



**The Sponsor
Circle Program
for Afghans**

Thank you for your interest in serving as a sponsor circle through the Sponsor Circle Program for Afghans.

By participating in this emergency initiative, you are choosing to respond to one of the greatest humanitarian crisis of our time and provide support to an Afghan newcomer in need of welcome.

Here you will be provided with a general introduction to the Sponsor Circle Program for Afghans. In order to serve as a sponsor circle, at least one member of your group must complete the online knowledge assessment found at bit.ly/SponsorCirclesCourse. For more information about this and the full application process, visit sponsorcircles.org.

Module 1: The Sponsor Circle Program for Afghans

Module 1 Objectives

By the end of this module, you will be able to:

- Articulate the need for urgent action
- Describe how this program differs from the Afghan Placement and Assistance Program
- List three responsibilities you will have as a Sponsor Circle

The Moment for Action

The Need & The Opportunity

The Need

The United States has evacuated tens of thousands of Afghans in need of protection. Many of these individuals are staying at military bases across the United States until they can be received into welcoming communities.

Afghan newcomers are served through a network of community-based organizations called resettlement agencies through a program called the Afghan Placement and Assistance Program.

Resettlement agencies are experts in welcoming newcomers; however, given the speed with which Afghan newcomers have arrived in the United States, resettlement agencies and the communities in which they work may lack the staffing and resources necessary to provide immediate welcome.

The Opportunity

The Sponsor Circle Program for Afghans is an emergency response launched by a coalition of partners to expand United States' capacity to welcome. Through the program, groups of five individuals can come together to form a certified sponsor circle and be matched with a newcomer, welcoming them to their community and providing them with initial reception and integration services.

Newcomers served through this program elect not to be served by resettlement agencies through the Afghan Placement and Assistance Program, and instead elect to be served through a certified sponsor circle.

Why Form a Sponsor Circle?

Many reasons may resonate with you:

- Because you urgently want to be reunited with a friend or family member currently at a military base
- Because you want to respond to a human need
- Because you want to connect with those in your community
- Because it is aligned with your values
- Because you or your family was welcomed to the United States as immigrants
- Because it supports refugee integration



The Opportunity, Responsibilities & Resources

The Opportunity

In serving as a certified sponsor circle, you will have a number of responsibilities, but you will also have support. The following slides detail your responsibilities and give an overview of available supports.

Sponsor Circle Responsibilities

- Secure housing;
- Provide basic necessities;
- Provide time-bound income support;
- Assist in completing required changes of address;
- Connect to legal assistance;
- Support in obtaining a social security card;
- Support newcomer in selective service registration as appropriate;
- Support in accessing medical services
- Support in accessing available benefits;
- Enroll children in school;
- Provide English language support;
- Provide job search advice and support;
- Provide community orientation; and
- Complete 30 and 90-day reports

Sponsor Circle Resources

Your Sponsor Circle will be able to receive:



Housing credits via
Airbnb.org



Ongoing guidance via
partner organizations



Application support via
partner organizations

Module 2: Afghan Newcomers

Module 2 Objectives

By the end of this module, you will be able to:

- Identify the legal status of the Afghan newcomer you will welcome and describe what should happen for them to receive permanent status
- List the documentation Afghan newcomers will have
- Name three benefits/services Afghan newcomers may be eligible to access

Legal Terminology & Humanitarian Parole

Legal Terminology

Refugee, Special Immigrant Visa Holder (SIV), Humanitarian Parolee

Different legal terminology may be used to describe newcomers' legal status in the United States depending on personal and administrative circumstances surrounding their evacuation or displacement from their home country. **Regardless of legal terminology**, the United States recognizes that **all these individuals possess an urgent need for resettlement**.

Legal terminology may include the following terms: **refugee, special immigrant visa holder, humanitarian parolee**. Depending on the terminology, the newcomer may be eligible for different government benefits.

Humanitarian Parole

Humanitarian parole provides immediate resettlement to people in dire need of immediate protection.

The Afghan newcomers at military bases in the United States have been brought in through **humanitarian parole**. Humanitarian parole is an established United States government program. It is utilized sparingly and only in emergency situations when other protections like refugee resettlement are unsuitable due to long processing times, and when eligible individuals need to enter the United States quickly due to urgent humanitarian need.

Refer to [USCIS](#) to learn more about the humanitarian parole program for Afghan nationals.

Humanitarian parolees are allowed to stay in the United States for a temporary period, often up to two years. In order to stay in the United States longer period, humanitarian parolees must be granted another status such as asylum or Special Immigrant Visa holder.

Documentation

I-94

Afghan newcomers will be issued I-94s. They can retrieve their I-94s on the US Customs and Border Protection website.

If the newcomer has a passport, the I-94 may be obtained by entering the person's complete name and passport number.

If the newcomer does not have a passport, the I-94 may be obtained by entering the person's complete name and using the person's alien number or wristband number in the passport number field. For alien numbers this sometimes requires adding the letter 'A' at the beginning of the line of numbers.

Instructions on accessing and printing I-94s can be found at: <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94>.

Work Authorization

Afghan newcomers supported through the Sponsor Circle Program for Afghans will be authorized to work.

Proof of work authorization comes in the form of an Employment Authorization Document (EAD). Newcomers will be supported in applying for this document prior to leaving the military base and will be mailed to the address on file.

Social Security Card

Afghan newcomers supported through the Sponsor Circle Program for Afghans will also be supported in applying for a social security card while on the military base. Like the EAD, the social security card will be mailed to the address on record when they depart for their welcoming community.

Driver's License and/or State ID

Afghan humanitarian parolees are eligible to apply for a driver's license and/or state identification. The documents referenced in the previous slides will support them in submitting a successful application.

Benefits & Services

Federal and State Benefits and Services

Federally funded benefits for which humanitarian parolees may be eligible include:

- Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), also known as food stamps
- Medicaid
- Refugee Cash Assistance
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Refugee Medical Assistance
- Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)
- Matching Grant Program (employment services), offered through resettlement agencies

Local Benefits and Services

Local benefits for which humanitarian parolees may be eligible include:

- Public library programs
- Low-income assistance programs
- Mutual aid programs
- Mental health services
- Pro-bono legal services

Benefits and Services Alert

Please Note: Afghan humanitarian parolees who have opted to be welcomed through the Sponsor Circle Program for Afghans have elected not to access the Afghan Placement and Assistance (APA) Program financial support and services offered through local resettlement agencies. Instead, they elect to receive this support from their certified sponsor circle.

Humanitarian parolees welcomed by Sponsor Circles remain eligible for all other federal, state, and local benefits noted in the previous slides, including other non-APA services offered through resettlement agencies.

Practice Identifying Resources

Visit the [Afghan Resource Center](#) at USAHello to explore resources that can support you and the newcomer you will welcome.

Module 3: Organizing Your Sponsor Circle

Module 3 Objectives

By the end of this module, you will be able to:

- Articulate the commitment of a Sponsor Circle
- Begin to prepare for welcoming a new neighbor as a Sponsor Circle
- List next steps to become a certified Sponsor Circle

Your Role, Commitment & Responsibilities

Your Role as a Sponsor Circle

Welcoming newcomers and supporting their integration.

The moment they arrive, and likely before, newcomers take steps to build new lives for themselves and for their family. As a Sponsor Circle, you take primary responsibility for welcoming newcomers, providing initial support and resources as they integrate into their new community.

A skilled Sponsor Circle member is aware not only of their role, but the role the greater community plays in integration. For example, by accessing community organizations, faith or ethnic communities, a newcomer may find additional resources through community members that you are unaware of.

The Commitment

Sponsor Circles commit to providing critical welcome and support to an Afghan newcomer or family for a minimum of 90 days.

You may commit to supporting a family whom you already know, or a family with whom you will be matched.

Sponsor Circle Responsibilities

- Help to secure temporary and permanent housing
- Provide basic necessities (furniture, clothing, food, etc.)
- Provide income support
- Assist in completing relevant paperwork to access documentation and public benefits for which the newcomers may be eligible
- Connect newcomers to relevant services, including health care, education, and legal assistance
- Support newcomers in English language acquisition
- Help to secure employment
- Provide community orientation, friendship, and moral support
- Complete 30 and 90-day reports

Sponsor Circle Requirements

Follow these steps to become a certified sponsor circle:

- Find at least 4 friends to form your circle.
- Complete mandatory background checks.
- Complete a knowledge check. (You are here!)
- Complete a Welcome Plan sharing how you will support the Afghan newcomers with whom you will be matched.
- Begin fundraising \$2,275 per Afghan newcomer you wish to welcome. Note that you will need to demonstrate that you have secured 60% of these funds before submitting your application.
- Submit your application for certification.

Forming Your Sponsor Circle

Identifying Group Members

Sponsor Circle Member Requirements

- Sponsor circles must include a minimum of five members
- Each sponsor circle member must reside in or near the same community
- Each sponsor circle member must pass a background check

Organizing Group Members

How you organize your Sponsor Circle team is up to you. Here are some helpful factors to consider:

Consider Roles

Some sponsor circles find it helpful to have circle members focus on different roles. Learn about each member's interests, experiences, and skills as this will help to ensure they'll contribute effectively. Your group members' roles and contributions may change over time depending on the sponsorship needs

Consider Availability

The more time your group members can contribute, the better! That said, limited availability should not discourage you or others from sponsoring. Sponsors with limited availability might consider pairing with others to carry out sponsorship tasks.

Consider Communication

A sponsor circle that is open to ongoing communication and collaboration will be the best prepared to overcome challenges, respond to unpredictability, and achieve success

Preparing Your Welcome Plan

An essential part of certification is completing a Welcome Plan.

The Welcome Plan outlines the Sponsor Circle's plan for welcome in order to demonstrate readiness and ability to sponsor.

In the Welcome Plan you will be asked to describe in a few paragraphs how you will fulfill several core resettlement supports to help situate the newcomer in your community, including housing, basic necessities, services and benefits, legal assistance, education, language, interpretation and translation, cultural connections, employment, and transportation.

The Welcome Plan is available on the Sponsor Circle website.

Housing

In your welcome plan, you will need to describe your plans for arranging safe, sanitary, and affordable housing, including the anticipated number of rooms and the anticipated number of any other people who will be living there.

If temporary housing will be arranged prior to the Afghan newcomers moving into permanent housing, you will need to provide details including anticipated length of stay.

Housing may be a challenge. Draw on your personal networks and share your asks publicly. Note that the sooner the newcomer you are welcoming is in permanent housing, the sooner they will feel at home.

Basic Necessities

In your welcome plan, you will need to describe plans for purchasing or collecting donations of furniture and home furnishings, clothing, and food staples, as well as plans for ensuring that basic needs such as groceries and utilities (telephone, electricity, internet) are met.

To support your application, you can reference any corporate and/or charitable resources you will rely on.

Documentation

Afghan newcomers who have been processed at military bases will have been supported in applying for social security cards, which should arrive at the newcomers' final destination, along with an Employment Authorization Document. To ensure that these cards are received,

Preparing Your Welcome Plan

newcomers should be supported in completing a change of address with the US Department of Homeland Security and with the US Postal Service each time they move.

In your welcome plan, you should include the links of the websites that offer guidance on this, demonstrating that you know where to go to get these forms.

Services and Benefits

Afghan humanitarian parolees are eligible for the same benefits as newly arriving refugees. However, in electing to be served through the Sponsor Circle Program for Afghans, these newcomers elect not to access Afghan Placement and Assistance Program cash and services from local resettlement agencies.

In developing your welcome plan, you will want to describe the research steps you have taken to identify available benefits and services, including consulting with your umbrella organization and relevant local/state/federal authorities. As a Sponsor Circle, you must guide Afghan newcomers through the process of accessing any available services and benefits for which they might be eligible. At minimum, this is likely to include the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program, cash assistance, and medical assistance.

Note: Local resettlement agencies should not be relied upon to make local referrals.

Health and Mental Health Services

The Afghan newcomer family will need access to both health and mental health services. This begins with contact made to your local health department and an application for medical assistance through your local department of social services. In your plan, you can note the points of contact for those offices and any online research done to find other available support services.

Legal Assistance

In your welcome plan you need to provide details regarding the name of the organization or legal professional who you will arrange to assist the family in filing their asylum claim or applying for a Special Immigrant Visa. To identify a professional, you might visit USAHello or CLINIC online.

Preparing Your Welcome Plan

Education

As a Sponsor Circle, you are responsible for supporting the Afghan newcomer family in enrolling any school-aged children in the public education system within the first two weeks of arrival.

In your welcome plan, you will need to provide details regarding the enrollment process, including needed immunizations, in your community, as well as your district's local point of contact responsible for enrollment. The outreach you make as a part of your welcome plan will support your school district in preparing for welcome of a newcomer.

Language

The newcomer family you support may have limited English proficiency. As part of your welcome plan, you will need to detail how you will support them in strengthening their English skills.

You can do this by describing any outreach you have done to identify potential service providers, including libraries, local authorities, community centers, etc. You can also share your plans to provide informal language support.

Interpretation and Translation

As part of your application, you will need to explain how you will communicate with the newcomer family you will support. You can do this by offering the name(s) of local volunteers who will provide support and/or the contact information of the organization that will provide in-person or telephonic interpretation.

Note: Any agency that receives federal funds is responsible for ensuring language access.

Cultural Connections

You will need to describe how you will facilitate cultural connections for your newcomer including access to culturally appropriate foods, connections to the Afghan diaspora, and places of worship.

Based on your location, this may feel like a challenge. Consider checking out the USAHello app, reaching out to your local mosque, and/or connecting with a local interpretation service. You may also find that with COVID, many resources are available online.

Preparing Your Welcome Plan

Employment

You will want to support the newcomer in finding initial employment as soon as possible after arrival. This will assist them in developing a daily rhythm and learning language and local customs. It will also assist them in gaining self-sufficiency.

As part of your welcome plan, you will need to describe any affordable employment counseling or other employment-related programming in your community that Afghan adults may be able to access to support job acquisition as well as outline your plans for providing informal employment support, including leveraging any networks you may have.

Transportation

In your welcome, you will need to describe available transportation in your community, noting how the newcomer might travel (e.g., bus, metro, rideshare, walk) to and from possible employment, worship, and the grocery store.

Fundraising

Newcomers served through the Sponsor Circle Program for Afghans elect not to receive Afghan Placement and Assistance Program financial support and services offered through resettlement agencies. Instead, they agree to receive financial support and services from a certified sponsor circle.

Your financial responsibility as a certified sponsor circle is to ensure that you raise a minimum of \$2,275 per newcomer to be spent on behalf of the newcomer you are serving.

In order to be certified as a Sponsor Circle, you must demonstrate that you have raised a minimum of 60% of the total funding needed to sponsor your newcomer family. The remainder may be raised through continued fundraising efforts or provided through direct Sponsor Circle committed contributions.

Guiding Principles

People are far more likely to give to a person than they are to a cause. This means that while you may have had trouble raising money for your group in the past, the experience of raising money for a family will likely be different.

While not every person will want a tax-deductible receipt for their contribution, some will - especially those who are giving larger amounts of money. You may be able to provide this if your group is partnering with a local charitable organization.

Communicate the urgency. If your family is expected to arrive soon, make this known.

The more specific you are about how the money raised will be used, the better. (However, do not provide information that will jeopardize client confidentiality.) For example, you might say:

This money will cover the family's rent until they are employed and self-sufficient.

We are helping an Afghan family of six arriving.

Submitting Your Application

How to Apply

To apply, submit your application on the Sponsor Circle website. A complete application will include:

- Information about all five group members
- Mandatory background checks for all five group members
- Knowledge check
- Evidence of funds raised
- Welcome plan

Need one-on-one assistance?

Email applications@sponsorcircles.org to connect with an individual who can provide you with support.

Module 4: The Skillfull Sponsor Circle

Module 4 Objectives

By the end of this module, you will be able to:

- List sponsor circle guiding principles
- Identify means of supporting self-sufficiency
- List tips for communicating with English language learners
- Identify ways to engage from a trauma-informed perspective

Remember Your Role

As a sponsor circle member, you are welcoming a newcomer to a new community. Your support can greatly impact their ability to integrate successfully and thrive independently.

Understanding a few key skills will facilitate an effective and positive sponsorship, situating an Afghan newcomer for successful integration.

A skillful Sponsor Circle member is able to:

- share with the newcomer
- empower the newcomer
- learn from the newcomer
- offer flexibility, patience, and empathy

The guiding principles in this module will help develop these skills.

Guiding Principals

Consider Expectations

Identify Expectations Toward the Newcomer

Entering any experience with specific expectations can lead to disappointment or confusion. It is important to keep an open mind throughout the community sponsorship period. Supporting someone who is adjusting to a new environment can take time and rarely unfolds as expected. Newcomers have unique journeys and may seek to achieve different goals on different timelines.

Remember that challenges are an expected part of any sponsorship.

Consider Expectations of the Newcomer

Give space to the newcomer to share their own expectations of community sponsorship at the beginning of and throughout sponsorship.

This can:

- clear up any mistaken expectations or incorrect assumptions
- set goals
- set boundaries
- prevent confusion, frustration, and conflict

Inviting the newcomer to share expectations can greatly contribute to their own leadership and autonomy in the resettlement process.

Consider Expectations of Other Sponsor Circle Members

Other sponsors in your group may have different strengths, resources, and experiences that can impact their behavior and perspectives. While you may need to find a common path forward to perform sponsorship duties as a united group, expect that some sponsors may approach a challenge differently.

Challenges are part of the experience. Establish open channels of communication between members from the outset so that your group is ready to overcome challenges if they arise. Regular sponsor group member meetings can help establish:

- communication practices
- member roles
- shared expectations
- steps to address conflict that will prepare your group to “ride the waves” of sponsorship

How you work as a team can have a positive effect on your experience as a sponsor circle as well as the success of the sponsorship.

Consider Power

Skilled community sponsors help newcomers build self-sufficiency so the newcomer can more quickly regain a sense of safety and control.

Having had to flee their country, leaving lives and livelihoods behind for uncertain destinations, newcomers may have recently felt a loss of power, safety, and control over their circumstances. Resettlement itself can be defined as newcomers regaining power and control in their lives.

Before you start your sponsorship, consider that you are not “giving to” or “helping” the individual, but rather “supporting” them as equals. As rights-bearing individuals, they have a right to safety, home, and livelihood. As a sponsor community sponsor, you are simply facilitating their access to those things.

Practice the skill of “doing with” not “doing for”.

Remember your role is not to make choices for the family but provide information and support them as they start life in their new community.

Ask Yourself:

- Who is holding important papers, documents, bus tickets?
- Who is typing or dialing?
- Who is making decisions?

Respect space and possessions.

Support parental roles. Ask parents before giving a child something. If a child asks you a question their parent can answer, refer them to their parent.

Position yourself behind the newcomer when interacting with interpreters and service providers so that the interpreter or service provider is speaking directly to the newcomer and not you.

Remember that sponsorship is not adoption. Consider “the family we’re welcoming” or “my Afghan friend” rather than “our family” or “my family”.

Include the newcomer and empower them to inform the overall planning and nature of support.

An initial check-in with the newcomer after their arrival to the sponsorship community is important to discuss and confirm next steps and expectations. Empower the newcomer to have autonomy to inform overall planning and nature of support throughout the sponsorship timeline.

Consider Culture & Religion

Consider Culture

Culture is shared by a particular society, group, etc. and includes such things as beliefs, customs, and arts.

Cultural Awareness

The Sponsor Circle Program for Afghans is a unique opportunity to experience another culture and to share your own. A skillful sponsor circle member is aware of the important role culture plays in shaping our perspectives, assumptions, and behavior.

Cultural Humility

A skillful Sponsor Circle member develops an attitude of “cultural humility” – a willingness to acknowledge one’s own knowledge gaps and an openness to new ideas and contradictory information. Key to cultural humility is being curious about the newcomers’ customs and actions, reflecting on your own culture and biases, and suspending judgment of what is “wrong” or “right.” Sometimes this may mean asking questions and sometimes this may mean just observing.

Familiarize yourself with Afghan culture (e.g., greetings, foods, traditions) and basic phrases in Dari and/or Pashto through online research or outreach to relevant organizations.

Just remember that no matter what you learn, customs, traditions, practices, beliefs, and attitudes will vary by individual.

Consider Religion

Afghan newcomers have been forced to leave behind home, family, work, and community. They should be supported in holding onto their faith, if this is something that is important to them.

You can do this in a few ways:

- Do not attempt to proselytize. This is prohibited in the Sponsor Circle Program for Afghans and can be harmful to the family you are supporting.
- Familiarize yourself with the Muslim faith.
- Support the newcomer family in finding ways to practice their faith, including through online services and the provision of the Quran and/or prayer mats, if needed.

Consider Language

Different Language Needs

Knowledge of English can facilitate access to employment and services, and can help to build relationships. However, language acquisition may be challenging, take time, be a priority or not. It is important for Sponsor Circles to be aware of the potential ups and downs that come with learning a new language, to be supportive, and respect each person's learning journey.

Some individuals may:

- Want to be able to communicate with the local population
- Be working toward a certain level of reading and writing as a prerequisite for certain employment
- Wish to pursue higher levels of education which require more advanced language skills.

Examples of How to Support Language Learning

As a skillful Sponsor Circle member, some supportive tasks related to language acquisition may include:

- Identify access to necessary language assessments
- Assist in enrolling family members in basic language training
- Discuss with the newcomers any challenges or hesitations with taking language classes
- Provide emotional support
- Offer informal language learning support one-on-one
- Share programs and supports for language learning outside of classes, such as conversation circles, online learning, and mobile phone apps

Communicating with Language Learners

As you communicate with language learners, follow these tips:

- Take the time to learn to pronounce names correctly
- Be personal and speak to newcomers like you would to a friend, not mechanically
- Speak slowly, not loudly. Listen, and let newcomers finish their sentences
- You help by showing, they practice by doing
- Write it down step by step -- in words, numbers, or pictures
- Most importantly: It is your calm patience and attitude of helpfulness and that makes it possible for the family to approach you and learn with you.

Consider Trauma

Newcomers may have experienced trauma in their past, during the evacuation or displacement from their home country, or during the journey to where sponsor circles meet them now. The experience of resettling and adapting to a new community, in some instances separated from your family, can be a hardship itself.

A skillful Sponsor Circle is trauma-informed and mindful of mental health to best support the newcomer as they adapt to the new community. Additionally, Sponsor Circles are uniquely situated to identify and share mental health resources, if needed, that may help a newcomer heal from trauma or build mental health.

What is Trauma?

Traumatic events include a person experiencing, witnessing, or learning about something extremely frightening to them. This may involve actual or perceived threats to life or physical and emotional safety (e.g. sexual violence, torture, forced displacement) to themselves or others.

When an event might be considered traumatic to a person, their responses can include intense fear or horror, a sense of powerlessness and loss of control. A person may develop traumatic stress or ongoing symptoms at any time after the overwhelming event happens. Symptoms can manifest physically, mentally, or behaviorally.

Ways to Engage While Being Trauma-informed

- Learn about mental health care support in your community
- Understand and identify signs of traumatic stress
- Create a safe, empathetic, and responsive environment. Connections with supportive people, light exercise such as walks, time to sleep or relax, and nutritious meals can go a long way to addressing stress.
- Be mindful of triggers (e.g., certain events / noises / people could trigger memories of the traumatic experience)
- Share mental health care supports (e.g., clinics, books, phone apps, support groups)

Understand each person has their own journey and pace of healing

Do not expect that newcomers will share their stories. Unless they express an interest, do not ask them. They can choose when and where to tell you or others about what they have experienced.

If they do share trauma or worries, offer understanding and support. Messages such as “it’s better now” or “you’re safe here” are often isolating to a trauma survivor. Instead, it might be helpful to say “it’s understandable that you’re feeling sad or overwhelmed after everything you’ve been through”

Consider Trauma

or “it means a lot that you are sharing this with me”.

If a person has experienced trauma, they are more likely to have a trauma response when experiencing stress, uncertainty, or frustration. Trauma responses could look like:

- “Overreacting”
- Being “difficult”
- Being “unreasonable”
- Fatigue
- Worry
- Forgetfulness

Remember that each newcomer will have unique experiences and responses to those experiences. A few examples of possible mental health journeys for newcomers could include:

- No mental health needs arise
- Mental health needs arise; the sponsor circle is aware and share resources; they do not access services
- It takes longer than the sponsorship period for mental health needs to arise
- Mental health needs arise, and the sponsor circle is not aware of them
- Mental health needs arise; they choose to manage these on their own and seem fine
- Mental health needs arise; they choose to access services; things seem to worsen
- Mental health needs arise; they access services; the sponsor circle is not aware of what happens
- Mental health needs arise and are never “resolved,” but the person lives a fulfilling life

Consider Privacy

Respect Confidentiality and Protect Privacy

As a Sponsor Circle, you will have access to certain information about the newcomer that is both confidential and private. Confidentiality is very important. Not only does an individual have a right to their own information and how it is use, it is a matter of safety.

It is up to the individual to choose what information they share and with whom they share it.

Do not share important information, such as:

- Names, address, or telephone number
- Other personal identification information (such as driver license, passport, date of birth, social security number)
- Photos of the newcomer
- Health information
- Personal stories or opinions

Module 5: The Successful Sponsor Circle

Module 5 Objectives

By the end of this module, you will be able to:

- Articulate your expectations for a successful Sponsor Circle experience
- Identify tools to navigate challenges within your Sponsor Circle and between the Sponsor Circle and newcomer
- Plan at least one practice to foster helpful boundaries

What is Success?

Successful sponsor circles can take many different forms, but should generally achieve a positive welcoming of a newcomer to a new community, completion of required sponsor circle activities, and connection to resources and ongoing supports. The goal is for newcomers to feel well prepared to thrive independently of sponsorship.

The sponsor circle commitment is a minimum of 90 days, but the friendship and community connection can be lifelong.

How to Achieve Success

To be best situated for success, you should understand the overarching goals of Sponsor Circles through this training, set small goals and monitor progress throughout the sponsorship period, and overcome challenges. Utilize skills learned in Module 4 and resources accessed in Module 3 to:

- Monitor progress
- Address challenges
- Celebrate milestones

Monitor Progress

Any achievement is more likely attainable by monitoring progress. You can do this by:

- Creating a clear timeline of activities in partnership with the newcomer you will support.
- Checking in frequently regarding expectations and success achieved.
- Alerting your accredited umbrella organization to challenges experienced that can't be resolved.
- Keeping accurate record of work done in a secure space.
- Completing your 30 and 90-day reports

Address Challenges

Challenges are part of the experience. Overcoming these challenges in a proactive and positive way will support success. Challenges may surface in a variety of ways between sponsors and between the sponsors and newcomer.

Steps to address group conflict:

- Check expectations
- Set boundaries
- Brainstorm alternative solutions or perspectives
- Communicate with partners

Check Expectations

As you read in Module 4, it is important to identify expectations of sponsor circle members and newcomer. Throughout the sponsorship period, you will want to check these expectations.

A Story on Expectations

A close group of friends wanted to do something to help the Afghans joining their community. One of the members learned of Sponsor Circles and quickly a group came together. They made the decision responsibly. They researched community resources. They identified community interpreters and two people who could interpret over the phone. After initiating a fundraising campaign, they had raised the necessary funds, prepared a Welcome Plan and submitted an application. Once certified and approved to sponsor, they are matched with a family, including a mother, father, and four children.

Once the family arrived, the first weeks were busy. The family was tired, but excited and friendly. The children were enrolled in school and liked their classes and new friends. The adults were enrolled in language classes, although the father already spoke English well. The sponsors offered to connect the family to the local Muslim community and helped with transportation to and from the mosque. The sponsors helped facilitate excursions to obtain groceries, essential items, and to enjoy an outdoor concert and the library.

The sponsors had taken the family on an initial shopping trip to pick up immediate essentials, and told them that one of the sponsors would take them shopping again in the second week to purchase some additional clothing with donated gift cards. The group noticed that someone from the mosque had taken them to get new clothes. The sponsors took the family on the shopping excursion anyway, but was a little less excited as the family already had an abundance of additional clothing items.

These surprises continued in the fifth week, when a sponsor asked about language class, the mother explained that she had stopped going and planned to study English at home. The sponsor was frustrated remembering all the time they had spent practicing bus transportation to and from the classes. The mother didn't seem to be speaking much more English in the fifth week than when she arrived.

The sixth week the sponsors noted that the family had a new TV and cell phone. The family said they had gotten them from a friend. The sponsors were nervous that these items were not within the family's budget; the sponsors were paying for rent and all other expenses.

During the seventh week of sponsorship, the family told the sponsors that a cousin in a city several hours away had a job opportunity for them. They had accepted the job

offer and were going to move that next week. The sponsors were shocked. They felt disappointed and hurt. Knowing that employment and family were the main factors in the family's decision to move did not keep the sponsors from taking it personally.

One sponsor said, "This is the thanks we get after all the time and effort." Other sponsors felt a sense of failure and disappointment wondering if they did something wrong.

But it didn't occur to the sponsors that the sense of independence and safety the family felt from sponsorship had empowered them to make this move and was a testament to the success of the sponsors efforts. The family had taken charge of their own livelihoods and felt comfortable moving to a new city, thanks to the welcome they had received.

In the new city, the family is doing well. They are employed and benefiting from the support of their extended family there. Based on their positive experiences in the first community, the family knew how to enroll the children in school and use the bus system. They were easily able to navigate shopping and already knew about apartment leases and utility bills. When friends inquired as to their experiences coming to the US, the family tells them about the sponsors that warmly welcomed them and showed them support.

What is the moral of this story?

Due to cultural and individual differences, a newcomer's expression of gratitude may not match a sponsor circle's expectation. Each newcomer has different needs and may need more or less assistance than expected. In the best of circumstances, conversational English language acquisition takes three to five years. The expectation that the newcomer will have the desire and energy to excel in employment, English acquisition, exploring their new community, and expressing gratitude for the sponsors support in the exact way that sponsors expect is unrealistic.

While it is challenging, sponsors must remain mindful of expectations and assumptions. At times of disappointment or confusion, they should remember why they are undertaking this effort, what their roles are, and what they expect to receive from the sponsorship experience.

Addressing Challenges

Set and Maintain Boundaries

Positive Boundaries

Challenges are best approached from a place of wellbeing. Successful Sponsor Circle members know how to keep a balance between themselves and between the newcomers they are welcoming. Newcomers have a lot to manage in their first months. Establishing and maintaining clear boundaries not only allows you to be helpful, but it helps the newcomer know in what areas they can count on you, when they should develop confidence to act on their own, and in what areas they need to seek outside support.

When to Strengthen Positive Boundaries

From time to time during the sponsorship, check your boundaries. It is a good idea to strengthen your boundaries if:

- You say “yes!” to a request, but inside you’re saying “no – not again!”
- You feel the family’s sense of urgency as your own
- You want to “solve” the family’s problems or “buffer” them from the very real difficulties of low socio-economic status in the US
- You feel badly when your sponsor group or the family’s life in the United States does not meet the family’s expectations
- You insert yourself as “middleman” in the family’s relationships or problems
- Your own family, work, or friendships are suffering due to time or emotional energy given to sponsorship

Steps to Strengthen Boundaries

Define your role

- Review your goals as a sponsor and share them with the newcomer
- Review your role as a member of the Sponsor Circle

Identify the problem and ask yourself, “Whose problem is this?”

- This is not to blame, but determine whose responsibility it is to address the problem
- It may be helpful to consult with the coordinator of your group or with your accredited umbrella organization

Recognize your limits and make them known

- “I can’t help, I have to pick my kids up from school”
- “The sponsor group only has X dollars so we cannot...”

Practice radical self-care

- In order to provide the best support for the duration of the sponsorship you need to maintain a strong sense of self
- Take care of your own needs – spiritually, physically, and emotionally

Access Support & Celebrate Milestones

Access Support

Communicate any challenges to the newcomer, your sponsor circle coordinator, and/or your accredited umbrella organization.

Remember that you are not alone. Others can offer perspective, resources, and/or support.

If there is a challenge that arises within the first 90 days that keeps you from performing your sponsor circle responsibilities, inform your accredited umbrella organization.

Celebrate Milestones

It is important to celebrate milestones and acknowledge success (big and small).

Celebrations may involve acknowledging affirmations (by text or face to face), or gatherings. These celebrations are motivating, affirming, help build trust and community, and support further growth for both sponsor and newcomer.

Concluding Sponsor Circle Supports

Concluding your time as a formal Sponsor Circle is just as important as beginning it. If not done well, some newcomers may remain dependent.

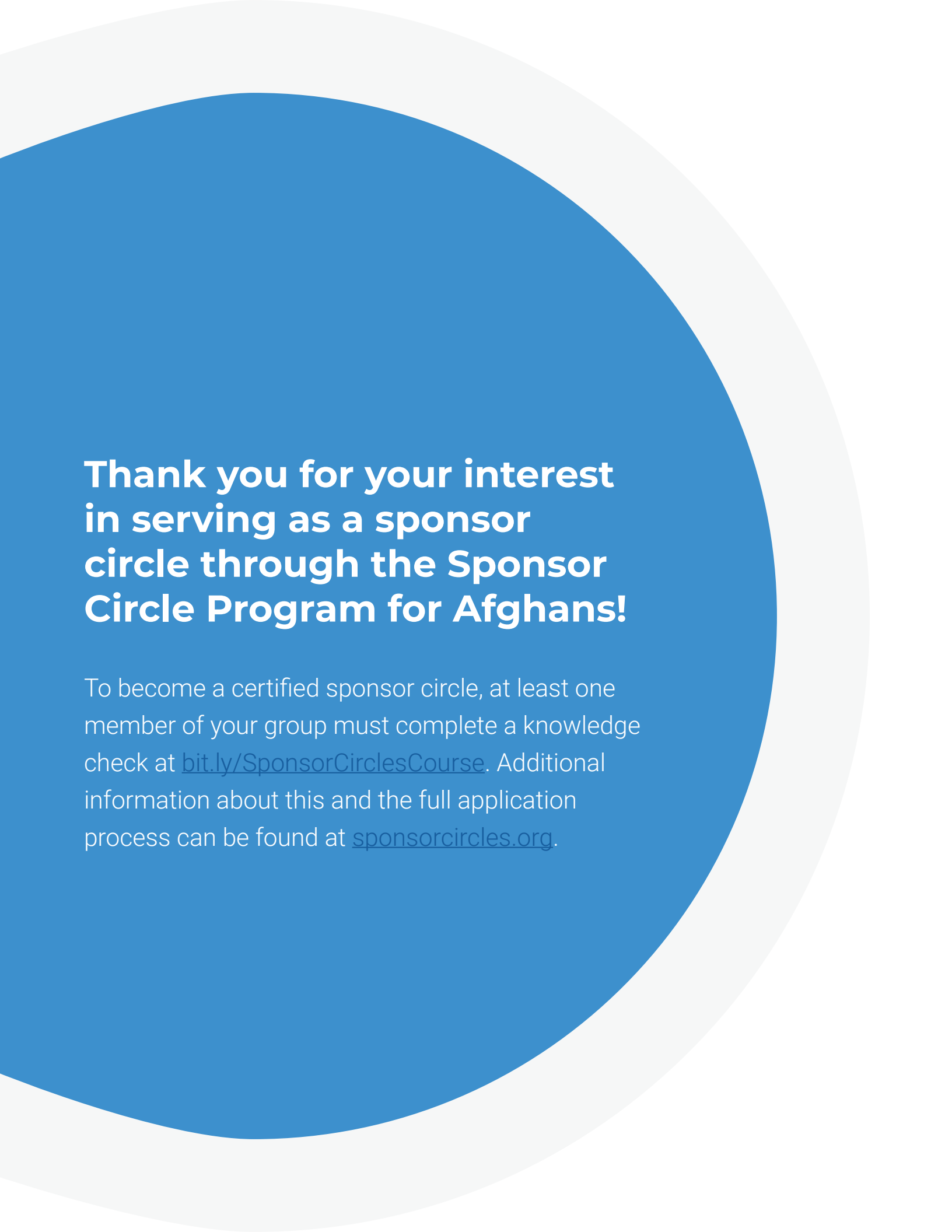
If the newcomer is amenable, plan a gathering or celebration to mark the conclusion of the formal Sponsor Circle supports. This is an opportunity for you to tell the newcomer how happy you are that they are your neighbors and celebrate what you have all learned.

Transition Check-In

About two weeks before the concluding celebration, you may want to have a “transition check-in meeting” with sponsors and the newcomer. At this meeting you can check which essential activities/abilities have been achieved and what might remain as goals. The newcomer can also highlight any goals they would like to address in the last weeks of sponsorship.

Sample transition check-in goals might include:

- Successfully purchases groceries and household items independently.
- Successfully takes transportation to key locations such as children’s school, doctor’s office, and work.
- Aware of language learning opportunities and if enrolled, are accessing them on their own.
- Successfully schedules a doctor’s appointment on their own or with the help of a friend or neighbor.
- Successfully deposit checks and withdraws money from their bank account.



Thank you for your interest in serving as a sponsor circle through the Sponsor Circle Program for Afghans!

To become a certified sponsor circle, at least one member of your group must complete a knowledge check at bit.ly/SponsorCirclesCourse. Additional information about this and the full application process can be found at sponsorcircles.org.