COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP IN THE U.S.

Motivations and Outcomes of Sponsorship

COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP HUB

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Executive Summary

As global displacement reaches historic highs, the United States has increasingly turned to community and private sponsorship to offer flexible, localized support for refugee resettlement. This report analyzes survey data collected between April and June 2025 from over 1,000 individuals who participated in the Sponsor Circle Program (SCP) and Welcome Corps between. Findings indicate that Americans across geographies and political affiliations are eager to support newcomers, with participation driven primarily by personal values, civic duty, and moral responsibility.

Key Findings:

1. **Sponsor Participation Is Values-Driven:** Sponsors cited strong ethical motivations for engagement, including belief in humanitarian values (30%), concern for the safety of family or friends (29%), faith-based commitments (18%), and the opportunity to support their communities (14%). This aligns with international research showing that sponsorship is rooted in moral obligation, empathy, and shared identity rather than material incentives.

2. **Sponsorship Enables Rapid, Localized Response:** Community sponsorship has mobilized a distributed network of support across all 50 states and D.C., reaching urban (47%), suburban (38%), and rural (14%) communities. Sponsor groups raised over $210 million in private funds, showcasing significant local investment in refugee reception and integration.

3. **Integration Outcomes Are Relational and Reciprocal:** Sponsors overwhelmingly report that refugees are integrating well into their communities. Nearly 90% of sponsors formed personal relationships with those they supported, and 73% reported a stronger connection to their local communities. Sponsorship also deepened ties with faith communities, civic groups, and immigrant networks.

Implications for Policy and Practice: Community sponsorship has emerged as an effective and adaptive model for refugee resettlement. It promotes deeper integration, fosters meaningful relationships, and strengthens social cohesion by empowering communities to lead resettlement efforts. As the U.S. reimagines its resettlement infrastructure, these findings underscore the importance of models that promote civic participation, decentralize support systems, and enhance local capacity. Far from being a temporary or supplemental measure, sponsorship is a transformative practice – one that not only facilitates refugee welcome but also revitalizes communities and reinforces the nation's humanitarian commitments.

Introduction

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that 139.9 million people will be forcibly displaced in 2025,[1] representing a more than threefold increase from approximately 43 million in 2015.[2] This dramatic rise in UNHCR's population of concern underscores the growing scale and complexity of global displacement. Among those displaced across borders – classified as *refugees*[3] – access to *durable solutions* [4] remains severely limited. As Figure 1 illustrates, the number of refugees able to access one of these options remains disproportionately low compared to the total global refugee population. This widening gap has resulted in most refugees living in protracted displacement – characterized by displacement for five or more years – often with restricted access to basic rights and services.[5]

In response to the growing global displacement crisis, governments and civil society actors are reexamining how resettlement systems can be made more responsive and sustainable. One of the most promising innovations is the rise of community and private sponsorship as complementary pathways to traditional, government-led resettlement. These models empower private individuals, families, and community groups to take an active role in supporting refugees as they rebuild their lives in a new country. While private sponsorship has a long-standing history in Canada, it has gained significant momentum in the United Kingdom and across Europe – and, in recent years, has been piloted and expanded in the United States.

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[1] UNHCR, *Global Appeal 2025*, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2024, https://reporting.unhcr.org/global-appeal-2025#:~:text=Where%20have%20people%20fled%20to,South%20Sudan%202%2C300%2C000%20Sudan%203%2C200%2C000.

[2] UNHCR, *Global Appeal 2015 Update: Populations of Concern to UNHCR*, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2015, https://www.unhcr.org/media/unhcr-global-appeal-2015-update-populations-concern-unhcr.

[3] Refugees are defined by the United Nations as persons: "...owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country."

[4] A durable solution is term used by UNHCR to identify a long-term resolution for refugees' displacement and includes voluntary repatriation to country of origin, local integration into the first country of asylum, or resettlement to a safe, third country.

[5] United States Department of State, *Protracted Refugee Situations*, 2017, https://www.state.gov/other-policy-issues/protracted-refugee-situations/.

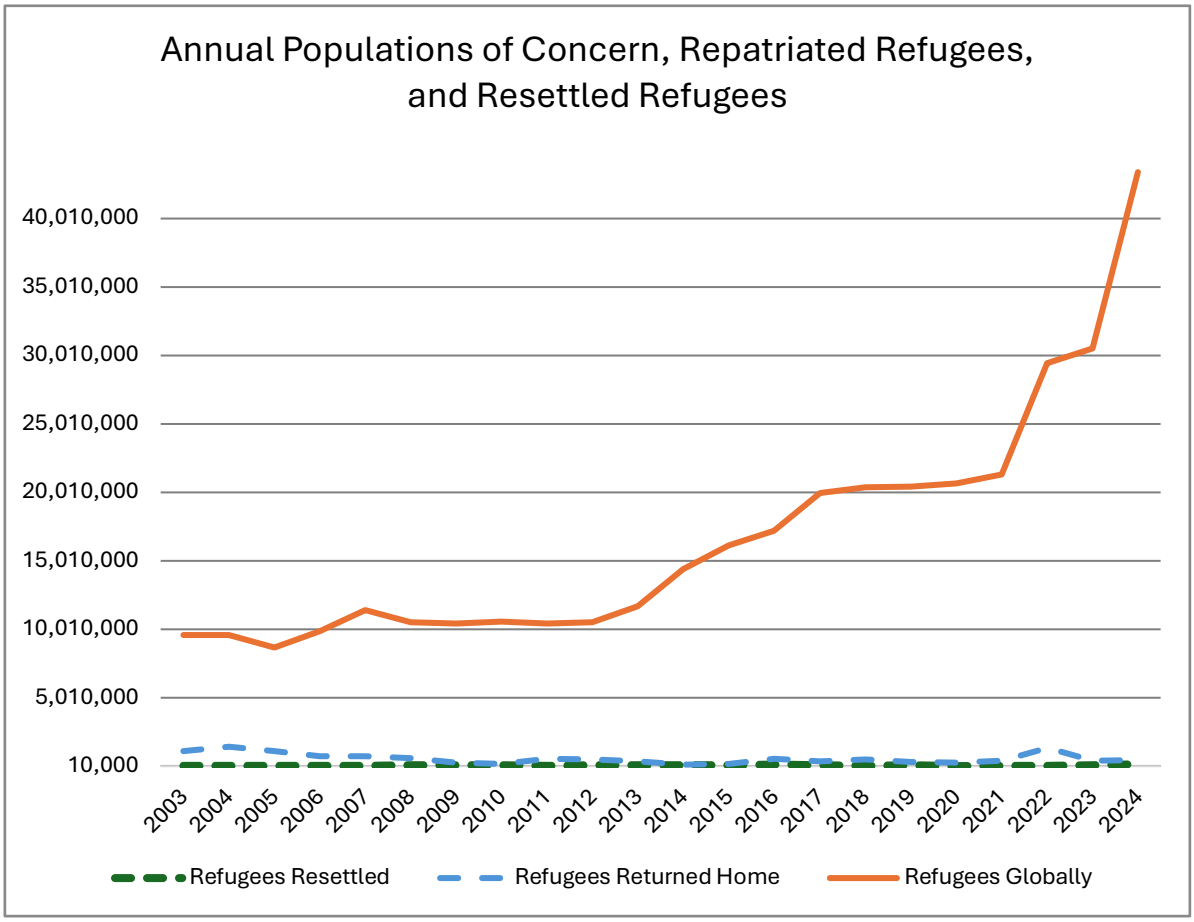

Figure 1. Refugee Population, Repatriated and Resettled Refugees by Year

In the U.S., community and private sponsorship programs have evolved in response to changing political landscapes and varying levels of institutional capacity. Once the global leader in resettlement, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) reached its lowest annual resettlement numbers in history during fiscal year 2021.[6] During President Trump's first tenure, the annual refugee resettlement ceiling declined to 15,000 refugees (an 85% decrease from President Obama's Fiscal Year 2017 ceiling of 110,000)[7] and led to the closing

[6] Jens Manuel Krogstad, "Key Facts About Refugees to the U.S.," *Pew Research Center* (blog), October 7, 2019, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/10/07/key-facts-about-refugees-to-the-u-s/.
[7] Phillip Connor and Jens Manuel Krogstad, "U.S. on Track to Reach Obama Administration's Goal of Resettling 110,000 Refugees This Year," *Pew Research Center* (blog), accessed December 16, 2022.

of one-third of local resettlement agencies.[8] During the Biden administration, the refugee resettlement ceiling for USRAP was increased to 125,000 individuals, and the ceiling was reached in fiscal year 2024. During this period, new community and private sponsorship programs were piloted and launched – including the Sponsor Circle Program, Welcome Corps, Welcome Corps on Campus, and Welcome Corps at Work – building on the legacy of earlier efforts such as the Reagan-era Private Sponsorship Initiative. These programs reflect a renewed emphasis on community-based approaches to resettling and supporting forcibly displaced populations, grounded in local leadership and supported by national coordination.

With USRAP currently suspended under the second Trump administration, and broader debates ongoing about the role of federal, state, and local actors in refugee protection, community sponsorship has emerged as a critical site of both innovation and civic participation. This report examines the practice and potential of community and private sponsorship in the United States through the lens of sponsor experiences. Drawing on original survey data from individuals who participated in the Sponsor Circle Program and Welcome Corps, this study identifies three key findings:

1. **Sponsor participation is values-driven.** Sponsors are primarily motivated by a sense of moral responsibility, civic identity, and personal connection to displaced individuals or communities. These motivations reflect deep ethical commitments rather than external incentives, aligning with international research on volunteerism and solidarity.

2. **Community sponsorship enables rapid, localized responses.** Sponsorship efforts have demonstrated the capacity of diverse communities – urban, suburban, and rural – to mobilize quickly, raise private funds, and deliver essential resettlement support. These networks of care and civic infrastructure extend the reach of formal systems and contribute to national resettlement capacity.

3. **Integration outcomes are relational and reciprocal.** Sponsors report high levels of refugee integration alongside strengthened community ties, intergroup

[8] Julie Watson, "Broken by Trump, U.S. Refugee Program Aims to Return Stronger," *AP NEWS*, April 20, 2021, sec. Immigration, https://apnews.com/article/joe-biden-politics-immigration-coronavirus-pandemic-0a649290b8a6628900598d4324c3d72b.

connections, and renewed civic participation. Sponsorship not only supports newcomers' integration – it transforms the communities that receive them.

By centering the experiences of those who lead and participate in sponsorship, this report contributes to a growing body of evidence that community sponsorship is not simply a stopgap measure – it is a transformative, community-based model that strengthens humanitarian protection and revitalizes local communities. The findings presented here offer insight into the impact of sponsorship and how it can be integrated into a revised resettlement system that centers localized support and community engagement. As the current administration reimagines its resettlement infrastructure, community sponsorship offers a flexible and values-driven pathway to offer durable solutions to refugees driven by local communities.

Context: Community and Private Sponsorship

Complementary pathways to traditional refugee resettlement have gained traction globally as states seek to expand the role of local communities in the protection of forcibly displaced populations and improve integration and resettlement outcomes. Among the most prominent of these are community sponsorship and private sponsorship programs, which offer alternative pathways for refugee reception and integration while also promoting public engagement in refugee protection efforts.[9] The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) defines *community sponsorship* as an arrangement in which individuals or groups provide financial, emotional, and logistical support to refugees who have already been admitted to their host country through resettlement or a complementary pathway, such as education or labor mobility programs. In this model, sponsors assist with initial reception and long-term integration, helping refugees navigate housing, employment,

[9] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), "Community Sponsorship," accessed June 17, 2025, https://www.unhcr.org/us/what-we-do/build-better-futures/long-term-solutions/local-integration/community-sponsorship.

language acquisition, and community connections. The emphasis is on community-level responsibility sharing, often in collaboration with government agencies or NGOs.[10]

In contrast, *private sponsorship* is characterized by the central role of private individuals or organizations not only in integration but also in identifying and nominating beneficiaries for entry.[11] Unlike traditional UNHCR-led resettlement, which prioritizes individuals based on protection needs and vulnerability, private sponsorship allows sponsors to propose specific individuals for resettlement based on criteria such as family ties, educational background, or employment potential. According to UNHCR,[12] private sponsorship "creates complementary pathways which facilitate the admission of refugees in a new country," with sponsors actively participating in admission, reception, and integration.

While the two forms of sponsorship share common goals – expanding resettlement capacity, promoting integration, and mobilizing civil society – their functions and structures differ. Globally, community sponsorship typically refers to situations in which refugees already selected through official resettlement or humanitarian pathways, whereas private sponsorship involves initiating and supporting refugee admissions outside the traditional state-led selection process.[13]

In practice, the definitions and implementation of these models vary by country, and the terms are often used interchangeably. This can lead to conceptual ambiguity in both policy discussions and program evaluation. However, a general distinction can be drawn: community sponsorship tends to refer to public engagement in supporting refugee integration after arrival and private sponsorship refers to sponsor-driven efforts to identify

[10] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), "Community Sponsorship," accessed June 17, 2025, https://www.unhcr.org/us/what-we-do/build-better-futures/long-term-solutions/local-integration/community-sponsorship.
[11] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), "Private Sponsorship Pathways," accessed June 17, 2025, https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/build-better-futures/solutions/complementary-pathways/private-sponsorship-pathways.
[12] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), "Private Sponsorship Pathways," accessed June 17, 2025, https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/build-better-futures/solutions/complementary-pathways/private-sponsorship-pathways.
[13] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), "Private Sponsorship Pathways," accessed June 17, 2025, https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/build-better-futures/solutions/complementary-pathways/private-sponsorship-pathways.

and bring refugees into a country.[14] Community and private sponsorship are viewed as promising tools to complement government-led resettlement and respond to the growing global need for durable solutions. When supported with appropriate training, oversight, and resources, community and private sponsorship programs can enhance integration outcomes, promote social cohesion, and build more welcoming societies.[15]

While these models are increasingly defined within global policy frameworks, their application and evolution are shaped by local and national contexts. In the United States, community-based approaches to resettlement and newcomer integration have deep historical roots. From post-World War II resettlement efforts to the Reagan-era private sponsorship pilot and today's Welcome Corps program, the U.S. has long relied on the active participation of civil society – including volunteers, faith groups, and local organizations. The following section traces the historical development, policy shifts, and contemporary innovations that have shaped community sponsorship in the United States.

Background: Community Sponsorship in the U.S.

Community and private sponsorship have been a key feature of U.S. humanitarian-based immigration programs. Historically, the United States prioritized humanitarian-based immigration in its national immigration policy.[16] The United States emerged as a leader in humanitarian protection and resettlement at the end of World War II. With the help of U.S. leadership, the International Refugee Organization (IRO) – a precursor to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees – ensured over 1 million refugees were safely resettled in the late 1940s.[17] On December 22, 1945, President Truman issued a presidential directive

[14] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), "Private Sponsorship Pathways," accessed June 17, 2025, https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/build-better-futures/solutions/complementary-pathways/private-sponsorship-pathways; Susan Fratzke and Lena Kainz, *Partners in Refugee Protection: The Role of Civil Society in the Resettlement of Refugees*(Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2019).
[15] Aubrey Grant, *Networks and Policy Outcomes: The Case of Refugee Integration* (PhD diss., George Mason University, 2024), https://mars.gmu.edu/entities/publication/c74df050-648f-4729-9ce2-7faf20d9c995.
[16] Anna K. Boucher and Justin Gest, *Crossroads: Comparative Immigration Regimes in a World of Demographic Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).
[17] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. *The History of Resettlement: Celebrating 25 Years of the ATCR*. Geneva: United Nations, 2019. https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/5d1633657.

authorizing expedited admission of European refugees.[18] As a result of the order, around 1,000 European refugees already in the U.S. were granted lawful permanent residency, and over 40,000 displaced persons were able to resettle in the U.S.[19] The Displaced Persons Act of 1948, was the first legislation passed by U.S. Congress addressing refugees. The Act used the existing quota system as the basis for resettlement and required admitted refugees to find housing and jobs – explicitly stating that these jobs could not replace U.S. workers.[20] Through the Act, 350,000 refugees were able to resettle in the U.S.[21]

With the establishment of the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees in 1950, the United States continued to be a leader in ad hoc refugee resettlement, responding to the ongoing resettlement of European refugees and the emergence of new refugee populations. The Refugee Relief Act of 1953 authorized 200,000 non-quota visas for refugees and defectors from communist countries. This program expanded U.S. refugee visas, and around 2,000 visas were allocated to Chinese refugees.[22] Over the next three decades, the U.S. continued passing ad hoc legislation, allowing people from Hungary, Cuba, Hong Kong, the Azores, and Southeast Asia (mainly from Vietnam) to resettle in the United States.[23] The U.S. government's partnerships with nonprofit organizations that provided resettlement support were core to these ad hoc refugee resettlement programs.[24]

The United States Refugee Act of 1980 built on this history and ad hoc resettlement programs to establish a permanent resettlement program. This Act served as the basis for today's resettlement laws and policies.[25] The Act adopted the 1967 UN Refugee Protocol definition of a refugee into U.S. law, removing the geographic and ideological limits applied to the U.S. legal definition of a refugee (which was instituted in the 1965 Amendment to the

[18] U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, "Refugee Timeline," July 28, 2020, https://www.uscis.gov/about-us/our-history/history-office-and-library/featured-stories-from-the-uscis-history-office-and-library/refugee-timeline
[19] US Citizenship and Immigration Services, "Refugee Timeline."
[20] US Citizenship and Immigration Services, "Refugee Timeline."
[21] US Citizenship and Immigration Services, "Refugee Timeline."
[22] US Citizenship and Immigration Services, "Refugee Timeline."
[23] US Citizenship and Immigration Services, "Refugee Timeline."
[24] Norman Zucker, "Refugee Resettlement in the United States: The Role of the Voluntary Agencies," *Michigan Journal of International Law* 3, no. 1 (1982): 155–157.
[25] Edward M. Kennedy, "Refugee Act of 1980," *International Migration Review* 15, no. 1/2 (1981): 141–156.

1952 Immigration and Nationality Act); instituted statutory basis for asylum; created the Office of Refugee Resettlement (which oversaw domestic programs for refugees following their arrival to the U.S.); and increased annual limits on refugee resettlement numbers.[26] A core feature of the U.S. resettlement infrastructure established in the Refugee Act of 1980 is the U.S. government's partnership with nonprofit organizations – known as refugee resettlement agencies – that provide direct support to refugees on arrival.[27] Following the establishment of a permanent program, communities continued to provide support and vital in-kind and financial resources to resettlement agencies as they resettled refugees.

Since the inception of the USRAP, various pilot and temporary initiatives have incorporated volunteer support to assist with resettlement efforts. In 1983,[28] the Reagan Administration launched a pilot community sponsorship scheme, to resettle 2,000 - 3,000 Vietnamese refugees. Following the success of the pilot, the Reagan administration launched the Private Sponsorship Initiative (PSI) in 1986,[29] allowing organizations to enter a Memorandum of Understanding with the U.S. State Department to resettle refugees. Through this program up to 10,000 refugees could be resettled annual in addition to the presidentially-determined refugee admissions ceiling. Sponsoring organizations were required to provide sufficient support and resources to ensure that sponsored refugees did not access public benefit programs, such as like Medicaid and food stamps, for two years or until they obtained lawful permanent resident (LPR) status, whichever came first. If a refugee accessed federal public assistance, the sponsoring organization was responsible for repaying the value of those services to the government.[30] The program was terminated by President Clinton in 1996 in part due to the administrative burden of entering in MOUs, the complexity

[26] US Citizenship and Immigration Services, "Refugee Timeline."
[27] Norman Zucker, "Refugee Resettlement in the United States: The Role of the Voluntary Agencies," *Michigan Journal of International Law* 3, no. 1 (1982): 155–157.
[28] National Immigration Forum, *"A Guide to Private Sponsorship for Refugees,"* (Washington, DC: National Immigration Forum, accessed June 18, 2025), https://immigrationforum.org/article/a-guide-to-private-sponsorship-for-refugees/.
[29] David Bier and Matthew La Corte, *Private Refugee Resettlement in U.S. History*, Niskanen Center, April 26 2016, https://www.niskanencenter.org/wp-content/uploads/old_uploads/2016/04/PrivateRefugeeHistory.pdf.
[30] National Immigration Forum, *"A Guide to Private Sponsorship for Refugees,"* (Washington, DC: National Immigration Forum, accessed June 18, 2025), https://immigrationforum.org/article/a-guide-to-private-sponsorship-for-refugees/.

of the sponsorship process, and the financial burden and uncertainty associated with resettlement costs.[31] Although the PSI ended in 1996, organizations and volunteers continued to be a vital component of the resettlement program, partnering with local resettlement agencies to serve as volunteer and co-sponsors on cases that arrived (with the resettlement agency taking on the role of the sponsor for the case).

In October 2021, the U.S. Department of State signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Community Sponsorship Hub to establish and implement an emergency private-led community sponsorship-based initiative for displaced Afghans – the Sponsor Circle Program for Afghans.[32] Since then, the Sponsor Circle Program (SCP) has expanded to support displaced Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, Ukrainians, and Venezuelans. The SCP informed the design and establishment of the Welcome Corps, a community and private sponsorship pilot program for refugees arriving through the U.S. Refugee Admission Program. Through Welcome Corps, sponsor groups could be matched with newcomers to support their reception and integration into their community or they could name and refer a refugee abroad to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program and then support their reception and integration following arrival. Welcome Corps launched in December of 2022[33] and was followed by the launch of the Welcome Corps on Campus (university sponsorship) in July 2023 and the Welcome Corps at Work (labor sponsorship) in April 2024.

Methods and Data

This report draws on data collected by the Community Sponsorship Hub (CSH) through a two-wave national survey designed to investigate the experiences, motivations, and attitudes of individuals participating in community and private sponsorship programs in the United States. The survey was developed by CSH and More In Common, leveraging CSH's

[31] National Immigration Forum, *"A Guide to Private Sponsorship for Refugees,"* (Washington, DC: National Immigration Forum, accessed June 18, 2025), https://immigrationforum.org/article/a-guide-to-private-sponsorship-for-refugees/.

[32] **"Launch of the Sponsor Circle Program for Afghans,"** *United States Department of State* (blog), accessed November 12, 2022, https://www.state.gov/launch-of-the-sponsor-circle-program-for-afghans/.

[33] "Report to Congress on Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2023," *United States Department of State*, 7.

expertise in resettlement outcomes and sponsor engagement alongside More In Common's research on public attitudes and the political dynamics surrounding global sponsorship models.

The first wave of the survey email to a stratified random sample of sponsors by CSH between April and May 2025. Participants were given a three-week window to complete the survey. A stratified random sampling approach was used to ensure coverage across both sponsorship pathways. These included "naming" sponsorships, where sponsors identify a specific individual or family to support, and "matching" sponsorships, where sponsors are paired with refugees through the program. The sample also accounted for sponsorship case status, distinguishing between those whose sponsored individuals had already arrived in the United States and those with applications still in process. Through the first wave, a total of 594 individuals partially or fully completed the survey, yielding a response rate of 5.5 percent (see Table 1). The second wave of the survey was distributed via email by CSH in June 2025 and remained open for ten days. This wave aimed to extend the reach of the initial survey while excluding all individuals who had participated in the first round. A total of 412 respondents partially or fully completed the survey during the second wave, resulting in a response rate of 5.6 percent.

Table 1: Survey Sample and Response Rate

	Sample Frame	Survey Respondents	Response Rate
Wave 1 (April - May 2025)	10,830	594	5.5%
Wave 2 (June 2025)	7.311	412	5.6%

The sponsor survey consisted of both closed- and open-ended questions and was designed to capture a range of sponsor experiences, including motivations for participation, perceptions of program effectiveness, interactions with government and resettlement infrastructure, and broader attitudes toward politics, including immigration and refugee policy. Several questions were used from previous research conducted by CSH, and additional measures were adapted for the U.S. context by More In Common to assess civic engagement and public sentiment. The survey was administered online using the Qualtrics

platform. All participants provided informed consent, and responses were anonymized prior to analysis. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were able to exit the survey at any time. In the first wave, a small gift card incentive was offered to the first 300 individuals who completed the survey.

Findings

This study identified three core findings that illuminate how community and private sponsorship function as both mechanisms for resettlement and catalysts for local engagement in the United States. First, sponsor participation is primarily driven by moral conviction, personal relationships, and a strong sense of civic responsibility – highlighting that sponsorship is rooted in deeply held values rather than material incentives. Second, sponsorship efforts are enabled by widespread, cross-sector community involvement that allows for rapid, localized responses to displacement. This decentralized infrastructure has proven highly adaptable, with sponsor groups forming across urban, suburban, and rural areas and drawing on networks of family, faith, and civic organizations. Third, the outcomes of sponsorship extend beyond successful resettlement to include strengthened community ties and social cohesion. Respondents reported high levels of newcomer integration alongside increased engagement within their own communities, indicating that sponsorship produces durable, reciprocal benefits for both newcomers and communities.

Sponsor Motivations

Over the past four years, there have been substantial changes in U.S. refugee resettlement policy, occurring alongside a global shift toward community and private sponsorship as a model for refugee protection. In the United States, the history of resettlement has long been rooted in private engagement, with faith communities, civic groups, and individuals playing a central role in welcoming newcomers. Recent global crises – such as the fall of Kabul and the urgent call to protect U.S. allies in Afghanistan – have reignited public interest and civic participation in refugee resettlement. In this context, communities across the country have stepped in to provide support where formal systems

have faltered or paused. With the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) currently suspended and under administrative review and redesign, it is critical to understand what drives individuals to engage in community sponsorship. Survey findings indicate that most sponsors are eager to provide domestic support to refugees and other forcibly displaced individuals during the program's suspension. Notably, 77% of respondents expressed interest in sponsoring or supporting a newcomer already in the U.S., reflecting a strong public commitment to actively welcoming and assisting those approved for entry.

As the current administration undertakes efforts to redesign the resettlement infrastructure, understanding sponsor motivations offers valuable guidance for both program development and policymaking. Analysis of survey responses from individuals who participated in the Sponsor Circle Program and Welcome Corps provides critical insight into the values, relationships, and contextual factors that shape participation. These findings align with a broader body of international scholarship on volunteerism and community-based resettlement, which identifies moral obligation, faith-based commitments, relational ties, and civic identity as central motivators.[34]

Overall motivations for respondents whose most recent sponsorship was through either the Sponsor Circle Program or Welcome Corps most frequently cited the belief that helping refugees is an important American value and moral duty (30%) as their primary motivation (see Figure 2 and Table 2). Nearly as many (29%) indicated that concern for the safety of a refugee family member or friend motivated their decision to sponsor. Faith-based motivations (18%), a desire to make a positive difference in the world (14%), and the opportunity to engage in meaningful activities with family, friends, or the local community (14%) were also among the most common reasons for participating. These findings reflect a broader pattern in the literature, which highlights that refugee sponsorship is typically motivated by deeply held personal values and identities rather than external incentives. A

[34] Hynie, Michaela, et al. "What Role Does Type of Sponsorship Play in Early Integration Outcomes? Syrian Refugees Resettled in Six Canadian Cities." *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees* 35, no. 2 (2019): 36–52; Chudleigh, Kate. "Sponsoring Sanctuary: Civil Society's Role in Community-Based Refugee Protection." PhD diss., University of Oxford, 2024; Détollenaere, Jens, and Geert Lucassen. "Civic Engagement and Refugee Integration: A Cross-National Analysis." *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 18, no. 3 (2020): 295–312.

relatively small proportion of respondents selected professional ties to refugee work (3%) or a response to a specific crisis or disaster (3%) as key motivations, suggesting that instrumental motivations play a more limited role in shaping sponsor behavior.

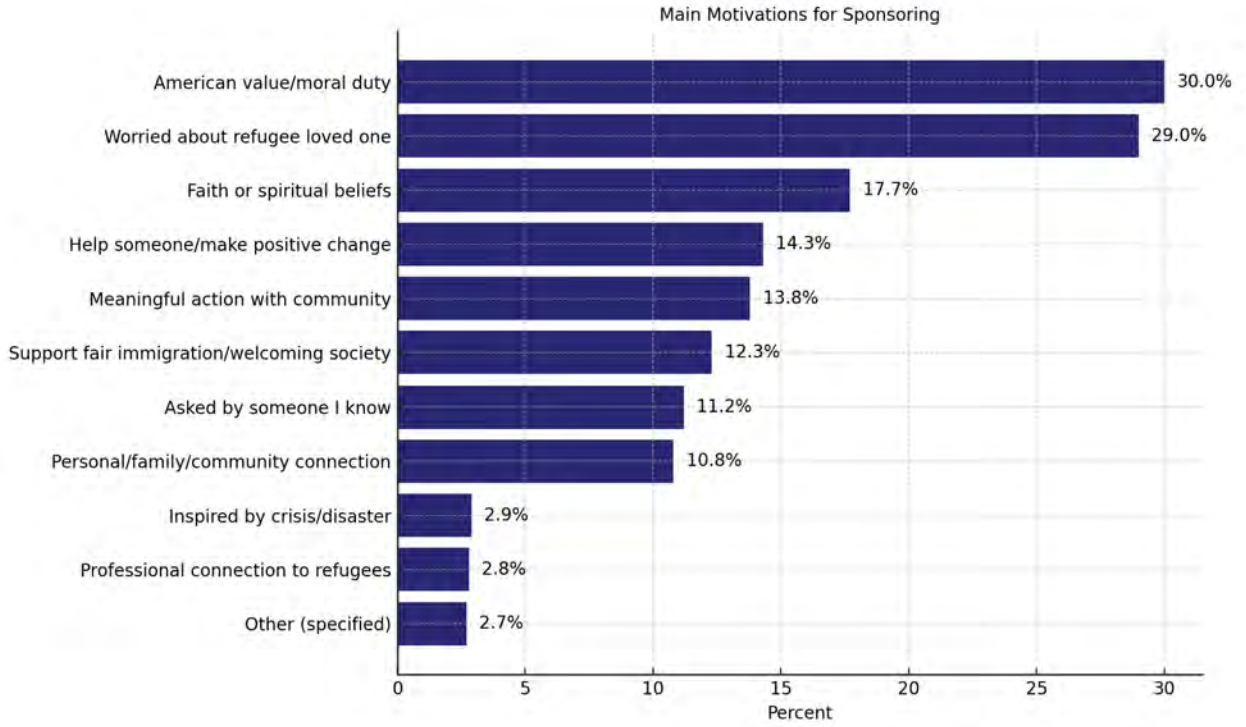

Figure 2: Respondent Motivations for Sponsoring

Motivation Variation in Programs. While many motivations were shared across programs, key differences emerged when examining what drove participation in the Sponsor Circle Program (SCP) versus the Welcome Corps (see Table 2). SCP was designed as an emergency response mechanism to support forcibly displaced individuals arriving under time bound humanitarian parole. It was rapidly mobilized to assist Afghans after the fall of Kabul and later adapted to serve other populations including Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, Ukrainians, and Venezuelans. During the temporary suspension of USRAP, SCP has provided the only national community sponsorship pathway for individuals lawfully permitted to travel to U.S., including Afghan allies with Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs). Given its emergency nature, SCP attracted sponsors whose motivations were often rooted in professional or

institutional affiliations with the populations served – such as U.S. Armed Forces veterans or former Peace Corps volunteers. Among respondents who cited a professional connection to refugees, 13% of SCP sponsors reported this as a motivation, compared to just 3.6% of Welcome Corps sponsors. SCP participants were also more likely to identify as an important American value (57.4%) and faith-based beliefs (40.7%) as key drivers of their involvement – substantially higher than the corresponding figures among Welcome Corps sponsors (45.2% and 25.1%, respectively).

In contrast, the Welcome Corps was developed to provide a long-term and ongoing program to support USRAP and add capacity to an existing refugee resettlement infrastructure. Through Welcome Corps, sponsors would support individuals already within the USRAP pipeline – known globally as community sponsorship – as well as those residing abroad whom American residents could refer to the USRAP through a process known as "sponsor someone you know," commonly referred to as *naming* in the U.S. and private sponsorship globally. This model was not based on emergencies or urgent crises but provided a mechanism to support refugees – many of whom lived in protracted situations abroad. Given the program's proactive and sustained approach to resettlement, Welcome Corps participants were more often motivated by personal relationships, emotional connections, and a desire to contribute meaningfully at the community level. Nearly half (47.1%) reported concern for the safety of a family member or friend as a motivation, compared to only 20.4% of SCP sponsors. Welcome Corps participants were also more likely to report being driven by a desire to make a positive change in the world (21.5% vs. 14.8%). While both programs attracted individuals who cited American values and civic responsibility, Welcome Corps sponsors were generally less likely to report faith-based or professional motivations and were less influenced by specific crises (see Table 2).

Table 2: Respondent Motivations by Sponsorship Program

Motivations	All Respondents	Sponsor Circle Program Respondents	Welcome Corps Respondents
I believe helping refugees and other forcibly displaced people is an important American value and part of our moral duty	30.05%	57.41%	45.21%
I was worried about the safety or a family member or friend who is a refugee	29.04%	20.37%	47.13%
Helping refugees and other forcibly displaced people is important to my faith or spiritual beliefs	17.66%	40.74%	25.10%
To help someone in need or to make a positive change in the world	14.21%	14.81%	21.46%
This was a chance to do something meaningful with my family, friends, or local community	13.71%	24.07%	21.46%
I want to support fair immigration policies and a more welcoming society	12.28%	35.19%	17.05%
Someone I know asked me to join their sponsor group	11.27%	16.67%	18.01%
I feel a person connection to helping refugees due to my family or community background	10.76%	22.22%	16.48%
I was inspired to act because of a specific crisis or disaster	2.94%	7.41%	3.64%
I have a professional connection to refugees (e.g., through military service, humanitarian work, etc.)	2.84%	12.96%	3.64%

Note: *"All Sponsors" includes responses from individuals who did not specify whether they participated in the Sponsor Circle Program or the Welcome Corps.*

Overall, the data reveal that sponsor participation in resettlement in the U.S. is primarily driven by moral conviction, personal connection, and a desire to contribute meaningfully to one's community. The most frequently cited motivations include a belief in the moral duty to help refugees, concern for the safety of loved ones, faith-based commitments, and a broader commitment to humanitarian values. These findings align with

international research on community sponsorship. In Canada, private sponsorship has been found to draw heavily on emotional responses to humanitarian crises, such as the widely publicized image of Alan Kurdi, as well as on personal or familial histories of migration and deeply held values of solidarity and responsibility.[35] In the United Kingdom, research on the Community Sponsorship Scheme similarly highlights the centrality of shared identity, empathy, and civic engagement as key motivators. Volunteers often frame their involvement as an act of collective moral purpose, rooted in affective solidarity and a desire to extend personal welcome and support to resettled families.[36] Together, these studies demonstrate that community sponsorship is a values-driven form of civic engagement, sustained not by material incentives but by emotional, relational, and ethical commitments. These motivations help explain the remarkable scale and responsiveness with which communities have built localized resettlement infrastructure across the United States.

Local Capacity to Resettle

The launch of community and private sponsorship programs in the U.S. in 2021 ushered in a new era of localized refugee resettlement capacity, characterized by rapid mobilization, financial commitment, and broad-based civic engagement. Within just six months, CSH designed and launched the SCP – the first national, privately-led community sponsorship initiative in more than 30 years – to address the urgent needs of Afghan evacuees. More than 600 Afghans were resettled through SCP in this initial phase, showcasing the ability of private citizens and local communities to respond quickly and effectively to humanitarian crises. In January 2025, the SCP expanded its infrastructure to fill critical protection gaps during the pause of USRAP, becoming the only nationally operated program for displaced individuals approved for resettlement. Through this effort, SCP supported the resettlement of 500 Afghan allies authorized to travel with Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs) across 33 states and the District of Columbia.

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[35] Nicolas Kamran, *Private Refugee Sponsorship in Canada: Sharing the Lessons of a Good Practice*, KNOMAD Paper 49 (July 2023).

[36] Reyes-Soto, Michelle. "Community Sponsorship of Refugees in the United States: A Critical Analysis." *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 2023. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-023-01055-3.

Reach of Sponsorship. Building on the success of SCP during Operation Allies Welcome, the Welcome Corps was launched as a formal, long-term sponsorship pathway within USRAP. During its first year, over 15,000 Americans applied to sponsor more than 7,000 refugees through the program's matching pathway. Following the introduction of the "sponsor someone you know" option, interest in the program surged. Within the program's first two years, over 160,000 individuals across all 50 states – spanning more than 7,700 zip codes – had signed up to support refugee resettlement. This widespread engagement underscores the depth of grassroots interest and affirms community sponsorship as a durable, scalable pillar of the U.S. refugee protection system.

Sponsor survey data reinforces the widespread geographic and civic reach of these efforts. While a significant portion of respondents came from states with long-standing resettlement infrastructure – such as Minnesota, California, New York, and Texas – participants represented 44 states and the District of Columbia (see Figure 3). Notably, respondents' locations reflect the model's unique ability to facilitate engagement across diverse geographic settings: 47% of sponsors lived in urban areas, 38% in suburban communities, and 14% in rural areas. The widespread presence of sponsors groups across the country highlights the decentralized nature of this movement and suggests that refugee welcome is becoming embedded in the social fabric of communities well beyond traditional resettlement hubs.

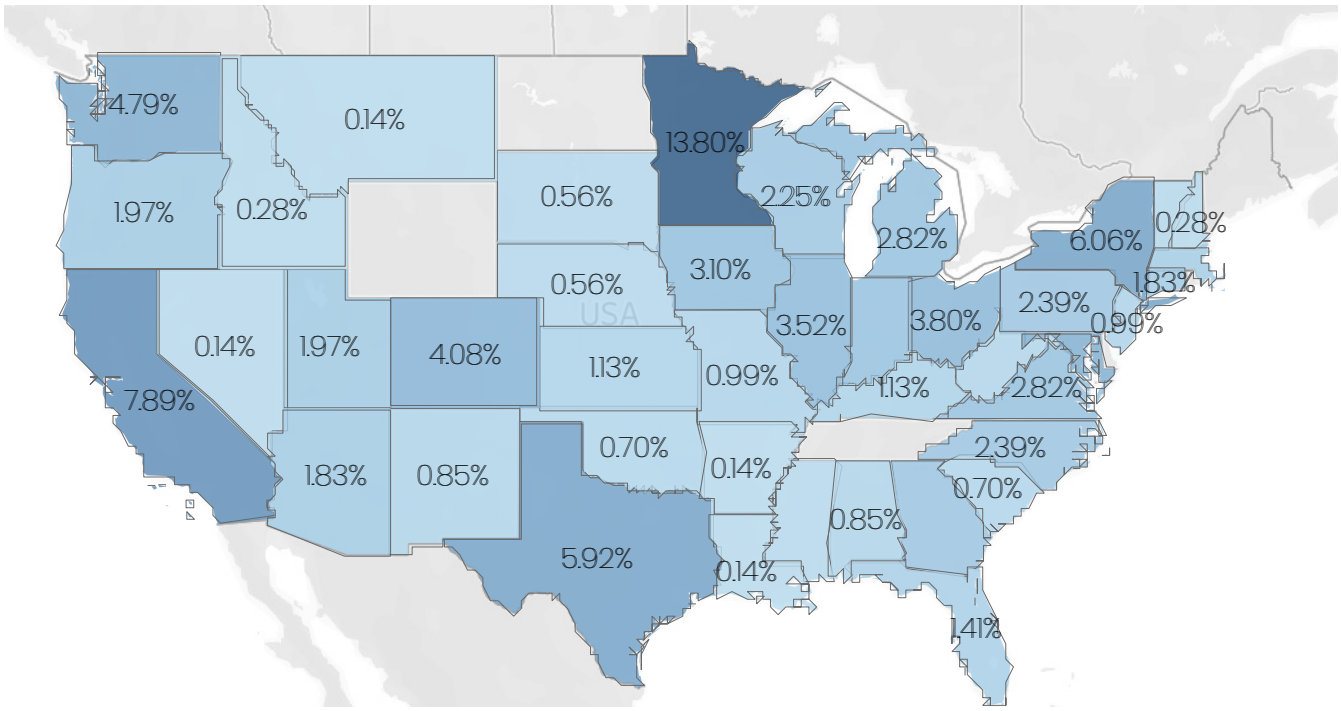

Figure 3: Percentage of Respondents by State

Group Member Associations and Affiliations. Group affiliations reported by survey respondents offer insight into the community-embedded nature of sponsorship and the varying types of relationships within sponsor groups (see Table 3). Among all respondents, the most common associations within sponsor groups were friendships (29.64%), family relationships (26.29%), and faith community ties (23.86%). However, these patterns diverge significantly by program (see Table 3). A closer look at these affiliations reveals distinct patterns that differ across the Sponsor Circle Program (SCP) and the Welcome Corps (WC), shaped in part by the underlying structure and purpose of each program.

Respondents affiliated with the Sponsor Circle Program, which was designed as a rapid-response initiative, were more likely to report that their groups were composed of members from faith communities (64.81%), followed by friends (38.89%) and neighbors (18.52%). These patterns suggest that SCP sponsors often mobilized through existing, ongoing community structures – particularly religious congregations – that provided a ready-made infrastructure for coordination, planning, and collective action. SCP respondents were far less likely to report group formation with family members (11.11%) than respondents

from the Welcome Corps, which aligns with the program's design to match sponsors with forcibly displaced individuals they did not already know. This emphasis on institutional and neighborhood networks reflects SCP's emergency-response character and the need for immediate, flexible community action.

Table 3: Respondents' Association with Group Members

Group Member Associations With One Another	All Respondents	Sponsor Circle Program Respondents	Welcome Corps Respondents
Member of my faith community	23.86%	64.81%	34.48%
School, college, or university connections	3.15%	0.00%	5.56%
Colleagues from work	4.37%	3.70%	7.66%
Family members	26.29%	11.11%	44.44%
Friends	29.64%	38.89%	47.70%
Neighbors	8.73%	18.52%	13.98%
Members of a community-based group I am part of (e.g. neighborhood association, sports club, book club, etc.)	3.86%	5.56%	6.13%
Members of a civic organization I am part of (e.g., Rotary Club, Lions Club, etc.)	0.81%	1.85%	1.34%
Members of a local advocacy or political group I am part of	4.87%	1.85%	3.07%

In contrast, respondents involved in the Welcome Corps more frequently reported forming groups with family members (44.44%), friends (47.70%), and colleagues (7.66%), and were also more likely to include individuals connected through schools or universities (5.56%). These patterns likely reflect the program's longer-term structure, and particularly the naming pathway, which allows sponsors to apply on behalf of a specific refugee they already know. While faith community ties (34.48%) remained an important organizing

structure in WC groups, they were less prevalent than in SCP. This suggests that Welcome Corps may be activating a broader array of personal and professional networks beyond those traditionally involved in community-based sponsorship efforts.

Across both programs, a smaller proportion of respondents reported that their groups formed through civic organizations, community associations, or advocacy groups, indicating these played a more limited – though still valuable – role. Additionally, approximately 10% of all respondents reported a military affiliation within their group – whether through their own service, that of a household member, or another sponsor – pointing to meaningful intersections between sponsorship and military or veteran communities.

While the data reflect the experiences of survey respondents and may not represent all sponsors, these patterns provide useful insights into how different program models engage distinct social networks. SCP respondents were more likely to report group formation through institutional and local community ties, reflecting the program's emergency orientation. Welcome Corps respondents more often described groups built on close personal connections, particularly through the naming pathway. Together, these findings highlight the flexibility of sponsorship models to tap into a range of social infrastructures – whether faith-based, familial, or civic – to support resettlement across the United States.

Localized Investment. The breadth of communities involved, significantly increased local, private investment in resettlement. Collectively, CSH's administrative data identifies that sponsor groups pledged over $210 million in private support to cover the costs of resettlement, reflecting high levels of community commitment at a time when federal infrastructure was still rebuilding. Fundraising outcomes varied by sponsorship pathway. Respondent from groups matched with a newcomer raised an average of $3,987 per newcomer supported, compared to $2,588 among respondents from groups sponsoring someone they know.

Altogether, this data illustrates a deep and widespread community infrastructure capable of supporting the reception and integration of refugees and other forcibly displaced

populations. Across urban, suburban, and rural settings, sponsor groups consistently demonstrated the ability to mobilize quickly, raise significant financial resources, and coordinate comprehensive resettlement efforts. These efforts were grounded in diverse social ties – spanning family, faith communities, neighborhoods, and military networks – underscoring the adaptability and civic depth of the sponsorship model. As the U.S. revisits the design and structure of USRAP, this foundation of widespread local engagement offers a powerful model for inclusive, community-driven resettlement. This distributed, community-based infrastructure has not only enabled rapid and flexible responses to displacement – it has also laid the groundwork for successful integration.

Community Connections and Integration Outcomes

The outcomes of community sponsorship extend far beyond the initial act of welcome. While the model plays a critical role in supporting short and medium-term refugee integration, its impacts are reciprocal and deeply embedded within the social fabric of U.S. communities. Sponsorship not only helps newcomers build new lives – it transforms the communities that receive them. These whole-of-community benefits include strengthened civic ties, renewed social cohesion, broadened cross-cultural understanding, and the creation of new networks. They also encourage ongoing volunteer involvement from community members. Most survey respondents (96.35%) reported being satisfied with their experience, and 95% said they would recommend the program they participated to others – reflecting a strong sense of fulfillment and shared purpose among sponsors. As one sponsor reflected, "It changed the way I see my town. I feel more connected – and more responsible – for making it a welcoming place."

Refugee Integration Outcomes. Respondents overwhelmingly reported positive perceptions of integration among the individuals and families they supported. A significant majority (84%) believed that the newcomers had integrated well into their local communities. Of these, 28% described the newcomer had integrated as "very well," while an additional 56% noted moderate level of integration. Fewer than 10% indicated weak or limited integration,

with most of those responses attributing challenges to broader structural barriers such as housing access, employment limitations, or language services – not to the sponsorship model itself.

In both quantitative and qualitative responses, sponsors cited a range of integration milestones: children enrolled in school, adults engaged in job training or employment, families gaining access to healthcare, and individuals building friendships with neighbors, faith communities, and co-workers. These outcomes demonstrate that sponsorship enables more than just resettlement – it creates pathways to long-term stability and belonging. Sponsors frequently emphasized the emotional and relational dimensions of these milestones. Everyday activities – helping someone open a bank account, apply for a driver's license, or learn how to navigate local systems – were framed as acts of trust-building that deepened social bonds and mutual respect. This aligns with findings from other U.S.-based research on community sponsorship,[37] which showed that sponsor-newcomer relationships serve as key sources of social capital that accelerate integration by embedding newcomers into local networks of support.

Administrative data from CSH in December 2024 reinforces these findings. Among refugees supported through the early phases of the Welcome Corps program, 94% secured permanent housing, and 71% of households had at least one adult employed within 90 days of arrival. These early outcomes demonstrate that community sponsorship is highly effective in meeting core resettlement benchmarks – housing, employment, and local integration – through personalized, community-based support. When combined with sponsor-reported data, this evidence affirms the sponsorship model as an effective, people-centered approach to refugee resettlement and integration in the U.S.

Building Relationships and Establishing Vital Social Capital. The integration process fostered the development of meaningful and lasting interpersonal relationships between sponsors and the individuals or families they supported. A strong majority (nearly

[37] Aubrey Grant, *Networks and Policy Outcomes: The Case of Refugee Integration* (PhD dissertation, George Mason University, 2024), https://mars.gmu.edu/entities/publication/c74df050-648f-4729-9ce2-7faf20d9c995.

90%) of respondents reported forming a personal bond, with over half (50.3%) describing the relationship as a *close friendship that remains active (*see Table 4). Only 5% indicated that they did not develop a relationship beyond their role in providing core sponsorship services.

These bonds are not one-sided. Rather, they are foundational to a relational model of integration in which both newcomers and sponsors grow through shared experience, cultural exchange, and mutual commitment. Many sponsors noted that these relationships reshaped their own understanding of migration, resilience, and community responsibility.

Table 4. Respondent Relationships and Connections as a Result of Sponsorship

	Weakened	**Somewhat weakened**	**Did not change**	**Somewhat strengthened**	**Strengthened**
Connections with local community	0.62%	0%	27.86%	24.77%	46.75%
Relationship with members of sponsor group	0.62%	2.15%	14.46%	23.08%	59.69%
	Weakened	**Somewhat weakened**	**Remained the same**	**Somewhat deepened**	**Deepened**
Connection to respondent's faith-based community	1.55%	0.62%	38.08%	9.91%	23.84%
Connection to immigrant and diaspora communities	1.24%		30.96%	25.70%	37.77%
	Decreased	**Somewhat decreased**	**Had no effect**	**Somewhat increased**	**Increased**
Engagement with faith communities outside of respondents	0.31%	0%	36.01%	13.35%	28.88%
	Did not develop a relationship outside providing services	**Develop some relationship but not in contact**	**Friendship but not in close contact**	**Friendship and are connected**	**Close friendship and remain connected**
Relationship with individual or family welcomed	4.95%	4.95	13.00%	26.63%	50.26%

Sponsorship also created powerful group dynamics. Nearly 83% of sponsors reported strengthened relationships with members of their sponsor group – 59.7% said those relationships were significantly strengthened, while another 23.1% noted moderate improvement (see Table 4). Respondents frequently cited shared planning, collaboration, and collective problem-solving as factors that built deeper trust and a sense of shared purpose within their teams.

Civic and Community-Level Impacts. The benefits of sponsorship reverberated throughout the broader community. 38% of respondents who applied but whose case has not yet arrived, started volunteering and/or supporting other groups or organization that serve refugees, immigrants, and other newcomers. Of those respondents with arrived cases, a majority (73%) reported that their participation in sponsorship strengthened their connection to the local community – with 46.8% reporting a strong increase and another 24.8% noting a moderate one *(*see Table 4). Only 28% reported no change, and fewer than 1% indicated any weakening of ties.

Sponsorship also sparked deeper engagement with immigrant and diaspora communities. Nearly 63% of respondents reported an increase in their connections to these communities, with 37.8% describing this shift as significant and 25.7% noting moderate growth (see Table 4). These relationships often emerged from shared experiences and sustained interaction with newcomers and their extended networks.

These benefits were also visible in cross-faith engagement. Forty-two percent of sponsors reported stronger connections to faith communities outside of their own, with 28.9% experiencing a substantial increase and another 13.4% reporting moderate growth. These connections frequently resulted in new interfaith events, coalitions, and collaborations grounded in shared support for newcomer families. The impacts also extended to sponsors' faith communities, with approximately one-third of respondents reporting a deepened engagement in their own faith because of the sponsorship experience (see Table 4).

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that the community sponsorship model fosters a relational and reciprocal approach to integration – one that benefits both refugees and host communities. Rather than viewing integration as a one-directional process focused solely on newcomer adaptation, this model emphasizes shared responsibility, co-learning, and mutual transformation. Through acts of welcome, sponsors rediscover and reweave the threads of civic life, forging stronger, more inclusive communities along the way. The success of sponsorship is not only measured by how well newcomers resettle, but by how communities mobilize, connect, and grow stronger in the process. From urban centers to rural towns, sponsor groups reported that their efforts gave rise to new relationships, deeper empathy, and a renewed sense of community support. These whole-of-community benefits offer a compelling argument for why sponsorship matters – not just as a tool in resettlement but as a catalyst for deepen community involvement and public engagement. Together, these integration outcomes and community-level benefits reflect the transformative potential of sponsorship. As the data show, sponsorship strengthens civic ties, deepens social cohesion, and creates lasting bonds that extend far beyond formal resettlement timelines.

Conclusion

Community and private sponsorship in the United States is not only reshaping refugee resettlement – it is revitalizing the communities that welcome newcomers. Community sponsorship strengthens the whole of community by deepening social cohesion, broadening civic participation, and enhancing local capacity to respond to displacement. The model offers a flexible and localized approach to refugee protection that complements formal resettlement infrastructure while delivering tangible, reciprocal benefits for both newcomers and host communities.

Survey findings show that sponsors are primarily motivated by deeply held personal values, including moral obligation, concern for the safety of family and friends, civic duty, and faith-based commitments. These values not only shape sponsor participation but also contribute to the formation of meaningful, long-lasting relationships with the individuals and

families they support. Community and private sponsorship expand local resettlement capacity by leveraging existing social networks, institutions, and volunteer infrastructure. The rapid launch and scaling of the Sponsor Circle Program, followed by the formalization of the Welcome Corps within the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, illustrate the model's ability to deliver timely, community-based responses to emerging protection needs. Sponsorship efforts have extended beyond traditional resettlement hubs, reaching suburban, rural, and faith-based communities and demonstrating broad national interest in refugee welcome.

Outcomes associated with community sponsorship consistently demonstrate deeper integration for refugees and newcomers, as well as stronger local connections and relationships. Sponsors overwhelmingly report that newcomers are integrating well into their communities, accessing critical services, participating in school and work, and building strong social ties. These outcomes are facilitated by individualized resettlement support from sponsors and the broader community networks they activate. In turn, sponsors report stronger connections to their local communities, greater engagement with immigrant and diaspora groups, and a renewed sense of civic purpose.

These findings affirm that community sponsorship is not merely an alternative resettlement mechanism – it is a catalyst for strengthening communities at the local level. Sponsorship reinforces the social fabric, expands civic participation, and fosters durable networks of mutual support. At the same time, it accelerates newcomer integration and offers a flexible, community-driven model for welcoming displaced populations in a responsive and sustainable way. As the United States seeks to revise its resettlement and immigration infrastructure, community sponsorship should remain a central component of that vision. With sustained investment, policy support, and inclusive outreach, community and private sponsorship can meet urgent humanitarian needs while fostering stronger, more connected communities across the country.

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