RAISE YOUR VOICE:

The Global Refuge Advocacy Toolkit



Global Refuge

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Introduction

We are living in a defining moment—a moment when the choices made by everyday people will determine whether our communities move toward welcome, dignity, and belonging or toward fear and exclusion. Refugees and other immigrants across the country are rebuilding their lives in the middle of extraordinary uncertainty. This population contributes to our neighborhoods, our schools, our congregations, and our shared future—even as many face barriers that threaten their safety, stability, and opportunity.

This is not a moment to sit on the sidelines. This is a moment to step in. This is a moment to build power.

Grassroots advocacy is how movements rise. It is how ordinary people—not institutions, not experts, not political insiders—shape the policies, narratives, and decisions that define who we are. Advocacy is the collective act of defending dignity, expanding opportunity, and insisting that every family has the right to safety, stability, and the chance to thrive.

And here is the truth movements are built on: **anyone can become an advocate**. You do not need formal training, a policy background, or a leadership title. The most consequential movements in our history were built by people who refused to wait for permission—people who believed their voices, stories, and communities mattered.

Right now, your voice matters. Your leadership matters. Your courage matters.

There is a role for everyone in this movement. Whether you prefer to support behind the scenes, make phone calls, write op-eds, meet with elected officials, organize community events, or participate in public actions, each of us has an indispensable role in shaping the future of our communities. When we act together—grounded in values of welcome, justice, and belonging—we build a country where refugees and other immigrants are protected, included, and able to thrive.

This toolkit is designed to help you step into this moment with clarity and confidence. It will guide you through the foundational steps of grassroots advocacy: building a support group, choosing an issue, framing your message, and taking strategic action. Each step is designed to help you move from concern to impact and from individual commitment to collective power.

This is a moment for movements. This is a moment for courage. This is a moment for us—and we are ready.

Global Refuge's Policy and Advocacy Approach

Global Refuge's Policy and Advocacy Team advances just, humane, and dignified refugee and immigration policy at the international, federal, state, and local level. Our work is rooted in recognized humanitarian principles, our Lutheran foundation, and more than 87 years of experience accompanying children and families seeking safety.

These commitments guide how we show up in policy spaces, how we partner with communities, and how we pursue a vision in which all newcomers are protected, embraced, and empowered in just and welcoming communities.



Humanity

We affirm the inherent dignity and worth of every person and view protecting life, reducing suffering, and ensuring the well-being of children and families as a moral imperative.



Impartiality

We advocate based on need without discrimination, working intentionally alongside communities that have faced disproportionate barriers.



Independence & Neutrality

We advance policy solutions driven by humanitarian values rather than political agendas, ensuring our advocacy remains mission-focused, credible, and trusted across the political spectrum.

Our Theory of Change

A secure, thriving nation requires policies that protect vulnerable families and uphold shared American values of dignity, safety, and opportunity. Guided by our values and principles, our theory of change focuses on:

- **Structural, systems-level reforms** that endure beyond political cycles.
- **Immediate improvements** that create stable, predictable pathways to safety and protection for refugee and other immigrant communities.
- **Evidence-based advocacy** grounded in program data, community insights, and lived experience.
- **Integrated engagement** across faith communities, grassroots leaders, coalitions, and national and local partners.

Through this model—programmatic grounding, bipartisan education, grassroots leadership, faith-based engagement, and strategic collaboration—we translate emerging needs into actionable policy solutions.

Our goal is clear: a country where all newcomers are welcomed with dignity, protected by just policies, and able to thrive.



How to Use This Toolkit

This toolkit is designed to help everyday people become confident, effective grassroots advocates for refugees and other immigrants. Whether you are brand-new to advocacy or already engaged in your community, this guide will help you move from concern to action and from individual commitment to collective power.

Who This Toolkit is For

- Community members who want to support refugees and other immigrants;
- Faith leaders, students, parents, service providers, and neighbors;
- People with lived experience of displacement, migration, or resettlement;
- Anyone seeking clear, practical steps to influence public policy and public opinion.

You do **not** need formal training, a policy background, or a leadership title. Advocacy is the strongest when it reflects the full diversity of our communities.

How to Navigate This Toolkit

This toolkit is structured to take you through the full arc of grassroots advocacy:

1. **Foundations of Advocacy.** What advocacy is, why it matters, and how everyday people shape change;
2. **Getting Started.** Building your support group and choosing a winnable issue;
3. **Framing Your Issue.** Communicating your demand strategically;
4. **Messaging and Storytelling.** Shaping narratives rooted in dignity and shared values;
5. **Advocacy Tactics.** Practical actions you can take to influence decision makers;
6. **Safety & Risk.** Assessing personal and community safety;
7. **Mobilizing Your Community.** Easy ways to bring others into the work;
8. **FAQs.** Answers to common questions.

You can read the toolkit straight through or jump to the sections most relevant to your current advocacy work.

What the Toolkit Provides

- Clear explanations of advocacy concepts;
- Step-by-step guidance for building campaigns and taking action;
- Tools and templates for advocacy actions, messaging, and more;
- Examples and scenarios to help you apply concepts to real-world situations;
- Values-based framing rooted in welcome, justice, dignity, and belonging;
- Safety guidance to ensure your advocacy is sustainable and grounded in care.

This toolkit is meant to be practical, accessible, and empowering. Use it to guide your advocacy, share it with your support group, and adapt it to the needs of your community.

You do not need formal training, a policy background, or a leadership title. Advocacy is the strongest when it reflects the full diversity of our communities**.**



Common Barriers & How to Overcome Them

Advocacy can feel overwhelming, especially for people who are new to this work or are directly impacted by immigration systems. These barriers are normal—and they can be overcome with support, clarity, and community.

Barrier 1: Feeling Overwhelmed or Unsure Where to Start

Many people want to help but don't know what action to take first.

How to overcome it:

- Start small: join a support group, attend one event, or send one email;
- Use the toolkit's step-by-step structure to guide your next move;
- Remember: advocacy is a journey, not a test.

Barrier 2: Fear of Saying the Wrong Thing

People worry about making mistakes, using incorrect terms, or unintentionally causing harm.

How to overcome it:

- Lead with values like welcome, dignity, and fairness;
- Use the glossary to strengthen your understanding;
- Ask questions and listen deeply—humility builds trust.

Barrier 3: Emotional Fatigue or Discouragement

Immigration issues can be heavy, especially for directly impacted communities.

How to overcome it:

- Share the load with your advocacy support group;
- Take breaks when needed; rest is part of the work;
- Focus on winnable issues that create visible change.

Barrier 4: Fear of Public Exposure or Safety Risks

Some advocates worry about being publicly identified or targeted.

How to overcome it:

- Use virtual or anonymous participation options;
- Review the toolkit's Safety & Risk Assessment section;
- Set clear boundaries about what you're comfortable doing and stick to those boundaries.

Barrier 5: Not Knowing Enough About Policy

Policy can feel complicated or inaccessible.

How to overcome it:

- Use the toolkit's definitions and examples;
- Focus on one issue at a time, one activity at a time;
- Remember: lived experience is expertise.

Barrier 6: Disagreement Within Families or Communities

Conversations about immigration can be sensitive.

How to overcome it:

- Use the "How to Talk to Friends, Family & Neighbors" section;
- Lead with shared values, not arguments;
- Seek understanding, not immediate persuasion.

Immigration & Refugee Glossary of Terms

A shared vocabulary helps advocates communicate clearly and avoid mis-information. This glossary provides simple, accurate definitions of commonly used terms.

Asylum
Protection granted to people already inside the U.S. or at the U.S. border who fear persecution in their home country. Asylees have been approved for protection based on their asylum claim, while asylum seekers have made that claim but have not yet been granted protection.

Refugee
A person outside their home country who cannot return due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Refugees are admitted to the U.S. through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), created by the Refugee Act of 1980.

Humanitarian Parole
Temporary permission to enter and remain in the U.S. for urgent humanitarian reasons.

Temporary Protected Status (TPS)
A designation allowing people from certain countries experiencing a crisis, such as a conflict or a natural disaster, to live and work in the U.S. temporarily.

Work Authorization/Employment Authorization Document (EAD)
A federal document that allows immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers to work legally in the U.S.

Resettlement Agency
Organizations (like Global Refuge) that help refugees rebuild their lives in the U.S. by providing housing, case management, and support services.

Unaccompanied Children
Children who arrive in the U.S. without a parent or legal guardian and are placed in federal care.

Sponsor
A person or family who agrees to support an unaccompanied child or newcomer during their immigration process.

Adjustment of Status
The process of applying for a green card (lawful permanent resident status) from within the U.S.

Removal/Deportation
The legal process of expelling someone from the U.S.

ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement)
Federal agency responsible for immigration enforcement inside the U.S.

USCIS (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services)
Federal agency that processes immigration applications, including essential requests for those inside the U.S. like green card applications, work permit requests, etc.

PART 1: Grassroots Advocacy Foundations

What Is Public Policy?

Public policy is the set of laws, rules, and funding decisions that the government makes about how our society works. These policies determine who has access to services, what rights people have, how resources are distributed, and what protections exist for immigrants, refugees, and all community members.

Public policy shapes things like:

- How refugees are resettled;
- How asylum claims are processed;
- Who qualifies for work authorization;
- What statuses are offered to immigrants;
- What supports families receive;
- How local communities invest in welcome and inclusion.

Changing public policy means changing the rules, so they better reflect our values of welcome, justice, dignity, and belonging.

What Is Grassroots Advocacy?

Grassroots advocacy is when everyday people take action to influence public policy decisions in government, public institutions, or their communities. It is how neighbors, faith leaders, students, parents, and directly impacted families speak up to shape policies, funding, and public opinion so refugees and other immigrants can live with safety, dignity, and belonging.

Advocacy can look like:

- Meeting with elected officials;
- Sharing lived experience;
- Organizing community events;
- Writing letters, emails, or op-eds;

- Educating neighbors or faith communities;
- Mobilizing supporters to take action.

At its core, advocacy is about turning values into action. It ensures that the voices of directly impacted people—immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and their communities—are heard by those in power.

Rights-Based, Empowering, and Ethical Advocacy

Ethical storytelling, messaging, and framing protects dignity, agency, and privacy. It ensures that advocacy uplifts communities rather than speaking over them. A rights-based lens reminds us that refugees and other immigrants are not defined by their status or by the hardest moments of their lives. They are rights-holders, leaders, and full members of American communities.

What To Do

- Speak from your own experiences and values;
- Include immigrant community leaders in shaping priorities;
- Get consent when sharing someone's story;
- Omit personal or sensitive details;
- Invite refugees and other immigrants to share their own stories;
- Be sensitive to different comfort levels;
- Provide options for anonymous or virtual participation;
- Ensure accessibility across age, gender, and disability;
- Use rights-based framing: dignity, safety, family unity, due process, and belonging.

What Not To Do

- Don't make overarching statements that overgeneralize all immigrants;
- Don't assume issue priorities without asking;
- Don't share traumatic or graphic details about someone's immigration journey without their consent;
- Don't share any personal details that reveal someone else's identity;
- Don't pit communities and populations against each other or compare "deservingness";
- Don't claim to be "a voice for the voiceless";

- Don't erase age, gender, or disability differences by treating all experiences as the same;
- Don't lie, misrepresent, or overpromise.

Trauma-Informed Storytelling Tips

- Let people choose what they want to share and in what format;
- Avoid pressuring anyone to disclose painful experiences;
- Focus on resilience, agency, and community strength, not suffering;
- Offer alternative ways to share stories, such as anonymous quotes, written statements, or group storytelling;
- Check in after sharing; storytelling can be emotional.

AGE, GENDER, AND DISABILITY

Advocacy must reflect the full scope of immigrant and refugee experiences. An individual's age, gender, and disability status, as well as other factors of personal identity, shape how people navigate systems, access services, and experience harm—while also shaping leadership, resilience, and community strength.

Age

- Recognize that children, youth, adults, and elders experience immigration systems differently;
- Avoid framing children only as victims; uplift their agency, creativity, and leadership;
- Ensure youth and elders have meaningful, age-appropriate ways to participate in advocacy;
- Provide consent processes that account for minors and guardians.

Gender

- Avoid assumptions about individual's roles, family structures, or who is "most impacted";
- Use language that ensures representation of all individuals, regardless of their gender;
- Recognize gender specific risks (e.g., gender-based violence) without sensationalizing trauma;
- Ensure advocacy spaces are safe for all to participate in and lead.

Disability

- Recognize that refugees and other immigrants with disabilities face unique barriers to access, safety, and services;
- Ensure physical, sensory, and cognitive accessibility in all advocacy spaces (ASL, mobility access, and plain language materials);
- Avoid framing disability as a deficit—uplift leadership of refugees and other immigrants with disabilities, as well as their expertise and resilience;
- Provide options for anonymous participation, virtual formats, or alternative storytelling methods.

Advocacy Tactics: How Grassroots Advocates Take Action

Advocacy is strongest when everyday people use a variety of tactics to influence public opinion, shape policy, and move decision makers. These tactics range from quiet behind-the-scenes work, to large-scale public mobilization. Each tactic plays a critical role in advancing the rights, dignity, and safety of refugees and other immigrants. They all play a part in shaping and moving public policy.

1. Direct Advocacy to Decision Makers
These tactics focus on influencing people in power—elected officials, agency leaders, or administrators.

- Meetings with policymakers: Advocates share stories, data, and clear asks;
- Letters, emails, and phone calls: Constituents communicate directly with their representatives and their staff;
- Policy briefs or memos: Clear, concise documents explaining the issue and the solution.

Why it matters: As decision makers make critical calls on funding and other topics, they need to hear from the people most affected—and from the communities who care about them.

2. Education & Awareness-Building
These tactics help people understand the issue, what's at stake, and why it matters.

- Community workshops or teach-ins: Leaders explain how immigration or refugee policies work and how they affect local families;
- Storytelling and lived experience sharing: Directly impacted community members share their experiences to build empathy and urgency;

- Faith or community presentations: Congregations, schools, and neighborhood groups learn how they can support immigrant and refugee rights.

Why it matters: People can't take action until they understand the issue. Education builds the foundation for all other advocacy.

3. Public Mobilization

These tactics bring large numbers of people together to show broad support for an issue.

- Rallies, marches, and vigils: Public events that demonstrate community solidarity with refugees and other immigrants;
- Petitions: Collective signatures showing widespread support for a specific demand;
- Social media mobilization: Coordinated posts, graphics, or videos that amplify the issue and call people to act.

Why it matters: Public mobilization shows policymakers that the community is paying attention and expecting action.

4. Narrative & Communications Tactics

These tactics shape how the public understands immigrants, refugees, and the issue at hand.

- Op-eds and letters to the editor: Community voices influence public opinion and local conversations in local and national media;
- Press conferences or media interviews: Advocates highlight urgent issues and uplift lived experience to a larger audience by engaging with reporters and media outlets;
- Story campaigns: Coordinated storytelling can help shift narratives toward welcome, dignity, and belonging. Campaigns can take place on social media through posts or videos, or in community spaces like churches, schools, neighborhood groups, and beyond.

Why it matters:
Changing public opinion creates the political space needed for policy change.

5. Organizing & Coalition-Building

These tactics build long-term power by bringing people and organizations together.

- Coalitions: Groups of organizations, faith communities, and directly impacted leaders working toward a shared goal;
- Advocacy support groups: Small, local groups that plan actions, support one another, and mobilize their networks;
- Leadership development: Training for community members—especially refugees and other immigrants—to strengthen their advocacy skills.

Why it matters:
Organizing builds sustained power, not just momentary action.

6. Advocacy Campaigns
Advocacy campaigns are organized, strategic efforts to address a specific issue.

A campaign includes:

- A clear issue;
- A measurable goal;
- A target decision maker;
- A strategy;
- A timeline;
- Coordinated tactics (like calls, meetings, rallies, storytelling, and media).

Campaigns help communities stay focused, build momentum, and push decision makers to act. They turn individual advocacy actions into a **collective, strategic push for change**.

Why it matters: Campaigns give structure to advocacy and help communities win concrete improvements for refugees and other immigrants.

7. Behind-the-scenes Support
Not all advocacy is public—and not all advocates want to be in the spotlight.

Behind-the-scenes roles include:

- Research;
- Logistics;
- Event planning;
- Graphic design;
- Translation or interpretation;
- Volunteer coordination;
- Food preparation for events;
- Administrative support.

Why it matters: These roles make public actions possible. Advocacy depends on people who organize, prepare, and support the work.

8. The Big Picture
Grassroots advocacy is powerful because it is collective. Different tactics work together to:

- Educate the public;
- Build community power;

- Shift narratives;
- Influence decision makers;
- Win policy change.

Every tactic matters. Every role matters. And every advocate—no matter their experience, background, or comfort level—has a place in this work.

History as a Testament: Interdependence Drives Advocacy

Grassroots advocacy has shaped every major social, political, and civil rights advance in U.S. history. Across movements, one truth stands out: **persistent, collective action by everyday people is the catalyst for breakthrough political, social, and legal reforms**. The Civil Rights Movement, the Farmworker Movement, and the Disability Rights Movement each demonstrate how interdependence—people relying on one another across communities, identities, and geographies—creates the conditions for lasting change.

The Civil Rights Movement (1954–1968)

The Civil Rights Movement is widely regarded as the most successful social justice movement in U.S. history. Activists across the country showed up against all odds to oppose segregation, voter suppression, and discrimination. Spanning more than fourteen years, the movement mobilized thousands of everyday Americans, shifted public discourse, and secured landmark laws that continue to shape American society sixty years later.

These successes were advanced by local communities that understood the value of interdependence. Churches, college campuses, and schools became organizing hubs where people planned both small and large actions. Existing community infrastructure made possible one of the most notable events of the movement: the **March on Washington** on August 28, 1963. While the nation watched 250,000 people gather on the National Mall, the march itself was the culmination of months of strategic coordination. Volunteer teams organized



every detail—from crowd control and transportation routes to lodging, safety protocols, and outreach. Community members prepared thousands of lunches, while others crafted petitions, flyers, and newsletters to broadcast the movement's demands to policymakers and the public. The march's success reflected not only its size, but the disciplined, interdependent organizing behind it.

The Farmworker Movement (1965–1970)

Simultaneously, farmworkers in California and the Southwest were building a multiracial, community-driven movement for fair wages, safe working conditions, and basic labor protections. Filipino farmworkers launched the Delano Grape Strike in 1965, soon joined by Mexican American workers, forming a coalition rooted in solidarity and shared purpose. Their campaign relied on interdependence at every level: church-based organizing, student mobilization, neighborhood meetings, and a nationwide grape boycott that asked everyday Americans to use consumer pressure to support farmworkers.



The movement's defining moment—the **300-mile march from Delano to Sacramento** in 1966—demonstrated the discipline and unity of the campaign. Communities along the route provided food, shelter, and support, while volunteers coordinated logistics and outreach. By 1970, millions of Americans had joined the boycott, resulting in historic union contracts that improved wages and working conditions. The Farmworker Movement showed how cross community solidarity and sustained grassroots pressure can overcome entrenched systems.

The Disability Rights Movement (1970s–1990)

Throughout American history, people with disabilities faced systemic exclusion from schools, workplaces, transportation, and public life. In response, disability advocates organized a sustained movement to demand equal access and civil rights. Independent living centers, students, parents, and allies built networks of support, held teach-ins, organized sit-ins, and used direct action to highlight barriers that nondisabled Americans often overlooked.

The **Section 504 Sit-ins** of 1977 became the longest nonviolent occupation of a federal building in U.S. history. More than 100 activists with a disability occupied a federal office for 26 days, relying on interdependent community support—food deliveries, medical care, legal assistance, and solidarity from faith leaders, unions, and civil rights groups. Their persistence led to the implementation of Section 504 regulations and ultimately paved the way for the **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** in 1990, a landmark civil rights law guaranteeing equal access and nondiscrimination.



The Throughline: Interdependence Makes Change Possible

Across these movements, the pattern is clear. Grassroots advocacy succeeds when:

- **Local communities organize together**
- **Volunteers coordinate strategically and persistently**
- **People build shared purpose across race, class, disability, and geography**
- **Public pressure is sustained over time**
- **Everyday Americans choose to act**

History shows that durable change is not spontaneous. It is built through disciplined organizing, community interdependence, and the belief that **ordinary people can do extraordinary things when they work together. They can transform systems and expand rights**.

> Ordinary people can do extraordinary things when they work together. They can transform systems and expand rights.

PART TWO: Getting Started, Making a Plan, and Sustaining the Work

Grassroots advocacy becomes powerful when people come together, choose a clear issue, and build a strategy rooted in lived experience and shared values. This section helps you take the first steps: forming your advocacy support group and identifying the issue you want to work on.

Step 1: Building an Advocacy Support Group; Invite Others to the Table

In today's sociopolitical landscape, getting involved in advocacy for refugees and other immigrants can feel overwhelming. Many people experience emotional fatigue, powerlessness, or fear when confronting complex immigration systems, rapidly shifting policies, or the constant public debate about who belongs in our communities. These feelings are real—and they often grow stronger when we try to navigate advocacy alone.

One of the most powerful ways to overcome these barriers is to **connect with others who share your commitment to welcoming, protecting, and standing with refugees and other immigrants**. Your advocacy support group does not need to be formal, registered, or structured like an organization. Instead, think of it as an informal circle of **2-10 community members** you can lean on for ideas, support, planning, and collective action.

Your group can come from anywhere, including:

- Your faith community;
- Your workplace or union;
- Your school or campus;
- Your neighborhood, apartment building, or local community center.

Together, you can choose how often to meet, how you want to communicate, and what immigration or refugee issues matter most to you, whether it's expanding refugee resettlement, protecting asylum access, supporting TPS holders, or advocating for humane border and enforcement policies, to name a few. Advocacy comes alive when people root their work in shared values of **welcome, justice, dignity, and belonging** and commit to taking meaningful action together.

Include Directly Impacted Communities Early
As you build your support group, it is essential to **invite community members with lived experience of displacement, migration, or resettlement** to join your efforts. When people with lived experience are included from the beginning, advocacy becomes a pathway for **community-led solutions**, not just community-focused demands.

The stories, insights, and ideas of refugees and other immigrants strengthen your strategy, deepen trust, and ensure that your actions create real impact. Including directly impacted individuals early on is both respectful and strategic. It helps your group stay grounded in the realities of the communities you aim to support and build the kind of solidarity that sustains long-term immigration and refugee advocacy.

Step 2: Identifying Your Advocacy Priority

The next step is identifying which immigration or refugee issue most directly affects your community. Narrowing your focus helps you:

- Clarify your goals;
- Shape your tactics;
- Identify the decision maker you need to influence;
- Mobilize others who care about the same issue.

Choosing a clear issue transforms broad concern into targeted, winnable action.

The Difference Between a Problem and an Issue
Problems are large, overwhelming conditions such as:

- Poverty;
- Racism;
- Fear in immigrant communities;
- Delays in work authorization;
- Lack of access to legal services.

These are important starting points, but too broad to guide meaningful action.

Issues are smaller, targeted pieces of a problem that you can realistically influence. Cutting a problem into a specific issue helps you identify a tangible goal and the decision maker who can make that change happen.

This process is often called **"cutting an issue"** and it is foundational to successful grassroots advocacy.

Examples:

- **Problem**: Poverty/food insecurity;
  Cut Issue: Congress or State legislature restores SNAP eligibility for lawfully present immigrants. (Target: Members of Congress, state human services committee, or governor's executive action.)

- **Problem**: Fear in Immigrant Communities;
  Cut Issue: Federal government, state government, or city passes a "safe access" ordinance preventing ICE enforcement at schools, clinics, and shelters. (Target: Congress; state legislature; city council.)

- **Problem**: Delays in Work Authorizations (or green card processing);
  Cut Issue: USCIS commits to a 90-day processing benchmark for asylum EAD renewals. (Target: USCIS leadership but will likely need Congressional or governor pressure); Congressional office escalates specific delayed EAD cases for local families. (Target: District congressional staff)

How to Cut an Issue

1. Think About Root Causes
Listen closely to immigrants, refugees, and others directly impacted. Their lived experience will help you identify the root cause you can advocate around—whether it's access to language services, delays in work authorization, barriers to resettlement, or harmful local policies.

2. Choose Issues That Are Deeply and Widely Felt
Strong advocacy issues affect many people and can bring together directly impacted community members, supporters, allies, congregations, and partners.

3. Focus on Issues That Improve Everyday Life
Choose issues that, if solved, would create meaningful improvements in people's daily lives—such as access to legal services, housing support, or timely work authorization.

4. Choose an Issue That Empowers Your Community
A good issue helps people realize they have the power to make a difference. It reinvigorates interest and strengthens long-term engagement.

5. Strategic Issues Have a Clear Target
A target should always be a **person**—someone with elected, administrative, or appointed authority who can say "yes" to your demand.

6. Ensure Your Issue Is Winnable
A winnable issue is specific, targeted, and achievable with the power your group can build.

ASK YOURSELF:

- Can we build enough support to influence our target?
- Is this issue specific enough that one person's "yes" would make a difference?
- Will this issue create meaningful change for refugees and other immigrants in our community?

EXAMPLE: From Problem to Issue to Advocacy Ask

Step 1:
Problem

Many refugees and other immigrants in your community lack access to legal aid to process their immigration cases. This causes fear of legal limbo or encounters with federal law enforcement.

Step 2:
Issue

After deeper conversations, you learn the root cause of this problem is the **cost of legal services.** You discover that other cities have established **legal trust funds** to assist immigrants. You also learn that the **mayor** has the authority to allocate funds through an ordinance.

Step 3:
Advocacy Ask

You finalize your demand: **Ask the mayor to create a local legal assistance fund for refugees and other immigrants.**

You develop messaging centered on values of faith, safety, and justice, and you choose a campaign name that reflects due process and dignity.

Step 3: Mapping Decision Makers and Influencers (Power Analysis)

Once you've chosen your advocacy issue, the next step is understanding **who has the power to make the change you want—and who can influence them**. This process is called **power analysis**, and it helps you use your time, energy, and relationships strategically.

A strong power analysis answers three questions:

- Who can say "yes" to your demand?
- Who influences that person?
- What arguments or tactics are most likely to sway them?

Even the best advocacy message won't create change unless it reaches the right people in the right way.

1. Identify the Primary Decision Maker (Your Target)

Your target is the person with the authority to make the change you're asking for. A target is always a **person**, not an institution.

For immigration and refugee advocacy, targets might include:

- A city council member;
- A school principal or superintendent;
- A state agency director;
- A governor;
- A member of congress;
- A local housing authority official;
- A county health director.

You'll know your issue is well-cut when **one person's "yes"** moves you toward your goal.

2. Identify Secondary Targets and Influencers

Influencers are people or groups who can help sway your primary target. They may not have formal authority, but they have **credibility, relationships, or public influence**.

Examples:

- Faith leaders;
- Business owners;
- Local coalitions;
- Community organizations;
- Neighborhood associations;
- Educators;
- Service providers;
- Directly impacted community members.

Mapping influencers helps you build a strategy that reaches your target from multiple angles.

3. Understand Your Target's Motivations

To persuade someone, you need to understand **what motivates them**. This is not about guessing their political views; it's about identifying what they care about, what pressures they face, and what values they publicly uphold.

CONSIDER:

- What issues do they champion?
- What committees or boards do they serve on?
- What communities do they represent?
- What values do they publicly emphasize (e.g., safety, economic growth, family stability, fairness)?
- Who do they listen to? Whose support is meaningful to them?
- What are their priorities for the year?

This helps you tailor your message so that it resonates with their worldview.

4. Determine What Arguments Might Sway Them

Different targets respond to different types of arguments. For immigration and refugee advocacy, common persuasive frames include:

- **Values-based arguments:** Individuals or communities share values of welcome, dignity, justice, belonging, compassion, and community safety;
- **Economic arguments:** Refugees and other immigrants strengthen local economies, fill workforce gaps, and contribute to long-term growth;
- **Community well-being arguments:** Stable housing, language access, and work authorization help families thrive and reduce strain on local systems;
- **Public safety arguments:** When people have access to services and legal pathways, communities are safer and more stable;
- **Constituent-driven arguments:** "Your community members care about this issue and are asking you to act";
- **Lived experience:** Stories from directly impacted refugees and other immigrants often shift perspectives more than data alone.

Choose the argument that aligns with your target's values and priorities.

Step 4. Identifying Your Tactics and Creating a Plan of Action

Once you've chosen your issue and mapped your target decision makers, the next step is to **identify the tactics you will use and build a clear plan of action**. This step turns strategy into movement. It helps your advocacy support group coordinate efforts, stay focused, and take actions that move your target toward a "yes."

A strong plan answers three core questions:

- **What tactics will we use?**
- **Who will carry them out?**
- **When will each action happen?**

This is where your advocacy becomes visible, organized, and impactful.

Choose Tactics That Match Your Target and Your Issue

Different tactics work better for different targets. Your power analysis should guide which actions you take. Your group's plan should include tactics that align with your target's motivations, your community's strengths, and the needs of refugees and other immigrants affected by the issue.

EXAMPLES:

- **If your target values community relationships:** Organize a listening session with immigrant and refugee families;
- **If your target responds to public pressure:** Mobilize supporters for a rally, petition, or coordinated call-in day;
- **If your target is data-driven:** Provide a concise policy brief with local statistics;
- **If your target is influenced by faith leaders:** Ask clergy to sign a letter or join a meeting;
- **If your target is sensitive to media attention:** Publish op-eds or share stories with local reporters.

Your tactics should always be **strategic**, not random.

Common Grassroots Advocacy Tactics

Direct Advocacy

- Meetings with elected officials;
- Phone calls, emails, or letters from constituents;
- Petitions;
- Policy briefs or lived experience testimony.

Public Mobilization

- Rallies, marches, vigils;
- Social media campaigns;
- Community events or press conferences;
- Coordinated call-in or email days.

Education & Awareness

- Teach-ins, workshops, or community forums;
- Storytelling events featuring directly impacted refugees and other immigrants; and/or
- Presentations in faith communities, schools, or neighborhood groups.

Narrative & Communications

- Op-eds, letters to the editor, or blog posts;
- Media interviews or press releases;
- Story campaigns that uplift lived experience.

Behind-the-scenes Support

- Research, logistics, translation, food preparation, and volunteer coordination;
- Graphic design, communications support, or event planning.

Your plan should include a mix of tactics—some that build public pressure, some that deepen community engagement, and some that directly influence your target.

Sequence Your Activities Strategically

Advocacy is most effective when actions build on one another. Think of your plan as **a ladder of engagement**—starting with simple, accessible actions and building toward more public or high impact tactics.

EXAMPLE SEQUENCE:

- **Host a listening session** with refugees and other immigrants to gather stories on how SNAP cuts have impacted local family's access to food assistance;
- **Publish an op-ed in the local newspaper** or create a social media campaign highlighting the impacts of SNAP cuts on those families;
- **Deliver a petition to an elected official** (your target) with signatures from supportive community members;
- **Hold a meeting with your targeted elected official** to present your ask that SNAP be reinstated or other food assistance benefits be expanded;
- **Organize a local public event or rally** if your elected official needs additional pressure.

Note how these tactics can reinforce each other—how an aspect of one action can tee up another action. No single action necessarily convinces the target on its own. Each step should move your target closer to saying "yes."

Assign Roles and Responsibilities

A plan only works when people know what they're responsible for. Assign roles based on interest, skill, and comfort level.

EXAMPLES:

- **Lead organizer** coordinates the plan and keeps the group on track;
- **Policy lead** drafts briefs, tracks legislation, prepares talking points;
- **Story lead** supports refugees and other immigrants who want to share lived experience;
- **Communications lead** manages social media, graphics, or press outreach;
- **Logistics lead** handles event planning, transportation, food, and materials;
- **Outreach lead** mobilizes supporters, partners, and coalition members.

Clear roles prevent burnout and ensure everyone contributes meaningfully. This approach also means people can contribute based on their strengths or what advocacy tactics or skills people want to develop.

Set a Timeline with Milestones

Your plan should include:

- **Start and end dates;**
- **Key milestones** (e.g., petition launch, meeting with target, public event);
- **Check-ins** to assess progress;
- **Contingency plans** if your target doesn't respond.

Timelines keep your group focused and help you measure momentum.

Prepare for Follow-Up and Adaptation

Advocacy is rarely linear. Decision makers may delay, push back, or ask for more information. Your plan should include:

- **Follow-up communications**;
- **Additional pressure tactics** if needed;
- **Ways to keep supporters engaged**; and
- **Opportunities to uplift new stories** or data.

Adaptation is a sign of strength, not failure. The most effective grassroots advocates adjust their plan based on what they learn.

Step 5. Taking Action and Evaluating Your Impact

After you've created a plan, identified your tactics, and mapped your decision makers, it's time to **take action**. This is the moment when your advocacy becomes visible—when your group shows up, speaks out, and works together to advance the rights, dignity, and safety of refugees and other immigrants in your community.

Taking action is not the end of the process. It's part of a cycle. Once you act, you evaluate what happened, learn from it, and strengthen your strategy for the next step. This cycle builds durable grassroots power.

Take Action with Purpose and Coordination

Your actions should be intentional, strategic, and aligned with your plan. Whether you're hosting a listening session, meeting with a policymaker, launching a petition, or organizing a public event, make sure your group:

- Knows the goal of the action;
- Understands the target;
- Is clear on roles and responsibilities;
- Has prepared materials, talking points, or stories;
- Is ready to follow up.

Actions should reflect your values of **welcome, justice, dignity, and belonging**—and uplift the voices of refugees and other immigrants whenever possible.

Document What Happens

Good advocacy requires good recordkeeping. After each action, capture:

- Who participated;
- Who you engaged (policymakers, partners, media, and/or supporters);
- What was said or promised;
- How your target responded;
- What questions or concerns came up;
- What follow-up is needed.

Documentation helps you track progress, identify patterns, and prepare for future actions.

Evaluate Your Impact

Evaluation is how you learn what worked, what didn't, and what you should adjust. It keeps your advocacy grounded, strategic, and effective.

Ask your group:

Did we move our target?

- Did they respond?
- Did they agree to meet?
- Did they express support?
- Did they take any action?

Did we build community power?

- Did new people join our efforts?
- Did directly impacted refugees and other immigrants feel heard and included?
- Did partners or allies deepen their engagement?

Did our tactics work?

- Which actions had the biggest impact?
- Which tactics need improvement?
- What should we try next?

Did we stay aligned with our values?

- Did our actions reflect welcome, justice, dignity, and belonging?
- Did we uplift lived experience responsibly and respectfully?

Evaluation is not about perfection—it's about learning and strengthening your strategy.

Celebrate Wins (Big and Small)

Grassroots advocacy is long-term work. Celebrating progress keeps your group motivated and helps build community resilience.

Celebrate when:

- A policymaker agrees to a meeting;
- A partner joins your coalition;
- A story resonates publicly;
- A petition gains signatures;
- A directly impacted leader takes on a new role;
- You win your issue—or even move closer to winning it.

Recognition builds momentum and reinforces the belief that **every action matters**.

Plan Your Next Move

Based on your evaluation, decide what comes next:

- Are you focusing on the right target or decision maker?
- Do you need a follow-up meeting?
- Should you escalate pressure?
- Should you broaden your coalition?
- Is it time for a public event?
- Do you need new tactics or messaging?

Advocacy is iterative. Each action informs the next. Over time, this cycle builds the power needed to win meaningful change for refugees and other immigrants.

Taking action and evaluating your impact transforms your group from concerned individuals into a **strategic, powerful force for change**—one that can influence policy, shift narratives, and strengthen welcome in your community.

Step 6. Sustaining Your Advocacy Over Time

Advocacy is not a one-time action—it is a long-term commitment. Sustaining your advocacy over time means nurturing relationships, strengthening your support group, adapting your strategy, and continuing to show up even when progress feels slow. This is how grassroots power grows, through consistency, connection, and shared purpose.

Long-term advocacy is about building something bigger than a single campaign. It's about creating a culture of welcome and justice that lasts.

Strengthen Your Advocacy Support Group

Your support group is the backbone of your advocacy. To sustain momentum:

- **Hold regular check-ins** to maintain connection and alignment;
- **Share and/or rotate responsibilities** so no one burns out;
- **Celebrate progress** to keep morale high;
- **Invite new members**—especially refugees and other immigrants—to join and lead;
- **Create space for reflection** so people feel heard and valued.

Strong groups last because they invest in relationships, not just tasks.

Continue Building Community Power

Advocacy grows when more people join the work. Over time:

- **Partner with faith communities**, schools, unions, and neighborhood groups;
- **Build coalitions with organizations** that support refugees and other immigrants;
- **Offer leadership opportunities** to impacted community members;
- **Host recurring events** that keep people engaged and informed.

Power expands when communities stay connected and active.

Adapt Your Strategy as Conditions Change

Immigration and refugee policy landscapes shift quickly. Sustaining advocacy requires flexibility. To ensure your advocacy remains effective and relevant:

- **Reassess your issue** if new policies or patterns emerge;
- **Update your tactics** based on what you've learned;
- **Adjust your target** if decision-making authority changes;
- **Respond to urgent needs** without losing sight of long-term goals.

Adaptation is an indicator of strength within a group or movement.

Invest in Leadership Development

Sustainable advocacy depends on developing new leaders—especially those with lived experience of displacement. To ensure inclusivity and representation among those with lived experience:

- **Offer training** in storytelling, public speaking, and policy engagement;
- **Support directly impacted leaders** in taking on visible roles;
- **Create mentorship pathways** within your group;
- **Encourage shared leadership** rather than relying on one or two people.

Leadership development ensures your advocacy continues even as people's lives change.

Maintain Relationships with Decision Makers

Winning one issue is not the end of the relationship. Sustained advocacy means:

- **Following up** after a win to thank your target;
- **Keeping communication open** for future issues;
- **Inviting policymakers** to community events;
- **Providing updates** on how their decisions are impacting immigrant and refugee families.

Long-term relationships make future advocacy easier and more effective.

Track Progress and Learn from Each Campaign

Evaluation needs to be part of your ongoing work. Effective evaluation includes:

- **Documenting wins**, challenges, and lessons learned;
- **Keeping a record** of actions, meetings, and outcomes;
- **Identifying what tactics consistently work** for your community;
- **Using past campaigns** to strengthen future ones.

Sustained advocacy is built on accumulated knowledge.

Celebrate Community Resilience

Advocacy can be emotionally demanding. Sustaining it requires joy, connection, and recognition. Celebrate:

- **New leaders** stepping forward;
- **Community stories** that shift narratives;
- **Small wins** that build momentum;
- **Moments of solidarity**;
- **The resilience of refugees and other immigrants** who continue to lead and inspire.

Celebration is not gratuitous—it is fuel for long-term movement building.

Sustaining your advocacy over time means nurturing relationships, strengthening your support group, adapting your strategy, and continuing to show up even when progress feels slow.

PART THREE: Diving Into Tactics

Direct Advocacy: Emailing, Calling, or Meeting with Policymakers

Direct advocacy is one of the most powerful tools available to grassroots advocates. It allows everyday people to communicate directly with the individuals who shape public policy—elected officials, agency leaders, and other decision makers. When constituents speak up, policymakers listen. When directly impacted refugees and other immigrants share their stories, policymakers gain insight they cannot get anywhere else. And when communities coordinate their outreach, they build the pressure needed to create meaningful change.

This section of our toolkit provides practical guidance for engaging policymakers through emails, phone calls, and meetings. It also offers strategies for navigating today's political landscape, building consensus, and engaging leaders who may not initially agree with you. Sample scripts are included to help you get started.

Understanding the Political Landscape

In April 2026, The Washington Informer published a survey showing that although **36% of Americans expressed interest in civic engagement**, many did not follow through with action. This gap reflects the increasing complexity of participating in advocacy in an everchanging political environment. People often feel overwhelmed, unsure where to begin, or uncertain whether their voice will matter.

Direct advocacy is one of the most accessible ways to start. A single email, phone call, or meeting can influence how policymakers understand an issue—and can help shape decisions that affect refugees and other immigrants in your community.

The key is to start small, stay consistent, and build confidence over time.

Preparing for Direct Advocacy

1. Identify Your Representatives at Every Level of Government
Effective advocacy begins with knowing **who represents you**. Understanding who holds power over your issue helps you determine where to focus your efforts and who can say "yes" to your demand.

The fastest and most reliable way to identify **all** your elected officials—federal, state, and local—is to use tools that match your address or ZIP code to the correct districts.

This includes:

- **Local officials**: City council members or mayors, county commissioners, school board members;
- **State officials**: State legislators, governors, agency directors;
  - https://www.usa.gov/state-local-governments
- **Federal officials**: Members of Congress.
  - https://www.Congress.gov
  - https://www.House.gov
  - https://www.Senate.gov

Nonpartisan, nongovernmental websites that might also be helpful include:

- Ballotpedia
- 270towin
- Common Cause

2. Research What Your Elected Officials Care About

To understand what your representatives actually care about and where they stand on key issues, you need to look at **what they do, what they say**, and **with whom they align**. To help discern what is important to your representative, you can:

- **Examine their voting and broader legislative records**. Look for bills they sponsored (shows priorities); bills they co-sponsored (shows alliances); bills they voted for or against (shows positions); and patterns over time (consistency is more determinative than single votes). You can also look at hearings they participate in and amendments they offer. All of this information is valuable.
  - Congress.gov: Official Library of Congress database with bills Members sponsored, cosponsored, and voted on;
  - How Congress Votes App: Provides full voting history, participation rates, and plain English summaries of recent votes;
  - Gov Track: Historical voting data with ideology scores (from source list);
  - State legislature websites: Most states publish rollcall votes for state senators and representatives.
- **Read their public statements.** These reveal what issues are important to them, their values, and how they frame policy debates:
  - Review their profiles on the various websites above, including their own official public websites;

  - Review their remarks at Congress.gov, which publishes all remarks made in the Congressional record;
  - Check out other media and speaking opportunities. Representatives regularly publish:
    - Press releases;
    - Speeches;
    - Newsletters;
    - Floor statements;
    - Social media posts.
- **Review their website and social media**. Candidate and representative websites provide issue pages, policy priorities, press releases, and more.

***A note on local officials:** Local officials often have less media coverage, so use USA.gov for local government directories and city/county websites for media minutes, agendas, votes, ordinances, and public statements.*

- **Check endorsements and political values.** Endorsements show with whom they align and what values they prioritize, which can also be demonstrated through the interest groups they work with and their policy priorities. Resources include:
  - WeVote: Tracks endorsements and political values for federal and state candidates;
  - Ballotpedia: Lists endorsements, issue positions, and background; and
  - Vote Smart: Provides issue positions, ratings, and public statements (from source list).
- **Look at campaign finance data.** Money is not everything, but it often signals priorities and alliances. Look for industries or groups that donate to them; political action committees they rely on; and whether they receive support from immigration, labor, faith, or business groups, etc.
  - FEC.gov: Official federal campaign finance data; and
  - OpenSecrets.org; Tracks donors, political action committees (big fundraising groups), and spending.

All of this research helps you understand how your issue aligns with their interests—and how best to frame your message for maximum impact.

3. Identify Which Officials Hold Strategic Influence (Power Map!)
See section Step 3: Mapping Decision Makers and Influencers (Power Analysis) for more on targeting decision makers and influencers.

Some policymakers have more decision-making leverage and understanding that landscape is essential for effective advocacy. Power mapping helps you identify **who can actually move your issue**, who influences them, and where pressure points exist.

When assessing strategic influence, consider:

- **Committee Assignments:** Officials who sit on key committees often have outsized authority over specific policy areas. A single committee chair can accelerate, stall, or reshape an issue before it ever reaches a full vote.
- **Leadership Roles:** Leaders within legislative bodies or agencies—like chairs, ranking members, caucus leaders, directors, etc.—set agendas, control priorities, and influence what gets attention.
- **Tenure or Seniority:** Long-serving officials often have deeper relationships, stronger networks, and greater procedural knowledge. Seniority can translate into gatekeeping power or the ability to fast-track solutions.
- **Bipartisan Reputation:** Officials known for cross-party collaboration can be critical bridgebuilders. Their support can legitimize an issue, reduce polarization, and attract broader coalitions.
- **Influence Within Their Caucus or Agency:** Some individuals shape internal dynamics more than others and are relied on as trusted advisors, policy experts, or respected voices who can sway colleagues behind the scenes.

These factors help you identify **strategic targets**—the individuals most likely to move your issue forward. A strong power map shows not only *who* holds influence, but also *how* they wield it, who they listen to, and where your advocacy can have the greatest impact.

Engaging Policymakers

Direct advocacy can take many forms. The most common are **emails, phone calls, and meetings**. Each plays a unique role in influencing decision makers. Each can be an effective tool of advocacy when they stay on-message and are done strategically and respectfully.

Below are sample scripts to help you begin.

EMAILING POLICYMAKERS

Emails allow you to introduce your issue, share stories or data, and make a clear ask.

*Note: Global Refuge's Action Center has pre-drafted and ready-to-send emails available for the most pressing, time-sensitive issues we're covering. Check back regularly for the latest action alerts we've posted or sign up for our Advocates Network to receive these alerts directly to your inbox.

SAMPLE EMAIL SCRIPT

Subject: Support Needed for [Issue]: Strengthening Our Community's Welcome

Dear [Title + Last Name],

My name is [Name], and I am a constituent living in [City/Neighborhood/Zip Code]. I'm writing to urge you to support [specific issue or bill], which directly affects refugees and other immigrants in our community.

Families in our district are experiencing [brief description of the problem]. For example, [one short story or lived experience]. Addressing this issue would help ensure that newcomers can rebuild their lives with safety, dignity, and stability.

I respectfully ask that you:

[Primary ask: e.g., "Cosponsor Bill X," "Support funding for Y," "Issue a public statement," etc.]

This action aligns with our shared values of welcome, opportunity, and community prosperity. I would welcome the chance to speak further or provide additional information.

Thank you for your leadership and service.

Sincerely,

[Name]

[Address]

[Email] and [Phone]

CALLING POLICYMAKERS

Phone calls show urgency and allow offices to track constituent interest. Even if you are only able to leave a message, calling has a larger impact than an email.

SAMPLE CALL SCRIPT

Hello, my name is [Name], and I live in [City/Neighborhood]. I'm calling to ask [Representative/Senator/Official] to support [specific issue or bill].

This issue matters because [one sentence about the impact on immigrants or refugees]. Our community values welcome, dignity, and opportunity, and this action would help uphold those values.

My request today is that [Official's Name] [specific ask].

Thank you for taking my call.

MEETING WITH POLICYMAKERS

Meetings, either virtual or in-person, allow for deeper engagement and relationship building. Note that in-person meetings will have the largest impact, but virtual is still beneficial if the official you are meeting with is open to it (not all are!).

SAMPLE MEETING SCRIPT

Opening: Thank you for meeting with us today. We're constituents from [City/Neighborhood], and we're here because [issue] is affecting refugees and other immigrants in our community.

Story or lived experience: We'd like to share a brief example. [One person shares a short, specific story.]

Data or context: This experience reflects a broader trend. For example, [one or two key statistics].

The ask: We are asking you to:

[Primary ask] This action would make a meaningful difference in people's lives.

Closing: We appreciate your time and leadership. Can we count on you to take this step? We're happy to provide follow-up information or stay in touch as this moves forward.

Community Letters, Open Letters, and Petitions

Community letters, open letters, and petitions are powerful advocacy tools that allow everyday people to demonstrate broad support for an issue, articulate clear demands, and show policymakers that their constituents expect action. These tools help build consensus, elevate community voices, and create public accountability.

Below is guidance on how to craft each type of message, followed by a sample template you can adapt for your own advocacy efforts.

Community Letters

A **community letter** is a collective message written on behalf of a group such as a coalition, congregation, neighborhood association, or advocacy support group. It is typically sent directly to a policymaker or agency leader.

Community letters are useful when:

- You want to show organized support from a specific group;
- You want to demonstrate that multiple stakeholders share the same concern;
- You want to articulate a clear, unified ask.

How to Create a Community Letter:

- Identify the target (a person, not an institution);
- Explain who you are and why your group is speaking out;
- Describe the issue and its impact on refugees and other immigrants;
- State your specific asks, i.e. what you want the target to do;
- Invite follow-up and provide contact information;
- Include signatures from group members or leaders.

COMMUNITY LETTER TEMPLATE

[Date]

[Title + Full Name of Decision Maker or Target]

[Position] [Office / Agency / Organization]

[Address]

Dear [Title + Last Name],

Introduction & Who You Are: We, the undersigned [community members/organizations/faith leaders/service providers/residents] of [City/County/State], are writing to express our deep concern about [issue] and its impact on immigrant and refugee families in our

community. Our coalition represents [brief description: e.g., "local congregations, neighborhood associations, refugee leaders, educators, and service organizations"] committment to building a community rooted in welcome, dignity, and belonging.

Background & Context: In recent months, [describe the policy, event, or decision] has created significant challenges for families who are already navigating the complexities of resettlement and integration. [Provide 1–2 sentences of context or data.] This issue affects not only newcomers but also the broader community—schools, employers, faith communities, and local service providers.

Impact on Families & Community: The consequences of [issue] are already visible. Families are experiencing [describe impact: e.g., food insecurity, housing instability, barriers to work authorization, lack of language access]. For newly arrived refugees and other immigrants, these challenges compound the trauma of displacement and make it harder to rebuild their lives. When families struggle, the entire community feels the effects, including local businesses, classrooms, healthcare systems, and neighborhood networks.

Community Values & Shared Priorities: Our community has long upheld values of welcome, opportunity, safety, and shared prosperity. Supporting immigrant and refugee families aligns with these values and strengthens every sector of our civic life. We believe that addressing [issue] is not a partisan matter. It is a commitment to ensuring that all families have the chance to thrive.

Your Advocacy Asks: We respectfully urge you to take the following actions to address this issue (Note: The more specific and actionable your asks are, the more likely you'll have an impact):

- [Action Step #1]
- [Action Step #2]
- [Action Step #3]

These steps would provide meaningful relief to impacted families and reinforce our community's commitment to dignity and inclusion.

Stories & Community Voices (Optional): Attached/below, you will find [statements, stories, or testimonials] from residents directly affected by this issue. Their experiences illustrate the urgency of taking action.

Request for Response *(Always ask for a response and a meeting)*: We kindly request a formal response by [date]. We welcome the opportunity to meet with you, share additional information, or collaborate on solutions that reflect our shared values.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and for your continued service to our community.

Sincerely,

[Name]

[Title/Organization, if applicable]

[Contact Information]

On behalf of: [List of signatories, organizations, or community groups]

Open Letters

An **open letter** is written to a policymaker or public institution but published publicly—often on a website, social media, or in a local newspaper. Open letters help shape public opinion and demonstrate transparency.

Open letters are useful when:

- You want to raise public awareness;
- You want to show broad, cross community support;
- You want to encourage others to join your advocacy.

How to Create an Open Letter

- Address the target directly;
- Explain the issue clearly, using accessible language;
- Share stories or data that illustrate community impact;
- Make a clear, actionable request;
- Invite others to sign or endorse the letter;
- Publish the letter where your community will see it.

OPEN LETTER TEMPLATE

From the Residents, Community Leaders, and Organizations of [City/State]

[Headline / Social Media-Friendly Hook] Our community believes in welcome, dignity, and opportunity—and we're calling for action.

To [Title + Last Name],

Introduction: We are writing publicly as community members, faith leaders, educators, service providers, and directly impacted families who call [City/State] home. Our community is united in concern about [issue], which is creating urgent challenges for immigrant and refugee families who are working to rebuild their lives here.

In recent months, [brief description of the policy, event, or decision] has placed significant strain on families who already carry the weight of displacement, trauma, and transition. These impacts ripple across our entire community—affecting schools, workplaces, healthcare systems, and neighborhood networks.

This is not a partisan issue. It is a matter of shared values: safety, stability, opportunity, and belonging. Our community has long embraced newcomers, and we believe that addressing [issue] is essential to ensuring that every family can thrive.

Why This Matters to Your Community: Families are experiencing: [1–2 sentences describing the impact, for example: food insecurity, housing instability, barriers to work authorization, lack of language access, etc.]

Local institutions are feeling the strain: [Brief example: schools seeing increased need, employers facing workforce gaps, service providers overwhelmed, etc.]

Our shared values are at stake: Welcome, dignity, fairness, and community prosperity.

What You Are Asking Them to Do *(Remember, specific and actionable steps are key!)*: We respectfully urge you to take the following actions:

- [Action Step #1]
- [Action Step #2]
- [Action Step #3]

These steps would provide meaningful relief to impacted families and strengthen the resilience of our entire community.

Community Voices: Below are statements from residents directly affected by this issue:

"[Short quote from a community member or refugee leader]."

"[Short quote from a service provider or faith leader]."

These stories reflect the lived experiences behind the data—and the urgency of taking action.

Closing Commitment: We are committed to working collaboratively toward solutions that reflect our shared values. We invite you to meet with us, hear directly from impacted families, and join us in building a stronger, more welcoming community.

We respectfully request a public response by [Date].

Signed,

[Name]

[Title/Organization, if applicable]

[Contact Information]

On behalf of: [List of signatories, organizations, or community groups]

Petitions

A **petition** is an effective way to show mass support for an issue. It allows you to gather signatures from community members and present a unified demand to a policymaker. Petitions demonstrate that your issue is widely felt, and that constituents expect action.

Petitions are useful when:

- You want to show broad, quantifiable support;
- You want to mobilize people quickly;
- You want to give your target a clear action to take.

To collect signatures, you can use platforms like Change.org, ActionNetwork.org, or OpenPetition.org. Note that petitions are most helpful when you are able to mobilize a proportionately large number of constituent signatures and successfully deliver the petition directly to the policymaker.

How to Create a Petition

- Identify your target (e.g., a mayor or councilperson);
- Write a short introduction explaining who is signing and why;
- Describe the issue and its impact on families and communities;
- List specific actions you want the target to take;
- Set a deadline for response;
- Attach or link to signatures and any supporting statements.

SAMPLE PETITION TEMPLATE

Dear [Title + Name of Decision Maker or Target],

Introduction and Background: I'm writing on behalf of [number of signatures collected: e.g. "700 concerned residents"] across the city of [City Name]. [Brief intro to issue.]

Impact of the Issue: [Expand on issue]

Advocacy Asks *(specific and actionable!)*: We urge you to take action to:

- [Specific ask]
- [Specific ask]

We kindly request a formal response by [date]. You can reference the list of signatures and statements from residents here: [PDF or link].

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

[Name, Title]

Providing Written or Oral Testimony at Federal, State, or Local Hearings

Testifying at a public hearing is one of the most impactful ways community members can influence policy. Whether at the federal, state, or local level, hearings give advocates the chance to speak directly to lawmakers, share lived experience, and shape the public record. Written and oral testimony helps decision makers understand how policies affect real people—especially refugees and other immigrants whose voices are often underrepresented.

This section explains how hearings work, why testimony matters, and how to prepare strong written or oral testimony.

Why Testimony Matters

Testimony is powerful because it:

- **Puts lived experience on the record.** Lawmakers rely on real stories to understand the human impact of policy decisions;
- **Shapes debate.** Testimony can influence how legislators frame issues and what questions they ask;
- **Builds credibility.** When community members show up, they demonstrate that the issue is urgent and widely felt;
- **Creates accountability.** Testimony becomes part of the public record, showing lawmakers that constituents are paying attention;
- **Elevates directly impacted voices.** Refugees and other immigrants can speak to realities that data alone cannot capture.

Testimony is not partisan; it is a civic tool available to everyone.

Types of Testimony

1. Written Testimony

Written testimony is submitted in advance of or after a federal, state, or local hearing. It becomes part of the official record and is often shared with lawmakers and staff.

Written testimony is ideal when:

- You want to provide detailed information;
- You cannot attend the hearing in person;

- You want to include data, citations, or longer stories; and/or
- You are representing an organization or coalition.

2. Oral Testimony

Oral testimony is delivered live at a hearing, either in person or virtually. Time limits are usually strict (often 2–5 minutes).

Oral testimony is ideal when:

- You want to speak directly to lawmakers;
- You want to share a powerful story;
- You want to show visible community presence;
- You want to respond to questions or discussions.

Preparing Effective Testimony

Before preparing testimony, learn as much as you can about:

- The committee or body holding the hearing;
- The issue or bill being discussed;
- The purpose of the hearing (informational, oversight, legislative);
- The time limits for oral testimony;
- Submission deadlines for written testimony.

Identify:

- Who the decision makers are;
- What values they emphasize;
- What questions they may ask;
- How your story or expertise connects to their priorities.

Testimony Structure (Written or Oral)

- Introduction
  - Name, city, role (resident, service provider, refugee leader, etc.)
  - Why you care about the issue

- Context
  - Brief explanation of the issue or policy
  - Why the hearing matters
- Impact
  - Lived experience or community stories
  - Data or examples showing the consequences
- Values
  - Shared values that pertain to the issue, like safety, dignity, opportunity, belonging
- Specific Asks
  - What you want lawmakers to do (support a bill, amend a policy, increase funding, etc.)
- Closing
  - Thanks to the committee
- Offer to provide follow-up information

****Keep it clear, brief (time limits are strictly held!), values-based, and jargon-free.*

Planning or Participating in a Town Hall

Town halls are one of the most accessible and effective ways for community members to engage directly with people in power. They create space for two-way dialogue, allow constituents to raise concerns publicly, and help elected officials hear directly from the communities they serve—including refugees and other immigrants whose voices are often underrepresented.

Town halls can be organized by:

- Elected officials;
- Churches or faith communities;
- Local organizations;
- Advocacy groups;
- Coalitions or interfaith networks.

They may feature federal, state, or local representatives as the main guests. While organizers may set broad themes, town halls generally function as **open forums**, giving community members the chance to ask questions, share experiences, and propose solutions.

Organizing a Town Hall Meeting

Organizing a town hall is a powerful way to bring community voices together and create public accountability. Below are the key steps for planning a successful event.

Work in coalition with local nonprofits, interfaith groups, refugee- and immigrant-led organizations, neighborhood associations, and service providers. Coalitions increase turnout, broaden representation, and demonstrate unified community concern.

Send a Formal Invitation to the Target Elected Official. Your invitation should:

- Clearly state the purpose of the town hall;
- Identify the issue(s) you want to discuss;
- Explain why their participation matters;
- Include logistical details (date, time, location, format);
- Offer opportunities for them to speak and respond to questions.

A sample invitation letter is included below.

Choose an Accessible Venue

Town halls are typically held in:

- Churches;
- Community centers;
- Libraries;
- School auditoriums;
- Union halls.

Choose a space that is centrally located, ADA accessible, reachable by public transit, and safe and welcoming to refugee and other immigrant families.

Create a Registration Link and Promotional Materials

To ensure strong turnout:

- Create a simple registration form;
- Design a flyer or graphic;
- Share widely through email, social media, WhatsApp groups, and partner networks;
- Provide interpretation, disability accommodations, and childcare options if available.

Clear communication helps build trust and encourages participation.

Prepare Topics and Guiding Questions

Even in an open forum, it helps to prepare:

- Key themes;
- Priority questions;
- Stories or data points;
- Community concerns;
- Specific asks for the elected official.

These guide the conversation and ensure the event stays focused on community needs.

SAMPLE INVITATION LETTER TO AN ELECTED OFFICIAL

[Date]

[Title + Full Name]

[Office / Position]

[Address]

Dear [Title + Last Name],

On behalf of [organization/coalition name], we would like to invite you to participate in a community town hall focused on [issue or topic] and its impact on families across [City/County/State]. Our community includes [relevant community members, i.e. residents, faith leaders, service providers, and/or directly impacted refugees and other immigrants] who are eager to engage in constructive dialogue about shared challenges and solutions.

The town hall will take place on: Date: [Insert date] Time: [Insert time] Location: [Insert venue] Format: [Brief description—open forum, moderated Q&A, etc.]

We believe your participation is essential to helping our community understand current policy efforts, ask questions, and explore collaborative solutions rooted in our shared values of welcome, dignity, and opportunity.

We hope you will join us for this important conversation. Please confirm your availability by [RSVP date]. We would be happy to provide additional details or accommodate any logistical needs.

Thank you for your service and leadership.

Sincerely,

[Name]

[Title/Organization]

[Contact Information]

Attending a Town Hall Meeting

Participating in a town hall, whether as an individual or part of a group, is a meaningful way to elevate community concerns and influence decision makers.

Craft a List of Concerns and Questions. Clear questions help ensure your voice is heard. Before attending, write down:

- The issues you want to raise;
- How those issues affect refugee and other immigrant families;
- Any relevant stories or examples;
- Specific questions for the elected official.

Center Your Questions in Lived Experience. Lived experience is often more persuasive than abstract arguments. Ground your comments in:

- Your own experiences;
- Stories from your community;
- Challenges faced by newcomers;
- Impacts on local schools, workplaces, or service providers.

Propose Specific Solutions and Actions. Specific asks help move the conversation toward action. Town halls are most effective when participants offer:

- Concrete policy ideas;
- Specific actions the official can take;
- Programs that need support;
- Partnerships that could be strengthened.

EXAMPLES:

- "Will you support expanding language access services in our city?"
- "Can your office help strengthen coordination with local refugee resettlement agencies?"
- "Will you commit to meeting with community leaders to discuss food insecurity among newcomer families?"

Sample Questions for Grassroots Advocates

These questions help guide meaningful dialogue and encourage elected officials to respond with clarity and commitment. They can be adapted for federal, state, or local town halls.

- **Values & Vision**
  - How does your office plan to support immigrant and refugee families in our community?
  - What values guide your decision-making on issues affecting newcomers?
  - How do you see immigrant and refugee integration contributing to our city's long-term prosperity?
- **Policy & Programs**
  - What steps will you take to expand language access across public services?
  - How is your office addressing barriers to work authorization or employment for newcomers?
  - What actions can you take to strengthen coordination with local resettlement agencies?
- **Community Impact**
  - What are you doing to address food insecurity among newly arrived families?
  - How will you support schools that serve growing numbers of multilingual learners?
  - What investments can be made to improve access to housing for refugee and immigrant families?
- **Accountability & Follow-up**
  - Will you commit to meeting with community leaders to discuss this issue further?
  - Can you provide a timeline for when we can expect action on this matter?
  - How will you ensure transparency and communication with constituents as this issue moves forward?
- **Consensus Building**
  - How can we work together across political differences to support immigrant and refugee families?
  - What opportunities do you see for bipartisan collaboration on this issue?
  - How can community members help you advance solutions that reflect shared values?

Harnessing the Power of Social Media in Direct Advocacy

Social media is one of the most effective tools for direct advocacy. It allows constituents to communicate publicly with elected officials, amplify community concerns, and build momentum behind specific policy actions. When used strategically, social media can strengthen accountability, elevate refugee and other immigrant voices, and help advocates reach audiences far beyond traditional channels.

Platforms like Twitter/X, Instagram, BlueSky, LinkedIn, Facebook, and TikTok make it possible to connect with policymakers in real time. Many elected officials and their staff actively monitor mentions, tags, and public posts to understand constituent priorities and gauge public sentiment.

Why Social Media Matters in Advocacy

Public Visibility. Public visibility increases pressure and encourages responsiveness. Social media posts are public, which means:

- Policymakers see community concerns directly;
- Other constituents can join the conversation;
- Journalists and partners can amplify your message.

Accountability. Tagging an elected official creates a public record, helping to build long-term accountability and encouraging follow-up on:

- What you asked;
- When you asked;
- How they responded.

Relationship Building. Social media is a modern form of civic dialogue. Thoughtful, values-driven posts can:

- Show appreciation for positive actions;
- Open doors for future engagement;
- Demonstrate that your community is paying attention.

Amplification. Amplification builds momentum behind your advocacy goals. Posts can be shared widely, allowing:

- Coalitions to coordinate messaging;
- Community members to add their voices;
- Stories and lived experiences to reach broader audiences.

How to Make an Effective Social Media Advocacy Post

Find the Representative's Handle. Accurate tagging ensures your message reaches the right audience. Before posting, confirm:

- The correct spelling of their name;
- Their official account*;
- Whether they use separate personal and official handles.

**Note: elected officials sometimes have multiple social media accounts—in some cases, politicians running for reelection may have a separate account designated for campaigning. Make sure to tag their official account.*

Decide the Purpose of Your Message. Gratitude builds relationships. Calls to action build accountability. Your post should either:

- Thank them for an action they took;
- Urge them to take a specific action.

Keep It Brief. Short posts are more likely to be read and shared, and many platforms have character limits. Aim for:

- One sentence of context;
- One sentence of impact;
- One clear ask.

Highlight Strategic, Measurable Actions. Avoid vague or overly broad requests. Emphasize:

- Specific actions they can take;
- Actions they have already taken;
- Actions that align with shared community values.

SAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS FOR ADVOCACY

Gratitude Post
Example: Thank you @RepSmith for supporting expanded language access services in our district. This action strengthens welcome and opportunity for immigrant and refugee families across our community.

Call to Action
Example: @SenJones, families in our city are facing rising food insecurity. Please support funding for local food incentive programs so newcomers can rebuild their lives with dignity and stability.

Community Impact Post
Example: Newcomer families in [City] are struggling to access affordable housing. @MayorLee, we urge you to expand partnerships with local housing providers to ensure every family has a safe place to call home.

Coalition Post
Example: Our coalition of faith leaders, service providers, and residents is calling on @CouncilMemberGarcia to support universal free school lunch. Every child deserves access to healthy meals.

Tips for Effective Social Media Advocacy

- Use values-driven language like welcome, dignity, opportunity, and belonging;
- Avoid partisan framing and focus on community needs and shared priorities;
- Include visuals like graphics, photos, or short videos to increase engagement;
- Coordinate posts and encourage partners to share or repost;
- Follow up if the official responds, continuing the dialogue respectfully;
- Stay constructive, as tone matters, especially in public forums.

When used strategically, social media becomes a powerful extension of your direct advocacy, helping you elevate refugee and other immigrant voices, mobilize supporters, and advance solutions rooted in shared values.

A Note on the Importance of Moving Beyond Partisanship to Find Solutions for Impacted Families and Communities

In today's political environment, immigration and refugee issues are often framed through a partisan lens—even when the real-world needs of families and communities are not partisan at all. When debates become polarized, the people most affected by policy decisions—i.e. newcomers seeking safety, longtime residents building community, and local service providers working to support them—are left without meaningful solutions.

That is why **moving beyond partisanship is essential**. Effective advocacy requires us to focus on shared values rather than political divides. Most people, regardless of party, want their communities to be safe, stable, and thriving. They want families to have opportunities, children to be protected, and newcomers to contribute to the strength of the nation. These are not partisan goals—they are widely held American values.

Consensus building is not about ignoring differences. It is about identifying the values and priorities that people already share and using them as the foundation for collaborative problemsolving. When advocates build consensus:

- **Solutions become more durable.** Policies supported across political lines are more likely to last and less likely to be reversed with changes in leadership;
- **Communities gain stability.** Refugees and other immigrants benefit from consistent pathways, predictable systems, and reliable protections;
- **Policymakers feel safer taking action.** When they see broad support, they are more willing to champion solutions;
- **Polarization decreases.** Advocacy rooted in shared values helps reduce fear, misinformation, and division;
- **Directly impacted voices are elevated.** Consensus creates space for lived experience to guide policy rather than partisan talking points.

Consensus building is especially important in immigration and refugee advocacy because these issues touch every sector of American life—the workforce, education, faith communities, local economies, and neighborhood stability. When advocates show how solutions benefit everyone, they help policymakers see the issue as a community priority rather than a partisan battleground.

How Advocates Can Build Consensus

To move beyond partisanship, advocates can:

- **Lead with values** like safety, dignity, opportunity, and family stability;
- **Highlight shared interests** such as economic growth, workforce needs, and community resilience;
- **Use lived experience** to humanize issues and reduce political defensiveness;
- **Engage leaders across the political spectrum**, not just those who already agree;
- **Frame solutions as practical, community-driven improvements**, not ideological victories;
- **Emphasize long-term benefits** for local families, businesses, and institutions;
- **Avoid partisan language**, focusing instead on what strengthens communities.

Consensus building does not mean compromising your values. It means **rooting your advocacy in values that resonate widely**, making it easier for people with different political perspectives to join you in supporting refugee and other immigrant communities.

Consensus building is both a strategy and a commitment to ensuring that **every community member, regardless of background or political affiliation, can thrive.**

Engaging Policymakers Who Oppose or Question Your Position

Talking to opposition can be challenging, but it is essential. Here are several strategies for productive engagement:

- Have a clear list of requests;
- Find common ground;
- Bring key statistics and data;
- Use constituent voices;
- Share specific stories;
- Voice concerns calmly and clearly;
- Emphasize accountability when appropriate;
- Treat every interaction as a relationship-building opportunity.

These approaches help you build credibility, reduce tension, and open pathways for future collaboration.

Following Up and Building Long-Term Relationships

Direct advocacy is not a one-time action. Sustained engagement builds trust, credibility, and influence. Long-term relationships make future campaigns easier and more effective.

After each interaction:

- Send a thank you email;
- Restate your ask;
- Provide additional information if requested;
- Share updates on community impact;
- Maintain communication for future advocacy.

EXAMPLE THANK YOU EMAIL

Dear [Name],

Thank you so much for meeting with [name of group of individuals]. We are very grateful for your time and for all the leadership shown by [title and name of individual] and your entire team in support of refugees and immigrants.

We appreciated the conversation around [specific issue] and [other related issue]. [Reiterate specific ask].

I am cc'ing all those who joined us in the meeting to facilitate direct follow-ups if helpful. We hope [name of group or individuals] can continue to serve as a resource to you through our insights as those with lived experience as [refugees and other immigrants, practitioners, faith leaders, community members, and/or advocates].

[If applicable - I've attached/ linked the materials you requested]. Please let me know if you have any questions and thank you again for your work! We look forward to staying in touch.

Kind regards,

[Name]

[Contact information]

Education and Awareness-Raising

Mobilizing Your Friends, Family, and Community

Grassroots advocacy is most powerful when it's done in community. Mobilizing your friends, family, coworkers, faith networks, and neighbors through education and awareness-raising strengthens relationships, builds shared purpose, and creates momentum behind the values of welcome, dignity, and belonging. People are far more likely to take action when invited personally by someone they trust.

Mobilizing others doesn't require formal training or a large platform. It requires clarity, authenticity, and a willingness to invite people into something meaningful.

Below are practical steps to help you activate your personal networks and build a community of advocates alongside you.

Start With Your "Why"

People respond to passion and authenticity. Your "why" helps others find their own.

SHARE:

- Why this issue matters to you;
- How it connects to your values;
- How it affects your community;
- What moved you to take action.

Make the Invitation Personal

A direct, personal invitation is far more effective than a general announcement. People say yes when they feel seen and included.

TRY:

- Texting a friend;
- Calling a family member;
- Sharing in a group chat;
- Speaking during a faith or community gathering;
- Use language like: "I'm taking action on this issue because it matters deeply to me. Would you join me?"

Keep the First Step Simple

Give people one clear, easy action. Small steps build confidence and momentum.

EXAMPLES INCLUDE:

- Signing a petition;
- Sending an email to a representative;
- Attending a town hall;
- Sharing a social media post;
- Joining a small advocacy support group.

Provide Tools and Guidance

Most people don't take action because they don't know how. When you remove barriers, people step forward.

OFFER:

- Sample scripts;
- Templates;
- Talking points;
- Links to action alerts;
- Step-by-step instructions.

Connect Advocacy to Shared Values
Mobilization is strongest when rooted in values your community already holds, such as:

- Welcome;
- Dignity;
- Safety;
- Opportunity;
- Fairness;
- Belonging.

Frame advocacy as an extension of these values, not a political debate.

Create a Supportive Group Culture
People stay engaged when advocacy feels relational and meaningful. This is how advocacy becomes a community practice, not a onetime action.

BUILD A CULTURE OF:

- Encouragement;
- Shared learning;
- Celebration of wins;
- Accountability;
- Storytelling.

Offer Multiple Ways to Participate
Not everyone will feel comfortable doing the same thing. Meeting people where they are increases participation.

PROVIDE OPTIONS LIKE:

- Writing letters;
- Attending events;
- Sharing stories;
- Making calls;
- Posting on social media;
- Volunteering;
- Hosting small gatherings.

Make Advocacy Social
Turn advocacy into something people want to be part of. People show up when advocacy feels communal.

HERE ARE SOME IDEAS FOR ENGAGEMENT:

- Host a letter writing night;
- Organize a community dinner with an advocacy moment;
- Gather friends for a "call your representative" hour;
- Create a WhatsApp group for quick mobilization;
- Plan a group visit to a town hall or hearing.

Celebrate Every Action
Celebration builds confidence and keeps people engaged. Acknowledge and celebrate:

- First-time advocates;
- Small wins;
- Collective efforts;
- Stories shared;
- Actions taken.

Keep the Momentum Going
Mobilization is not a one-time effort. Consistency builds a movement. Sustain engagement by:

- Sending updates;
- Sharing new actions;
- Inviting people to future events;
- Highlighting progress;
- Reminding people of the impact they're making.

SAMPLE MESSAGES YOU CAN USE TO MOBILIZE OTHERS

Text Message
Example: Hey! I'm taking action on an issue that really matters to me: supporting immigrant and refugee families in our community. Would you join me in sending a quick email to our representative? It only takes 2 minutes, and I can send you the script.

Group Chat Message
Example: Friends, I'm organizing a small advocacy group to help strengthen welcome and dignity in our city. We're starting with a petition and a town hall next week. Want to be part of it?

Faith or Community Announcement
Example: Our values call us to welcome the stranger and care for our neighbors. We're forming a small group to take action on policies affecting immigrant and refugee families. All are welcome to join.

Other High Impact/Easy to Faciliate Suggestions

JOIN GLOBAL REFUGE'S FAITH ALLIANCE

Global Refuge is proud to offer a training for communities of faith who seek to safely welcome and embrace refugees and other immigrants. The training walks participating communities through four video modules: Welcome in the Bible, Immigration 101, Immigrant Voices and Indicators of Safe Welcome. Each module is accompanied by a discussion guide and recommended readings. At the conclusion of these four modules, participants gather together for a Covenant Retreat in which the community commits to three action items for the coming year.

Congregations that complete the Faith Alliance safe welcome training will come away with an understanding of their place in the work of welcome as people of faith and tangible next steps, as well as a media kit that officially recognizes their membership in the Faith Alliance.

Learn more here: https://www.globalrefuge.org/faith-alliance/.

HOST A FILM SCREENING

A film screening is a powerful way to raise awareness and start conversations about the root causes of displacement and the lived experiences of refugees and other immigrants. Here's how to get started.

Pick a venue. Choose an accessible, welcoming space. Options include:

- Local churches;
- Library meeting rooms (often free or low-cost);
- Community centers;
- Your living room!

Invite your community. Reach out to:

- Friends and family;
- Faith communities;
- Neighborhood groups;
- Local nonprofits.

Make a flyer or invitation. A simple digital flyer with basic event details is enough. Share it widely.

Share it. Posting on Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp groups, or community calendars helps broaden your reach. Or just send texts to friends and family!

Pick an impactful movie. Choose a film that uplifts refugee and immigrant stories. See movie recommendations here: https://www.globalrefuge.org/movies-about-immigrants-refugees/.

Reserve time for conversation. Host a short panel or guided discussion afterward to help attendees process what they learned.

ORGANIZE A PRAYER CIRCLE OR VIGIL

Prayer circles can be deeply grounding spaces for empathy, reflection, and justice-driven action. Many faith traditions emphasize prayer as a bridge toward compassion and community care.

Create your invitation list. Invite friends, family, congregants, and broader community members.

Pick a format. If safety or accessibility is a concern, meet virtually. In person venues could include:

- Churches;
- Coffee shop meeting rooms;
- Library meeting rooms.

Establish a follow-up plan. Create a WhatsApp group to stay connected and plan future gatherings.

Establish prompts. Provide prayer prompts or themes, such as:

- Safety for families fleeing conflict;
- Strength for newcomers navigating resettlement;
- Compassion for policymakers making difficult decisions.

More suggestions are available in Global Refuge's *Vigil for the Taken*, which provides a prayer service honoring those who were detained or deported.

View here: https://www.globalrefuge.org/vigil-for-taken/

HOST COFFEE OR LUNCH CHAT CONVERSATIONS

Coffee chats create informal, low-pressure spaces for people to learn, share, and build trust.

Create a small group: Invite 3–6 community members to a local coffee shop.

Set a casual atmosphere: Use an icebreaker to help people feel comfortable.

Create guiding questions: Bring a few questions to spark conversation. These can change each meeting.

Stay connected: Set up a group on Signal or WhatsApp to keep the momentum going.

START A BOOK CLUB

Book clubs help people engage deeply with immigrant and refugee stories while building community.

Choose an eyecatching name: A clever name draws interest.

Set up a WhatsApp group: Share the link with friends, family, or on social media. Use polls to choose meeting times or books.

Choose a book: Pick one that highlights immigrant and refugee experiences. For recommendations: https://www.globalrefuge.org/books-about-immigration/

Create guiding questions: Craft questions that connect the book's themes to current sociopolitical realities. Leave space for members to add their own questions.

How to Talk to Your Friends, Family & Neighbors About Immigration and Refugee Issues

Conversations with people you care about can be some of the most meaningful—and most challenging—forms of advocacy. These discussions help build understanding, reduce polarization, and strengthen community support for refugees and other immigrants. The goal is not to "win" an argument, but to foster trust, curiosity, and shared values.

This section offers practical guidance for having constructive, respectful conversations rooted in dignity, empathy, and accurate information.

Clarify Your Conversation Goals

Before you begin, ask yourself:

- Are you trying to understand their perspective?
- Are you hoping to share your own experiences?
- Are you trying to change their mind or simply open the door to future conversations?

If this is your first conversation, focus on **mutual understanding**, not persuasion. Changes in opinion happen gradually when people feel safe, respected, and not defensive.

Start With Shared Values
Shared values create common ground and reduce tension. Your personal reasons for supporting refugees and other immigrants may not resonate the same way with your audience. Instead, begin with values you both hold, such as:

- Family;
- Fairness;
- Safety;
- Opportunity;
- Compassion.

Avoid Assumptions About Morality or Intent
Do not assume someone is less kind, less moral, or less informed because they disagree with you. Respecting their humanity makes space for genuine dialogue. Most people's views are shaped by:

- Personal experiences;
- Family history;
- Media exposure;
- Community norms.

Know the Facts
Accurate information prevents misinformation from spreading. For reliable and up-to-date information, check out:

- Global Refuge's Disinformation Hub
- Global Refuge's Advocacy Priorities
- Global Refuge's Blog (stories, policy explainers, and lived experience)

Engage Genuinely and Respectfully
Use open, welcoming body language, including:

- Eye contact;
- Uncrossed arms;
- Facing the person you're speaking with.

Ask questions to show you're listening:

- "Can you tell me more about how you see this?"
- "What experiences shaped your perspective?"

Avoid polarizing language or personal attacks. Remember: this is someone who matters to you.

Create a Safe Space for Listening
Let your conversation partner fully express their ideas without interruption. Then summarize what you heard:

- "What I'm hearing is..."
- "It sounds like you're concerned about..."

Affirming understanding builds trust even when you disagree.

Address Challenging Questions Calmly
If a question feels misrepresentative or uncomfortable:

- Stay grounded;
- Avoid defensiveness;
- Acknowledge the question;
- Answer honestly.

It is always okay to say:

- "I'm not sure."
- "I need to look that up."
- "Let me think about that."

Humility strengthens credibility.

Share Your Perspective Without Triggering Defensiveness
When offering a contrasting view, avoid "but", which can feel dismissive.

TRY:

- "I also think..."
- "The way I see it..."
- "From my experience..."

This keeps the conversation collaborative rather than adversarial.

Use Human Stories, Not Just Facts
Stories humanize issues. Facts alone can feel combative or abstract.

SHARE:

- Personal experiences;
- Community stories;
- Moments that shaped your understanding.

Use relatable language. Most Americans have a family immigration story, and this can be a powerful connection point. Avoid framing the conversation as "immigrants vs. Americans." Instead, emphasize that we are **one community**, with families who arrived at different times.

*Note: Prioritize respect when sharing an individual's stories, photos, or videos. Avoid unnecessary victimization and ensure their privacy is protected.

Step Back When Needed
If the conversation becomes heated or unproductive:

- Pause;
- Thank your conversation partner;
- Be firm about ending the discussion;
- Revisit the topic later if appropriate.

Your relationship and your physical and psychological safety matter more than winning a debate. If you feel able to, continue connecting with your friends, family, and neighbors afterward. Let them know you value them even when you disagree.

Invite Them into Advocacy
If they're open to learning more or taking action, you can say:

"If you ever want to learn more or get involved, Global Refuge has great resources, webinars, and updates."

Encourage them to sign up for Global Refuge's Advocates Network for updates, events, tools, and opportunities to take action.

Narrative and Communications Tactics: Shifting Public Opinion and Discourse

Letters to the editor (LTEs), op-eds, and blogs are powerful tools for shaping public conversation, influencing policymakers, and elevating community voices. They serve different purposes and are used strategically depending on your goal. Understanding the difference between these tools helps advocates choose the right format to advance immigrant and refugee issues effectively.

Letters to the Editor (LTEs)

Best for: Responding quickly, reacting to news, showing broad public sentiment, and demonstrating constituent engagement. LTEs are one of the most accessible ways for everyday people to influence public debate. Importantly, many policymakers and their staff monitor LTEs closely.

LTEs are short (150–250 words) responses submitted to a newspaper's editorial section. They often react to:

- A recent article;
- Breaking news;
- A public statement by an elected official;
- A policy decision;
- A community event.

Write an LTE when you want to respond quickly to something in the news, correct misinformation or add missing context, show policymakers that constituents are paying attention, highlight lived experience connected to a recent story, amplify a specific ask tied to current events, or demonstrate community consensus (multiple LTEs can be coordinated).

LTE Writing Checklist: Steps to Strengthen Your Message

- Keep it as short as possible. Stay within 250 words. This will increase the likelihood of your LTE being published.
- Reference the original article early. Use your opening paragraph to reference the article you are responding to.
- Go straight into the main idea. Because space is limited, you should always get straight to the main point you want to cover.

- Support your claims. Add any statistics, facts, or historical evidence that will strengthen your response.
- Offer solutions if applicable. If you have suggestions on how an issue or problem can be solved, state them.
- Reveal relevant parts of your identity. If you have a professional or personal role that bolsters your credibility, disclose it. Note that you will also be asked to provide your name and contact details to verify your identity.

SAMPLE LETTER TO THE EDITOR (LTE) TEMPLATE

[Your Name] [City, State] [Date]

To the Editor:

I am writing in response to your recent article, "[Article Title]", which highlighted [issue] affecting families in our community. As a resident of [City], I see firsthand how this issue impacts immigrant and refugee neighbors who are working hard to rebuild their lives.

[One sentence of lived experience or community impact.] This perspective is often missing from public conversations, yet it is essential to understanding the full picture.

We have an opportunity to strengthen our community by [specific action or solution]. I urge our local leaders to prioritize policies that reflect our shared values of welcome, dignity, and opportunity.

Thank you for covering this important issue.

Sincerely,

[Name]

Op-Eds

Best for: Shaping narrative, providing expert insight, elevating lived experience, and advancing a proactive policy vision.

Op-eds are longer opinion essays (600–800 words) written by community leaders, experts, advocates, or directly impacted individuals. They allow you to:

- Explain an issue in depth;
- Share a compelling story;
- Present data or research;
- Outline a clear policy solution;
- Shape how the public understands an issue.

Op-eds allow deeper storytelling and analysis, position the writer as a credible voice, influence how journalists and policymakers frame issues, and can spark broader media coverage or community dialogue.

Op-Ed Writing Checklist: Steps to Strengthen Your Message

- Before writing, reflect on your "Why." Think of the experiences that make you passionate about this topic.
- Be direct. Decide what key takeaway you want your audience to have;
- Tell at least one relevant personal story. As humans, stories compel us to act. To catch the reader's attention, share any specific events or moments that shaped your thoughts and views.
- Dive into what's at stake. Why should people care? Describe the vision you have for your community and why cultivating communities rooted in welcome is of supreme importance. Elaborate on what we risk when we refuse to uphold these values.
- Debunk misinformation. Think about what people usually get wrong about refugees and other immigrants. Discuss how they enrich our communities or the systemic barriers that they often navigate.
- Have an ask ready. Plan out any direct action that you would like the reader to take. Some options include attending a planned rally, sharing their own story, volunteering, signing on to a petition, or donating in support of refugees and other immigrants.
- Keep it short. For an oped, stay within 600–800 words.

SAMPLE OP-ED TEMPLATE

Headline: A Community Built on Welcome: Why [Issue] Demands Action Now

By [Name], [Title/Organization, if applicable]

Across [City/State], immigrant and refugee families are working every day to build stability, contribute to our local economy, and strengthen the fabric of our community. Yet [issue] threatens to undermine that progress and create barriers that affect all of us—schools, employers, faith communities, and service providers.

Paragraph 1: Introduce the issue and why it matters now. [Explain the current moment, the policy context, or the recent event that makes this issue urgent.]

Paragraph 2: Share a story or lived experience. [Highlight a specific example that illustrates the human impact. Stories make policy real.]

Paragraph 3: Provide data or broader context. [Include one or two key statistics that reinforce the scale or significance of the issue.]

Paragraph 4: Explain the stakes. [Describe how the issue affects the broader community—not just refugees and other immigrants.]

Paragraph 5: Offer a clear solution. [Outline the specific action(s) policymakers should take. Be concrete and actionable.]

Paragraph 6: Connect to shared values. [Frame the solution in terms of welcome, dignity, opportunity, prosperity, or belonging.]

Conclusion: We have a choice: allow [issue] to continue harming families, or take meaningful steps to build a stronger, more resilient community. By acting now, we honor our values and ensure that every family—regardless of where they come from—has the chance to thrive.

Blogs

Blogs are one of the most flexible and accessible tools for advocacy. They allow you to explain an issue in depth, share personal or community stories, highlight emerging challenges, and connect values to action without the space limitations of LTEs or the editorial gatekeeping of op-eds. Blogs are especially useful for grassroots groups, faith communities, and organizations that want to build sustained engagement.

Blogs are ideal when you want to:

- Educate your audience about a complex issue;
- Connect values to policy in a clear, accessible way;
- Share personal or community stories that deepen empathy;
- Respond to emerging events without waiting for publication approval;
- Mobilize supporters with clear next steps;
- Highlight organizational work or community leadership;
- Provide context that doesn't fit into an LTE or oped.

How to Structure an Effective Advocacy Blog

Start With a Strong Hook. Open with a compelling moment, question, or value. Examples:

- "Every family deserves safety and stability—yet today, too many newcomers face barriers that threaten both."
- "Our community is at a crossroads, and the choices we make now will shape who we become."

Lead With Values. Ground the blog in shared values such as welcome, dignity, justice, compassion, and belonging. Values help readers connect emotionally before diving into policy.

Explain the Issue Clearly. Break down the problem in plain, accessible language without jargon:

- What's happening?
- Who is affected?
- Why does it matter?

Share a Story or Example. Stories humanize issues and deepen empathy. You can share:

- Personal experiences;
- Community stories (with consent);
- Moments from your work;
- Examples from local events.

Provide Context or Analysis. Blogs allow you to:

- Explain root causes;
- Connect local issues to national trends;
- Highlight data or research;
- Debunk misinformation.

Offer a Solution. Be clear about what needs to change:

- Policy action;
- Community support;
- Organizational priorities;
- Values based commitments.

End With a Call to Action. Advocacy blogs should always end with a next step. Invite readers to:

- Attend an event;
- Contact a representative;
- Sign up for a newsletter;
- Share the blog;
- Join a support group.

Tips for Writing Strong Blogs

- Keep paragraphs short and scannable;
- Use subheadings to guide readers;
- Include links to resources or action steps;
- Use a warm, accessible tone;
- Avoid overly technical language;
- Stay grounded in values and community;
- Make the action step clear and easy.

SAMPLE BLOG TEMPLATE

Title: A clear, values-rooted headline (e.g., “Building a Community Where Every Family Belongs”)

Opening Hook: A compelling moment, question, or value.

Values Statement: Ground the issue in welcome, dignity, justice, belonging.

Issue Overview: Explain what's happening and why it matters.

Story or Example: Share a personal or community story (with consent).

Context or Analysis: Provide background, data, or policy explanation.

Solution: Describe what needs to change.

Call to Action: Invite readers to take a specific step.

View a sample Global Refuge blog here.

Public Mobilization Tactics for Grassroots

**Note that some of the below is discussed in greater detail in other sections, as there is a lot of overlap between some of the tactics.*

Public mobilization is about **visibility, solidarity, and values**. Whether you organize a march, rally, vigil, press event, or creative action, each tactic helps build momentum and demonstrate that your community is committed to welcome, dignity, justice, and belonging.

It signals to policymakers, media, and the broader community that people are paying attention and expect action.

Marches and Rallies

Marches and rallies are some of the most visible forms of public mobilization. They demonstrate collective power, build solidarity, and show policymakers that people are paying attention. A well-planned march or rally is safe, accessible, values-rooted, and strategically designed to elevate your issue.

Define the Purpose and Message

A march or rally should have a clear, unified purpose. Keep messaging simple, values rooted, and easy to chant or display on signs. Before planning, answer:

- What are we marching for?
- What values anchor this action?
- What is the core message we want people to see and hear?
- What is the call to action at the end?

Choose a Meaningful Route or Location for the Rally

Your route should reinforce your message.

CONSIDER:

- Symbolic locations (city hall, courthouse, state capitol building);
- Neighborhoods connected to your issue;
- Places where policymakers will see or hear you;
- Accessibility (sidewalks, transit access, restrooms).

Plan the route and logistics, including:

- Start point;
- End point;
- Length (1–2 miles is typical);
- Rest stops if needed.

Secure Permits (If Required)

Check local requirements early, as many permitting authorities require applications to be submitted months in advance. Permits help ensure safety and coordination with police or city agencies. Many cities require permits for:

- Large gatherings;
- Amplified sound;
- Street closures;
- Marches that move through intersections.

Holding an event without a permit can result in unwelcome consequences, including arrest. Be sure to check your local regulations.

Build a Volunteer Team

Train volunteers in advance. A march needs a coordinated team to run smoothly.

KEY ROLES:

- Marshals: guide the crowd, maintain pace, support safety;
- Accessibility leads: ensure accommodations and support;
- Communications team: coordinate signage, chants, social media;
- Logistics team: provide water, supplies, first aid;
- De-escalation team: manage tense moments with formal training;
- Press team: greet reporters, distribute press packets;
- Sound team: operate sound system.

Prioritize Safety and Accessibility

Share safety guidelines before the event. Safety is essential for public mobilization.

PLAN FOR:

- Water stations;
- Shade or rest areas;
- First aid kits;
- Accessible routes for wheelchairs, strollers, and mobility aids;
- Interpreters (ASL, language interpretation);
- Emotional support volunteers if the march centers trauma or loss.

Prepare Visuals and Messaging

Marches are powerful because they are visible.

CREATE:

- Signs;
- Banners;
- Values-rooted messaging;
- Coordinated colors or themes (t-shirts, buttons, bags, etc.);
- Chants that reinforce your message;
- Flyers or QR codes linking to action steps.

Encourage participants to bring their own signs too!

Engage Media

Media coverage amplifies your message beyond the march itself.

BEFORE THE MARCH:

- Send a media advisory;
- Prepare a press packet;
- Identify spokespeople;
- Craft short, values-rooted talking points.

DURING THE MARCH:

- Designate a press area;
- Have spokespeople available for interviews;
- Share photos and videos in real time (if safe to do so for participants).

Plan the Program at the Start or End Point

Most marches end (or start) with a rally, vigil, or call to action. Keep the program tight—20–30 minutes is ideal.

INCLUDE:

- Short, powerful speeches;
- Lived experience voices (with consent);
- Values rooted framing;
- A clear next step (petition, meeting, training, or action alert).

Provide Clear Instructions to Participants
Clarity builds trust and increases turnout. Before the march, share:

- Route map;
- Start and end times;
- Safety guidelines;
- Accessibility information;
- What to bring (water, signs, comfortable shoes);
- How to stay connected afterward;

Follow Up After the March
Momentum matters. After the march:

- Send a thank you message;
- Share photos and videos;
- Highlight wins or next steps;
- Invite people to join your support group or upcoming actions; and
- Debrief with your volunteer team.

Vigils

Vigils are quiet, reflective gatherings that honor lives, uplift community resilience, or mark urgent moments.

Best for:

- Centering dignity and compassion;
- Supporting directly impacted communities;
- Drawing attention to humanitarian issues.

Tips:

- Use candles, music, or readings;
- Keep tone respectful and grounded in values;
- Offer emotional support resources.

Take a look at Global Refuge's Vigil for the Taken for guidance:
https://www.globalrefuge.org/vigil-for-taken/

Press Conferences

Press conferences allow advocates, leaders, and directly impacted community members to speak publicly about an issue. If you're interested in hosting a press conference, please reach out to the Global Refuge communications team at communications@globalrefuge.org.

Public Teach-ins (In Person or Virtual)

Public teach-ins bring people together to learn about an issue in real time—often in public or symbolic spaces like libraries, parks, campuses, community centers, or outside government buildings. They combine education, storytelling, and collective action to help communities understand what's at stake and how they can respond.

Teach-ins are especially powerful during moments of rapid change, misinformation, or public confusion. They create space for people to ask questions, build shared understanding, and connect values of welcome, dignity, justice, and belonging to concrete policy solutions.

Teach-ins build informed, confident advocates. They help people understand not just what is happening, but why it matters and how they can act. They transform concern into readiness and readiness into collective action.

Best for:

- Educating supporters and new audiences;
- Countering misinformation or confusion;
- Connecting values to policy;
- Responding quickly to emerging events;
- Building community confidence and readiness;
- Launching or sustaining a grassroots campaign.

Tips:

- Keep content accessible. Use plain language, avoid jargon, and break down complex issues into clear, digestible pieces.
- Use storytelling and visuals. Stories humanize issues; visuals (slides, posters, or infographics) make information easier to understand and remember.
- Include trusted messengers. Faith leaders, service providers, directly impacted community members, or local experts help build credibility and trust.
- Make it interactive. Encourage questions, small group discussions, or quick activities that help people process what they're learning.
- Choose symbolic or high visibility locations. Public spaces reinforce the message that the issue affects the whole community.
- End with a collective action. Every teach-in should lead to a next step—contacting a representative, signing up for a support group, attending a rally, sharing resources, or joining an upcoming training.



Safety & Risk Considerations for Advocates

Advocacy is powerful and it also requires thoughtful attention to personal and community safety. Whether you are attending a rally, hosting a vigil, speaking at a town hall, or mobilizing others online, it's important to assess risk, set boundaries, and make informed decisions that protect your well-being and the well-being of those around you.

Safety is not about avoiding advocacy. It's about ensuring that your participation is grounded in care, consent, and preparedness.

This section provides guidance to help you evaluate risk, understand your comfort level, and choose the safest way to engage.

Core Safety Principles

1. Know Your Boundaries
Your safety—emotional, physical, and digital—comes first. Advocacy should never require compromising your well-being or making you uncomfortable.

It is always acceptable to:

- Decline an action;
- Choose a lower-risk option;
- Participate virtually;
- Remain anonymous;
- Leave an event early;
- Ask for support.

2. Understand Your Proximity to the Issue
If you are directly impacted by the issue being discussed, you may experience:

- Heightened emotional responses;
- Trauma related triggers;
- Increased visibility or vulnerability.

Choose actions that feel safe and sustainable for you.

3. Assess the Environment

Before attending an event, consider:

- Who is organizing;
- Expected turnout;
- Whether opposing groups may be present;
- Whether de-escalation plans exist;
- Whether the space allows physical distance if needed.

Preparedness reduces risk.

4. Protect Your Digital Identity

Online advocacy can expose personal information. Consider:

- Whether your identity will remain private;
- Whether organizers use secure platforms (Signal, WhatsApp);
- Whether you can participate anonymously;
- Whether your social media settings protect your privacy.

Digital safety is part of advocacy safety.

5. Have a Communication Plan

If attending an in-person event:

- Tell someone where you are;
- Go with a friend or group;
- Set check-in times;
- Know emergency exits and gathering points.

Community care strengthens safety.

6. Use Trauma-informed Practices

Advocacy can surface difficult emotions. Be mindful of:

- Your own triggers;
- The triggers of those around you;
- The need for breaks, grounding, or stepping away;
- The importance of consent when sharing stories.

Safety includes emotional well-being.

Sample Risk Assessment Tool

Use this tool before participating in any advocacy action, either virtual or in person. It helps you evaluate risk across several dimensions and choose the safest way to engage.

You can complete it alone or with your group.

Event Details	Proximity to the Issue	De-Escalation	Online Safety	Notes & Boundaries	Define Risk
Is there a virtual option for the event?	Are you directly impacted by the issue being discussed?	If something were to happen, will you have space to create physical distance?	Will your personal identity details remain private?		O Low O Medium O High
Who is organizing the event?	Are you speaking publicly?	Has a safety plan been communicated?	Is there a way to complete this action anonymously?		O Low O Medium O High
Are you going alone?	Does this topic cause any trauma related triggers for you or anyone with you?	How likely is it that the event will attract an opposing group?	Are organizers using safe platforms like Signal to communicate?		O Low O Medium O High

How to Use This Tool

- Review each row and answer the questions honestly.
- Circle or select a risk level (Low, Medium, High) for each category.
- Reflect on your overall comfort level.
- If multiple categories fall under Medium or High, consider:
    - Attending virtually;
    - Participating anonymously;
    - Bringing a friend;
    - Choosing a different action;
    - Asking organizers about their safety plan.
- Set boundaries before participating (how long you'll stay, who you'll go with, and what you're comfortable doing).
- Reassess after the event to determine what felt safe and what you'd adjust next time.

Safety is not a barrier to advocacy. It is a foundation for sustainable, empowered engagement. By assessing risk, protecting your identity, and honoring your boundaries, you can ensure that your advocacy is grounded in care, dignity, and long-term well-being.

Closing

Building a Future Rooted in Welcome, Justice, and Belonging

Grassroots advocacy is one of the most powerful ways everyday people shape the future of their communities. Throughout this toolkit, you've explored how to build an advocacy support group, choose and frame an issue, map decision makers, identify tactics, take action, and sustain your efforts over time. Each step reflects a simple truth:

Advocacy is not reserved for experts. It is built by neighbors, faith leaders, students, parents, directly impacted refugees and other immigrants, and all those who believe in dignity and justice.

When you take action, whether by making a phone call, sharing a story, organizing a meeting, or joining a public event, you can help build a community where refugees and other immigrants are welcomed, protected, and able to thrive. Your voice, your relationships, and your commitment matter. They shape policies, shift narratives, and strengthen the fabric of our communities.



Advocacy is long-term work. It requires patience, courage, collaboration, and hope. But history shows that when people come together across backgrounds, identities, and lived experiences, they can transform systems and expand rights. The movements that came before us remind us that change is possible because ordinary people chose to act.

As you continue your advocacy journey, remember:

- **You are not alone.**
  Advocacy is collective work rooted in interdependence.
- **Your voice has power.**
  Stories, values, and lived experience move hearts and influence decisions.
- **Your actions matter.**
  Even small steps build momentum toward meaningful change.
- **Your community is stronger when you show up.**
  Refugees and other immigrants deserve policies shaped by those who care about their safety, dignity, and belonging.

This toolkit is just the beginning. The real work happens when you gather your support group, choose your issue, and take your first step. Together, you can help build a future where every person—regardless of where they come from—has the opportunity to live, work, worship, learn, and belong.

Your advocacy is part of a larger movement for welcome and justice. And that movement is stronger because you are in it.

Annex 1: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

1. **Do I need policy experience to be an advocate?**
   No. Advocacy is strongest when it reflects everyday people: neighbors, students, faith leaders, parents, and directly impacted communities.

2. **What if I'm afraid of saying the wrong thing?**
   Lead with values, listen deeply, and use the glossary. Mistakes are part of learning.

3. **How do I choose an issue to work on?**
   Use the toolkit's "Choosing an Advocacy Issue" section to narrow a broad problem into a winnable, strategic issue.

4. **What if my family or friends disagree with me?**
   Use the conversation guidance section. Focus on shared values, not arguments.

5. **How do I stay safe while advocating?**
   Use the Safety & Risk Assessment Tool. You can always participate anonymously or virtually.

6. **How do I contact my elected officials?**
   You can call, email, or meet with them. The toolkit's Direct Advocacy section provides scripts and guidance.

7. **What if I don't know the answer to a question someone asks?**
   It's okay to say, "I'm not sure." Follow up later with accurate information.

8. **How do I get others involved?**
   Use the Mobilization section: host a film screening, start a book club, organize a vigil, or invite people to a coffee chat.

9. **What if I'm directly impacted by immigration issues?**
   Your voice is powerful, but your safety comes first. Participate in ways that feel safe, including anonymous or virtual options.

10. **How can I stay connected to advocacy opportunities?**
    Sign up for Global Refuge's Advocates Network for updates, webinars, resources, and action alerts.

11. **Where can I access more resources on the policy issues I care about?**
    Check out Global Refuge's Action Center for talking points, call scripts, templates, and more.

Annex 2: Tools

From Problem to Framed Issue

The Safe Neighbors Justice Fund

Safe Neighbors Just Communities

Our democracy functions best when we affirm each of our neighbors' constitutional right to a due and fair legal process. Amid increasing policies that destabilize legal protections for countless immigrants and refugees, many children and families are facing fear and uncertainty. Our city is founded on the belief that every family and child should be treated fairly and justly. This is why we are urging City Council and Mayor [name] to launch and fund "The Safe Neighbors Justice Fund"– a partnership between local government and local non-profits to help our newcomer communities access critical legal services.

STEP 1: **You establish that there is a problem affecting refugees and other immigrants that you and others want to advocate around.**	**STEP 2:** **You narrow down your problem into an issue that you can act around.**	**STEP 3:** **You frame your issue and have a clear demand defined.**
Questions to ask in this step: Who is directly impacted by this issue? What are the root causes that community members feel afraid of? How can you help alleviate this burden of fear for these communities? Realistically, will it be more effective for this issue to be addressed at the local, state, or federal level?	**Questions to ask in this step:** Why are people not able to access legal aid? Is it because of the cost? Who has the power to expand legal aid for refugees and other immigrants? If these community members access legal aid, will their lives be changed? Do a lot of people care about this issue? Does your community feel excited by the prospect of helping solve this? Realistically, will it be more effective for this issue to be addressed at the local, state, or federal level?	**Questions to ask in this step:** Who else cares about this issue that you should involve in the future? How would you explain this issue to them? How can you communicate this issue to someone who may be opposed to it? What are the key values you want to highlight when you are advocating around this? Who is your target? What is the clear demand you are making? Is there a name you can use for this issue campaign that would encompass what you want? Have other cities established this? How?
Result: Upon further discussions, you realize that many refugees and other immigrants in your community lack access to legal aid to process their immigration cases. This is causing many people to feel afraid of landing in legal limbo or ultimately having an encounter with federal law enforcement.	**Result:** After diving deeper and talking to community members, you realize the root cause is the cost of legal services. After further research, you find that other cities have established legal trust funds to assist immigrants in their local communities. You also find that the mayor has the power to pass an ordinance could allocate funds to support refugees and other immigrants with accessing legal aid.	**Result:** You finalize your main demand and have agreed to stick with the mayor as the key target. After talking to other community members who also care about this issue you come up with a slogan and key messaging centered on upholding values of faith, safety, and justice.