City Schools and the Durham Public Schools. The art work will be disseminated through social media and an end-of-year art show for the public will be catered by local farmers from refugee backgrounds. <http://www.tlcrefugees.org/2015-projects/>

Quilting as Communications

In 2015, Boise State University students chronicled the relationships between 12-16 year-old refugee and non-refugee youth, who worked in pairs. The pairs created three quilt squares: one for each child in the partnership, and one as a joint project. The quilt squares were stitched together to form one large quilt. In addition to quilting, the children wrote in journals describing their experience of quilting and working and learning with their partner. A documentary film created by the Boise State University students is expected to serve as a teaching tool, and a local public school district is exploring offering similar workshops for their students. <http://www.boiseweekly.com/boise/refugees-non-refugees-stitch-quilt-weave-new-relationships/Content?oid=3527972>



LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND ENGAGEMENT

The vocal support of leaders helps build unity in communities. So often, trusted local champions of diverse backgrounds set the tone for the community climate. State or local officials, business leaders, faith leaders, or representatives from health, education, social services, or economic development fields, as well as neighborhood civic leaders, can all be helpful as champions for a welcoming approach.

LEVERAGE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT WITHIN REFUGEE AND MUSLIM COMMUNITIES



► **TIP: Mosques and community organizations build a culture of civic engagement in their communities by volunteering within and beyond their communities; encouraging community members to share their voice and stories, serving on boards and commissions, educating community members on rights and responsibilities; developing anti-bullying initiatives; supporting citizenship and DACA applicants; and organizing voter registration efforts. Specific examples include:**

Leadership Development Alongside Support for Refugees in Greensboro, North Carolina

As the refugee crisis unfolded in Europe and following the Paris attacks in November 2015, Muslim refugees were the target of hate incidents in Greensboro, North Carolina. Local civic leaders—including refugees and Muslims—quickly realized that misconceptions and lack of understanding about the local refugee and Muslim community were at the heart of this fear and expressed hate. A coalition of faith leaders, refugee resettlement leaders, academics, and community members came together to engage city government through its International Advisory Committee, a part of the Human Relations Commission. In addition, the Greensboro police chief visited the Islamic Center of Greensboro (ICG). This coalition also organized the first annual Peace Festival, which included an outdoor Muslim prayer attended by hundreds of people of all faiths, as well as a Multicultural Thanksgiving Dinner and press conference in support of Syrian refugees. Church World Service's (CWS) Refugee Leadership Development for Social Change program focused on public speaking and civic engagement training for refugees and immigrants that prepared them to effectively share their own stories and become active civic participants by attending meetings with elected officials, writing letters to representatives, and registering to vote. The efforts in the small community had ripples across the state and the country. The Islamic Center of Greensboro and over 40 other area mosques are now members of North Carolina Outreach—a statewide interfaith network. Initiated at Greensboro's Guilford College with CWS Greensboro office's contribution, Every Campus a Refuge calls on every college and university around the world to host one refugee family on their campus grounds and to assist them in resettlement. <http://cwsgreensboro.org>

Beaverton Organizing and Leadership Development

In partnership with the City of Beaverton, Unite Oregon annually provides a leadership development program for emerging immigrant and refugee leaders and leaders of color. The Beaverton Organizing and Leadership Development (BOLD) Program centers around three goals: growing new leaders, building cross-cultural relationships, and laying the groundwork for civic engagement. The program exposes participants to the fundamentals of community leadership, cross-cultural organizing, structure of local government, and ways to get involved. City leaders make presentations on their services and departments, and the workshops include interpreters for Spanish, Farsi and Arabic. Including members of the 2016 cohort, more than 80 people have participated in the four years the program has been offered and graduates have gone on to serve on city boards and in other leadership positions in the community, as well as act as ambassadors to their communities. The City of Beaverton

was honored with the International Association for Public Participation's 2016 Public Involvement Best Practices Award, which recognized the BOLD Program as an innovative approach to engaging historically underrepresented communities in city government. This leadership engagement is one commitment to creating an inclusive, welcoming city, and in March 2016 the Beaverton City Council also unanimously passed the "Resolution to Declare Support for the Muslim Community and Reaffirm Beaverton as a Welcoming City," drafted by the Diversity Advisory Board. http://www.uniteoregon.org/leadership_development

Baitul Mal – House of Good

Two Muslim chaplains from the St. Louis, Missouri Police Department partnered with the Islamic Foundation of Greater St. Louis and the International Institute of St. Louis at the height of the international spotlight on refugees in 2015 to help Syrian refugees arriving in the city. The organic efforts of collecting and delivering clothing and household items grew so rapidly that the Islamic Foundation helped fund a rental space in the city's South side and Baitul Mal—House of Good was formed. Baitul Mal has grown to be a resource for both newly arrived refugees as well as longer-term community members. Volunteers including police officers, youth groups, local churches and mosque groups help sort, deliver and distribute donated items. This homegrown community effort provides a space for police and community members reflecting the diversity of the city to build a relationship with each other and the community they serve as they work together on a common purpose. <http://www.bringthemhere.com/baitul-mal-house-of-good.html>

ENGAGE WITH AND LEARN FROM YOUTH

► **TIP: Young people are not immune to experiences of bigotry and are active in interfaith, multi-ethnic dialogues and action to counter backlash and negative rhetoric. These efforts can serve as learning laboratories to engage and partner with diverse communities. Public schools are among the first points of contact that families have with the receiving community and despite stretched resources can play a foundational role in creating inclusive, welcoming environments.**



Youth LEAD

Teenagers from different faith backgrounds in the suburban community of Sharon, Massachusetts, have been engaging in dialogue and public service. Historically a Jewish community, Sharon has experienced demographic shifts and is now home to sizable Christian, Muslim and Hindu populations with eight churches, a Hindu Temple, and an Islamic Center. Youth LEAD inspires and mobilizes youth leaders to reflect upon their values and beliefs, connect with others across differences, and act together to address local and global challenges. Youth LEAD is driven by the vision and actions of its high school leaders, with staff leadership offering organizational support. The Leadership program includes ongoing community service projects developed and implemented by the youth and the TIDE Conference, a three-day national diversity conference, planned and run by the youth. <http://www.youthleadonline.org>

“ I hope young people ultimately have lots of opportunities to engage deeply across differences, but then to actually do something meaningful. Then they'll take those skills and ... create some positive change in the world. ”

— Janet Penn, Founder,
Youth LEAD

St. Cloud, Minnesota Schools

The St. Cloud Minnesota public schools have instituted policies and practices to make Somali students and their families feel welcome in schools and a part of the community. These policies were created as part of a 2011 settlement ending a federal civil rights investigation of ethnic and religious harassment of Somali students. In addition to supporting English Language development, the school has hired local Somali residents who can relate to and support the students and their families. In St. Cloud's middle and high schools, the district allows prayer time for students, including Muslim students, as federal law requires.¹⁵ The rooms used for prayer are open to all students. District-wide, school lunch menus provide pork-free options for students, and staff members try to spur the newcomer students' interest in sports, culture clubs, and other extracurricular activities to develop connections beyond the classroom. Somali student-athletes played key roles on Apollo High's 2014 state championship soccer team, and track and field teams have drawn plenty of Somali participants. The district has partnered with the University of Minnesota to develop uniforms for female athletes who wear hijab, the headscarves worn by some Muslim girls and women. The district is teaming with St. Cloud State to encourage more Somali-teaching candidates, including an effort to provide a pathway to help district staff already working as paraprofessionals to earn degrees.

Enough is Enough

In December 2014, a 15-year-old Kansas City high school student named Abdisamad Sheikh "Adam" Hussein died in what was believed to be an anti-Muslim hate crime. His peers launched Enough is Enough—an effort in his honor to promote peace and tolerance that has created a space for students to heal. A Peace Walk organized in the school's hallways and gym attracted over 500 community members and engaged youth and adults who may not have been aware of the extent of anti-Muslim/refugee bullying in their community. Watch the Initiative's online video for more about Enough is Enough. <http://www.tolerance.org/youth-united>

Religious Literacy Class for Educators

School personnel often feel unprepared to understand the varied religious contexts and needs of their students and their families. Montgomery County, Maryland's Faith Community Advisory Council, a part of the county government's Office of Community Partnerships, partnered with the Montgomery County Public Schools to offer a new continuing education opportunity for educators. The course included sessions such as Religious Literacy and Its Role in Our Public Schools, Importance of Religious Literacy in the 21st Century and Why it Matters to Montgomery County Public Schools, Importance of Religious Literacy in the 21st Century and How You Can Teach About it in Our Public Schools and Using Children's Literature to spread Religious Literacy. Led by experts, the five-day course included site visits to a synagogue, a Hindu temple, a Sikh gurdwara and a mosque. Co-sponsors included Wesley Theological Seminary, Kaur Foundation, the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, Jewish Community Relations Council, Georgetown University Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, and Diyanet Center of America. http://www2.montgomerycountymd.gov/mcgportalapps/Press_Detail.aspx?Item_ID=14077

ENGAGE COMMUNITY AND GOVERNMENT LEADERS



› **TIP:** Local government officials, school administrators, business leaders, small business owners and community boosters can help enhance and create institutional mechanisms. These institutional responses are as they know that their communities are stronger when everyone in them feels welcomed and included.

Statements of Support from Local Leaders

Following the increased anti-refugee and anti-Muslim rhetoric since the fall of 2015, a number of local government leaders have met with community groups and spoken out publicly in support of their refugee and Muslim residents. In some cases, like Beaverton, Oregon, the city council approved a resolution declaring its support for the Muslim community and condemning all forms of discrimination, hate speech, and violent acts targeting specific communities. Before the unanimous vote, council members took turns describing their support for the resolution and desire for Beaverton to be, as the resolution says, “a place where individuals and families from all backgrounds feel safe, are treated with respect and dignity, and are recognized for their contributions to building a strong and vibrant community.” “We have to keep reminding ourselves that we are a welcoming city,” councilor Betty Bode said. “It’s important that we stand up and say that we’re all together,” added councilor Mark Fagin.

Montgomery County, Maryland’s Faith Community Advisory Council (FCAC)

This Advisory Council, a part of the Office of Community Partnerships, works collaboratively with the county executive, faith groups, government agencies, nonprofits, and community organizations inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s goal of the Beloved Community. FCAC ensures that the county executive is well informed of and able to act effectively in responding to the needs and concerns of faith communities that worship and serve others in Montgomery County, including in response to emergencies and acts of hate and violence, prevention of violence, integration of immigrants, healthcare for all, and land-use issues.

A committee of the Faith Community Working Group (FCWG), the Faith Leaders Response Team develops and maintains a group of leaders from the full spectrum of faith communities in Montgomery County who are prepared to respond together to any act of hate, violence, or natural disaster. The response includes caring for people, including victims as well as police officers and firefighters, in crisis and grief situations.

In addition to A Resource Guide for Faith Leaders the FCWG partnered with the Montgomery County Police and the World Organization for Resource Development and Education to develop the Montgomery County Model for intervening and preventing violent extremism. The model builds community resilience by incorporating a wide range of stakeholders, including faith community leaders, public officials, law enforcement officers, educators, social service providers, and civic activists. Together, they create a network of trusted adults who can intervene in the lives of troubled individuals. A cornerstone of the program is specialized training and community workshops that generate awareness of the various public safety threats, including radicalization and recruitment to violent extremism. Stakeholders are connected with public and private resources that can provide mental health counseling and other direct services for vulnerable members of the community. Interventions are facilitated by professionals who are trained to reduce potential risk factors of violent extremist behavior, using a culturally competent, trauma-informed framework. The interventions can be part of a prevention scheme or set up as a diversion program in lieu of incarceration.

ONGOING CHALLENGES AND SUSTAINING THESE EFFORTS

We want to recognize the reality of ongoing anxiety and fear experienced by refugees, Muslims and receiving community members struggling to navigate change, make ends meet, and make sense of local, national and global events. As the stories above demonstrate, these struggles exist in parallel to the bright spots of individual, community, and institutional efforts to create stronger and more cohesive communities by building meaningful contact, communicating proactively, and by engaging local leaders of all backgrounds.

Based on the stories and your own experiences, it might seem that often relationship building begins and is nurtured by individual leaders. In some cases these relationships were created in response to a crisis, and with the passing of the crisis, leaders and organizations so often must turn to the next “burning issue” or their core work. Given limited resources and bandwidth, how can we sustain the results of a post-crisis response?

Sustaining efforts to prevent and counter anti-refugee and anti-Muslim backlash—and ultimately, to foster communities of neighbors that work, serve and lead together—begins with investing in proactive alliance building, promoting connections, and building relationships between new Americans and the receiving community while working together on community projects of all kinds. Communications efforts



that reframe the conversation and provide a vehicle to hear from diverse leaders from civic and community groups, youth organizations, local governments, and multiple faith communities are strategies that will continue to deepen and broaden the impact of your efforts.

It is also crucially important to create a long-term infrastructure for all residents to more fully participate in their communities and a vehicle for sustained collaboration and relationship building. Welcoming initiatives, which bring together all segments of the community to proactively plan for integration and to develop welcoming plans, policies, and practices at the local level, are one important longer-term strategy. In addition, the Welcoming America network of local governments and nonprofit organizations offers an opportunity for communities across the nation to come together to deepen, broaden, and institutionalize these relationships. This institution-

alizing of relationships helps generate ongoing trust and can also be a mechanism to stay focused on building and nurturing preventative alliance building after a crisis has passed.

Today our nation is at a crossroads. People around the globe are on the move, seeking safety and opportunity, and some will eventually make the United States their new home. Will we let our fears and differences divide us, or will we embrace the opportunity—as America at our best has historically done—to work together as neighbors, each contributing to the economic, cultural, and social fabric of communities? Embracing those with different languages, cultures, countries of origin, and religions may not always be easy, but a strong, vibrant democracy depends on it. Thank you for helping to lead the way.

We invite you to share your stories at
<http://www.welcomingrefugees.org/promising-practices>.

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RESOURCES

WELCOMING AMERICA

1. Welcoming America's Reframing Refugees Toolkit
http://www.welcomingamerica.org/sites/default/files/Reframing%20Refugees%20Messaging%20Toolkit_1.pdf
2. Stand Together: Messaging to Support Muslims and Refugees in Challenging Times
3. Welcoming Cities and Counties
<https://www.welcomingamerica.org/programs/member-municipalities>

BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH

1. Strength Through Diversity: *Four Cases of Local and State Level Coalition Success* Alejandro J. Beutel with Jelena Jankovic
http://www.ispu.org/pdfs/ISPU-Report-Strength_Through_Diversity-FINAL.pdf
2. Community Brief Manufacturing Bigotry: *A State-by-State Legislative Effort to Pushback Against 2050 by Targeting Muslims and Other Minorities*
[http://www.ispu.org/pdfs/ISPU_Manufacturing_Bigotry\[4\].pdf](http://www.ispu.org/pdfs/ISPU_Manufacturing_Bigotry[4].pdf)
3. Building Mosques In America: Strategies for Securing Municipal Approvals
http://www.ispu.org/content/Building_Mosques_In_America_Strategies_for_Securing_Municipal_Approvals#sthash.mm09XjTI

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4. What it Means to be American: Attitudes in an Increasingly Diverse America Ten Years After 9/11
<http://www.prrri.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/PRRI-Brookings-What-it-Means-to-be-American-Report.pdf>

PROMISING PRACTICES

1. The Linking Communities Project
<http://www.hias.org/linking-communities-project>
2. Shoulder-to-Shoulder Resources
<http://www.shouldertoshouldercampaign.org/resources/page/11/?org>
3. Countering the Backlash: Strategies for Responding to Anti-Refugee and Xenophobic Activity from the New South
<http://www.tnimmigrant.org/home/2016/1/20/new-report-lessons-on-countering-anti-refugee-backlash-from.html>
4. Islamic Networks Group's Bullying Prevention Guide
<https://ing.org/bullying-prevention-guide/>
5. My Neighbor is Muslim, Lutheran Social Service
<http://www.lssmn.org/refugeeservices/study/>



WELCOMING AMERICA



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