**Working with Refugees and Immigrants**

(Presented by Kentucky Refugee Ministries)

**Cultural Considerations & Overcoming Barriers**

Language barriers are one of the most commonly reported challenges of food pantry partners who are serving clients from different cultures. Available resources, cultural awareness, and considerations specifically focused around the refugee and immigrant experience are vital to help effectively serving these communities.

**Language Accessibility**

**Offer written translations of important information:**

* Translated print materials, signage, and even cheat sheets of common words can be very useful and improve communication.
* Can include the English version on the back of the page as a reference for volunteers when pointing out info on the translated version.
* Most helpful translated materials often include:
  + Welcome statement
  + FAQs
  + General information
  + Labels
  + Directional or instructional signage (e.g., “Please wait here”, “One box per household”, etc.)

**Use descriptive images and simple text:**

* Some clients may be preliterate and not able to read in any language, or they may just be beginning to learn. Using descriptive and/or directional images and simple, straightforward text will help them understand what is needed.
* Avoid using unnecessary words or colloquial phrases that may not translate or can cause confusion.

**Prioritize active recruitment of bilingual volunteers and staff:**

* Recruiting bilingual or multilingual staff and volunteers is highly effective in improving communication with food pantry clients.
* To find interested, native speakers, consider recruiting from:
  + Bilingual/multilingual clients already utilizing your food pantry
  + Local high schools, colleges or community centers
  + Community groups or religious organizations that serve a culture who speak the language you are seeking
  + Post a bilingual volunteer request to your social media and/or website

**Your online presence:**

* Clients with language barriers may have difficulty learning what resources are available if your website doesn’t offer a translation in their language.
* Consider having multiple language options to select from or dedicating a page on your website with key information translated into multiple languages

**Cultural Considerations**

**Culturally Responsive Foods:**

* Clients may have specific dietary restrictions based on their cultural or religious background. This most often includes pork, but can also include meat products, in general, non-halal animal processing, dairy, unfamiliar or novelty food items, etc.
  + Muslim clients do not consume pork products and will typically also not consume any animal product unless it is Halal (processed in the specific way as instructed in religious doctrine to which those of Islamic faith are required to abide).
* Create a food preference list based on the cultures served - either through community members’ feedback or by consulting a local organization serving those communities (like KRM, Catholic Charities or IRC).
* If serving several cultures, you can use this list to outline and prioritize food items that are preferred cross-culturally. These often include items such as:
  + Rice
  + Beans
  + French bread/baguettes
  + Various fruits and root vegetables
  + Lentils
  + Chicken
  + Fruit juices
  + Black tea
* Consider outreach to local international groceries, food markets and bakeries to source food items. There are many local options for specific communities as well - Latin American/Hispanic, Middle Eastern, Nepalese, Bosnian, etc.
* The vast majority of refugee and immigrant clients utilizing food pantries cook meals at home. Consider providing items that they can use together to create a meal.

**Trauma-Informed Engagement & Situational Awareness**

Many refugee clients have endured significant, complex trauma which can have long-lasting effects that take years to heal from - making social interactions and accessing resources more challenging. The majority of refugee clients served through resettlement offices have spent 5+ years in a refugee camp awaiting resettlement. In many cases, the camps may have times of reduced funding, supply chain interruptions, and severely limited resource availability - resulting in food and water scarcity for extended periods of time for its residents.

* These traumatic and long-endured experiences can lead to trauma responses being triggered in stressful situations or if involving access to vital resources.
* Examples of trauma responses:
  + Becoming easily upset or frustrated
  + Withdrawing or verbally unresponsive
  + Becoming frightened or easily startled
  + Confusion or disorientation
  + Easily overwhelmed
  + Hoarding tendencies or taking more than needed
* To help avoid potential trauma response triggers and de-escalate tension:
  + Consider de-escalation tactics training, with a specific focus on trauma-informed care and/or serving refugee and immigrant populations, for staff and volunteers
  + Maintaining an organized, quickly accessible inventory and an orderly, efficient process for distribution to clients.
  + Try to maintain spacial boundaries, organized lines, and prevent congested crowding.
  + Meeting the linguistic and cultural needs of clients helps reduce frustration, stress and the likelihood of trauma responses.
  + If possible, consider offering a delivery option to client homes
  + Creating an environment or choosing a food pantry location where clients can have a sense of safety, respect and cultural inclusivity.
    - Consider the police presence at or near your food pantry location. Due to experiences with police violence or ICE immigration practices, some refugees and immigrants may feel uncomfortable or unsafe.
      * If there is a police presence, you may consider a more neutral location, plain clothes officers, or communicating to pantry clients that your location is a safe space regardless of immigration status.
    - Consider non-religious pantry locations and avoid religious organizations that proselytize or require prayer.

**Additional Access Considerations**

**Transportation**

* Newcomers face heightened transportation barriers when arriving to the U.S., which may include limited access to a car, being unsure or uncomfortable navigating public transit, or having extremely long commute times.
* Consider choosing pantry locations that are near bus stops, setting up a pop-up pantry location in more accessible areas or offering a delivery option.

**Culturally Responsive Outreach**

* Help ensure equal access to information and the resources you offer by including food pantry details and hours of operation translated on your website and/or posting flyers in locations accessible to all community members.
* Communicate through the right channels
  + If posting translated information or flyers, choose locations and businesses utilized by refugee and immigrant clients or ask bilingual staff or volunteers to do outreach at these locations.
* Partner with a community organization or cultural center that is trusted by and specifically serves that community. This could be as simple as them helping communicate information, sharing about resources on social media or post printed flyers.
* Consider outreach to a radio, podcast or newspaper in the language(s) of the communities served.
  + El Kentubano and El Dia are two local Cuban newspaper publications widely distributed in multiple neighborhoods across Louisville.

**Resources**

* K**RM Interpreter Services**: [KYRM.ORG/SERVICES/INTERPRETATION](http://KYRM.ORG/SERVICES/INTERPRETATION)
  + KRM contracts in-person or phone interpreters, as well as translated text from interpreters in a multitude of languages. These interpreters are also available for outside organizations to contract at KRM’s set hourly rate. Visit the link above to request an interpreter or reach out to Interpreter Services Manager, Sanaan Hamza: [shamza@kyrm.org](mailto:shamza@kyrm.org).
* **Community Language Cooperative**: [COMMUNITYLANGUAGECOOP.COM](http://COMMUNITYLANGUAGECOOP.COM)
  + - Denver-based organization that offers written translation services and interpreters for events. They can source most major languages with a 48-hour notice, and prices average about 20 cents per translated word for print.
* **Volance:** [INTERPRET.VOLANCE.COM/LANGUAGE-SERVICES](http://INTERPRET.VOLANCE.COM/LANGUAGE-SERVICES)
  + Subscription service that offers on-call live interpretation with staff who speak over 240 languages through their video app.
* **Language Justice Grants**
  + Grants for translation or interpretation services may be available through local, state and federal government funding.
* **Cultural Awareness Resources, Trainings & Guides**
  + **Switchboard**: SWITCHBOARDTA.ORG - Offers a multitude of webinar trainings, toolkits, articles and guides to help both resettlement staff and community organizations working with refugee and immigrant populations to help provide awareness and improve service.
  + **CORE:** CORESOURCEEXCHANGE.ORG (Cultural Orientation Resource Exchange) - Similar to Switchboard and also offers comprehensive backgrounders on a variety of refugee populations.
  + **Cultural Atlas:** CULTURALATLASSBS.COM.AU - Also a fantastic resource for helping to improve understanding and cultural awareness for serving international communities, but this site offers more concise, consolidated information, like a quick list of “do’s and don’ts” for the selected country, cultural cornerstone highlights, etc. It’s also very accessible, allowing users to just select a country or religion, then choose the category you’d like to read about.