



## Guide to the Community Co-sponsorship Application

*In order to select groups who have the capacity to serve refugee families well, IRIS requires that prospective co-sponsors complete an application. It is a strengths assessment of community assets. IRIS will select which groups will be invited to the next training session on the basis of the application. Invitation to the training means that you have submitted a satisfactory application, but it does not guarantee that a refugee family will be placed with your group. Refugee families will be placed with groups who fulfill all of the requirements covered in training. We recommend that you read the [Community Co-sponsorship Manual](#) before you apply. You can also use this guide to help you complete the **Location and Services** Section of the application.*

### Resettlement Location

In our experience, refugee families fare best in sustainable communities, where they have access to public transportation, employment opportunities, English classes, and affordable housing. If your town does not have these resources, IRIS asks that your group plan to resettle the family in a more sustainable community near you. We have found that the following cities and towns offer the best mix of resources and affordable housing:

**New Haven County** East Haven, Hamden, Meriden, Waterbury, West Haven  
**Middlesex County** Middletown; **New London County** New London, Norwich  
**Windham County** Willimantic **Tolland County** Vernon **Litchfield County** Torrington  
**Hartford County** Bloomfield, East Hartford, Hartford, New Britain, West Hartford, Windsor Locks **Fairfield County** Bridgeport, Danbury

This is not an exhaustive list. If you can demonstrate that another town or city in your area is accessible to frequent, reliable public transportation, free English classes for adults, and other resources, IRIS may consider it a sustainable community for refugee resettlement.

### Housing

Please research 2, 3, and 4BR apartments. Due to large family sizes, it is likely that you'll need at least a 3BR apartment.

What IRIS means by **affordable**: We ask that cosponsors find apartments that refugees will have good chance of being able to afford on their own at the end of the financial assistance period (3-6 mos.): **a 2BR for \$1,100/month, a 3BR for \$ 1,300/month, or a 4BR for \$1,500/month; or less.**

We call these rates the "New Haven Standard," because these are the maximum rental rates for apartments IRIS secures for newly arriving refugees whom we resettle in the Greater New Haven area.

We realize that the “New Haven Standard” may not be available in some areas of the state. If it is impossible to find a safe, clean apartment in your area at these rental rates, you can arrange with IRIS to extend the period of assistance for the duration of the lease (e.g., from 6 months to a full year). But this rental-assistance extension should be discussed with IRIS and should be the exception to the rule.<sup>1</sup> (This will likely only apply to Lower Fairfield Co.<sup>2</sup>)

Keep in mind that placing a family in an apartment that they would not have a good chance of affording on their own can delay self-sufficiency. And they would likely have to move (with the children having to change school districts) at the end of the lease period.

### **Neighborhoods**

Talk to a few people in the neighborhoods you’ve identified with affordable apartments (residents walking down the street, people working in local businesses.) Ask them how safe they feel and how welcoming the neighborhood is. Ask how they would feel about having refugees from the Middle East and Africa as neighbors.

### **Landlords**

Talk to a few landlords in the area who are offering affordable apartments. Ask them: Would you be willing to rent to a refugee family? Would you consider a 6-month lease?

### **For groups based in or near New Haven**

The New Haven public school system is already serving hundreds of refugee families resettled by IRIS, and we cannot stretch these resources too thin. If your group is based in New Haven or nearby, please prepare to resettle a refugee family in a neighboring town (e.g., West Haven, East Haven, or Hamden.)

### **An additional note on housing**

Although free temporary housing opportunities may seem ideal, rent-free arrangements are very problematic: First, they pose challenges with regard to the disbursement of federal funds that must be spent within 3 months of a refugee’s arrival. Equally important, rent-free housing is not a realistic introduction to the American rental market and will likely create delayed understanding of cost of living and self-sufficiency. It’s better to offer below-market rental rates than to offer housing that is rent-free.

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<sup>1</sup> For cosponsors who cannot find housing at the “New Haven Standard” rates, the period of assistance can be extended for the duration of the lease (e.g., from 6 months to a full year). This will mean that cosponsors who are willing and able may need to raise more than the \$10,000 limit which we initially placed on co-sponsorship rental assistance. However, the refugee family will be responsible for the same amount of rent payment under such an arrangement. For example, a co-sponsorship group who resettles a refugee family in a 2BR apartment in Stamford with a rent at \$1600/ month, with a 1-year lease, can subsidize the rent for the full 12 months. BUT, at the end of the rental assistance period, the refugee family will be responsible for up to \$1100 of the rent, while the co-sponsor will subsidize their rent payment with \$500/month.

<sup>2</sup> Norwalk and Stamford are more affordable than most towns west of Bridgeport along the Shoreline, but nonetheless require application of the New Haven Standard due to their very high rents.

## Public Transportation

When looking for appropriate housing, it is crucial to consider accessibility of transportation. All housing locations should be within a 10-minute walk of public transportation. If this is not available in your town, IRIS asks that you resettle the refugee family in the closest town that does have accessible public transportation. Mobility is paramount in ensuring that the refugee family does not feel isolated, has the ability to connect to community and, most importantly, can get to multiple places of potential employment!

Early bus orientation is key to helping a resettled family manage for themselves and gain the confidence that comes with independence and access. When considering rental properties, please take these simple steps:

- Go to Google maps, enter the address of the potential rental property, click on Directions, and add any destination address in the nearest downtown population area with businesses, shopping, etc.
  - Click on 'Transit' (the tram symbol) and see what options appear. A business area should be within 20 minutes of the family's home on public transportation.
  - Consider times and frequency of public transportation options. Sometimes bus service starts too late or ends too early for certain job requirements.
- You can call CT Transit and reach live help at 203-624-0151. Give them any location, destination and time and they'll consult with you regarding the best options.

## Grocery Shopping

It is also important for refugee families to be able to take public transportation or walk to affordable grocery stores that SNAP (food stamps)/ EBT cards. (Tip: Stop N' Shop and C-Town are surprisingly expensive. The more affordable stores are Wal-Mart Supercenters, Aldi, Shop-Rite, Price Rite, and Price Chopper.)

## Cosigning the Lease

Refugee families should be listed as tenants on their lease agreements, and they will be expected to sign the lease shortly after arrival. Most landlords require a guarantor or cosigner since the family will have no credit history. In such cases, IRIS asks that the co-sponsorship group cosign the lease. The cosigner can be an individual or an organization affiliated with your group. We can provide best practices and information to ease any concerns about this.

**Please Note:** Do not make any rental commitments *until* you are assured of the arrival of the family (by IRIS—we usually get 10-15 days' notice from our national affiliates.)

## Interpreters

When reaching out to potential interpreters, please keep in mind that your group will need to have access to interpreters on a regular basis, especially during the first three months.