



CHURCH WORLD SERVICE

## Refugee resettlement: media strategy

*A resource for affiliates and cosponsors*

The arrival of refugees may attract significant interest on the part of the media and local communities. While a moderate level of publicity at the local level often results in increased community participation in resettlement, the Church World Service Immigration and Refugee Program affiliate must manage contact to ensure that refugees are allowed to begin the integration process without undue media attention or other public scrutiny. Another reason to manage media involvement is to ensure that accurate and positive information about refugees and refugee resettlement is communicated and disseminated to the wider audience.

### Media dos

It is very appropriate to share information such as what your church/faith group/affiliate has done to prepare for the arrival of the refugees, what types of activities you are doing to assist the refugees, how helping someone new to our country makes you feel, why you feel motivated to help, or other unique stories about how your church, faith group, or affiliate is involved.

### Media don'ts

In general, you should not share personal information about a refugee, such as his/her name, address, age, or medical information, or your opinion of the refugee's emotional state. ***Whether or not to release such information – indeed, whether or not to be interviewed and/or photographed by media at all - is the sole decision of the refugee him/herself.***

### Demand respect for refugees' privacy and security

Coverage of refugees' arrival, whether at the airport or their new home, is to be discouraged. The newcomers most likely will be exhausted after a long trip. Meeting their sponsors and getting settled in their new quarters will be "agenda" enough for their first hours or days. They might not want to be interviewed or photographed, whether out of a desire for privacy or a concern for security. They may need to communicate with their sponsors through an interpreter. In any event, there won't be time to discuss with them the pros and cons of meeting with media and their feelings about it.

Once the new arrivals have gotten some rest, and perhaps in the context of a broader orientation to their new community, sponsors may explain the role of the media in our culture and the rights of the person being interviewed (See related resource, *Refugee resettlement: refugees' rights in media interviews*). Engage an interpreter as needed.

### What if media insist on coming to the airport?

Sometimes refugee arrivals of such high interest – for example, as was the case with the Somali Bantu – that reporters will insist on coming to the airport. In that case, be proactive and manage media coverage of the arrival.

1. Contact the airport to talk about refugee arrivals and to request a gathering place for media away from the arrivals area.
2. Invite community leaders, family or church cosponsors, etc. to participate in a receiving line and simple ceremony at the place designated for the media.

3. Brief media in advance about the welcoming ceremony. Remind them that the new arrivals will most likely be exhausted, and ask them to maintain a reasonable distance (at least several yards). Note that you'll be meeting the refugees at the gate and asking whether they object to their faces being photographed. If that is the case, let media know at the airport before the new arrivals appear, ask them to respect the refugees' request for privacy, and request that they photograph the refugees only from a rear angle.
4. Have affiliate personnel meet the refugees at the gate and explain the welcome ceremony and cameras. Give them the option of not being photographed full face. Ask refugees to go to the ceremony, then whisk them away to their new home.
5. Do not allow media interviews with refugees at this time. Instead suggest interviews with local people at the ceremony - mayor, volunteers, co-sponsoring church representatives, etc. An affiliate spokesperson should be prepared to articulate the resettlement program and its benefits to refugees and communities. Distribute any fact sheets – for example, on refugee resettlement, local community cosponsors and the new arrivals' culture.
6. Designate *one or two* spokespersons for the refugees when they arrive. This will help manage interaction with the media. Give each spokesperson a specific perspective to cover, e.g., that of the cosponsoring faith community, affiliate, etc.
7. In a few days, ask the refugees for permission to schedule interviews for them with the media. Hold the interviews at the affiliate offices or church, and provide a translator. Respect the refugees' option to say "no."

Affiliate personnel must also brief schools and other public institutions on client confidentiality. A refugee minor and his or her family *must* give permission for an interview to take place. Schools or other public facilities *must* contact affiliate personnel to make sure that an affiliate representative or cosponsor is present during an interview.

In a news media interview, the reporter/photographer and interviewee should agree on any "ground rules" before the interview begins. For example, if the interview/photo subject does not want his/her full name used, or doesn't want his/her full face photographed, that should be made clear to the reporter/photographer before the interview begins. The interview subject retains the right to decline to answer questions that are too personal, and to stop the interview if he/she becomes uncomfortable.

In addition, remind the interviewee that whatever he/she says may be quoted. Off-the-record or not-for-attribution statements should be rare, and *must* be "bracketed" between the statements "This is off the record" and "Now I am back on the record." In general, if you don't want to be quoted as saying something, don't say it!

Except in very rare instances, interviewer and interviewee reach *oral* agreement on "ground rules." Very rarely, a written agreement may be helpful or even necessary – for example, if you or a third party are using a refugee's story and/or image in a video, film or fundraising materials. Contact either Ann Walle or Carol Fouke-Mpoyo (see below) for assistance.

*For media inquiries, please contact: Ann Walle, CWS/New York, 212-870-2654; [awalle@churchworldservice.org](mailto:awalle@churchworldservice.org); all others please contact Carol Fouke-Mpoyo, CWS Immigration and Refugee Program/New York, 212-870-2673; [cfouke@churchworldservice.org](mailto:cfouke@churchworldservice.org)*