



PROMISING PRACTICE: INCLUDING GUESTS FROM THE COMMUNITY

OVERVIEW

An ongoing challenge of Cultural Orientation (CO) is how to keep participants engaged while focusing on the important key messages of CO. With so much vital information to convey in such little time, it is essential that CO providers keep the classroom active and dynamic.

One strategy that experienced CO providers employ to keep participants engaged is to invite community guests, such as health providers, local educators, or the police, into the classroom to participate in sessions on CO topics related to their work. It makes the class more animated and transforms rehearsed scenarios into real life situations. It can also help facilitate refugees feeling more integrated in their new communities.

In fact, the involvement of community guests as a part of learning has long been a promising practice promoted in formal education systems. In these settings, it has been linked to improved attendance and increased social capital, thus improving the functioning of the community as a whole. While this strategy provides potential in a CO context, it does require careful planning and coordination. Therefore, this CO Promising Practice document offers guidance to CO providers who want to make the most of experts in their communities.

APPLICATION

GOAL OF PROMISING PRACTICE

By inviting select community guests to CO you will be able to:

- Reinforce key messages on select CO topics, thereby addressing CO objectives and indicators
- Enhance learning and engagement with a focus on providing practical and relevant information to adult learners
- Create a positive learning environment and ensure trust by introducing a guest of the community to refugees in the presence of a CO provider

WHAT TO CONSIDER BEFORE YOU BEGIN



WHO IS INVOLVED

Organizational leadership should be included from the planning stage to ensure that engagement with the community aligns with organizational strategy and policies, and that the overall implementation is appropriate. The **CO provider** will be instrumental in coordinating with organizational leadership, potential community guests, and interpreters to ensure that all parties are well-prepared and in agreement before implementation. Guests from the community can vary and should be selected based on specific goals. **Interpreters** may be needed while the community guest is presenting or interacting with a CO class. The interpreter should maintain the same standard of professionalism as with any other interpretation assignment.



MATERIALS AND RESOURCES NEEDED

There are various documents that we recommend you prepare when inviting a guest from the community.

- List of possible community guests, which can be used as a jumping-off point to engage with organizational leadership. In reviewing this list, community guests should be selected for specific CO-related purposes.
- Template guide for community guest that will be attending the CO session. This guide might include tips for activities, enforce objectives of CO, provide overall background information about refugee resettlement, how to work with an interpreter, or other frequently asked questions.
- Partnership outreach emails and agreements, which will help to cultivate positive partnerships and ensure that all stakeholders have a unified vision on the purpose for the community guests' role in CO. Be sure to check with organization processes and protocols.
- Post-CO documents, including thank you notes, or an equivalent, to provide to the community guest after the session, and feedback forms or other evaluative tools to document results.



TIMING

In terms of preparing and implementing this promising practice, you will need to consider the time involved in engaging organizational leadership and cultivating potential community guests or partners. This will vary across organizations. Once a community guest has been selected, additional time should be factored in for preparing that individual, along with time for follow-up activities that will help to maintain the relationship and ideally improve future sessions.

STEP BY STEP GUIDE

1

ASSESS NEED

This may include identifying the topics in CO that might be enhanced or improved with the engagement of a community guest, or determining if there is a specific need based on the participant demographics your organization is serving. At this phase, it is important to identify and meet with the correct leadership members within your organization to obtain their buy-in and additional input. Based on the needs, you should form a concrete strategy and goal for community engagement with CO. For example, this could be to improve understanding of the healthcare system or use community guests to better support refugees that are 65 years or older.

2

IDENTIFY POTENTIAL COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Once you have determined a particular strategy or focus for engaging the community, you will want to identify potential community guests. During this stage, it will be important to understand your organization's internal protocols or processes for developing partnerships and identify existing relationships or connections.

3

CONDUCT OUTREACH

By this stage, you should be sure to understand and follow internal protocol or processes for your organization in terms of conducting partnership outreach. These processes may require a specific format for an introductory call or email, or documentation of contact with an organization. When conducting outreach, you will want to be clear about your goals and objectives in general, and also with the specific community guest. This is where organizational leadership may also be helpful as they may already have existing contacts and/or want to facilitate initial conversations.

4

FORMALIZE PARTNERSHIP

After you have identified a community guest, it is recommended that the partnership be formalized. At the very least, this should include an agreement of expectations and the parameters of the partnership. This agreement should be linked back to the original strategy and goal(s) identified during the needs assessment, and may also be based on internal protocol or processes for your organization.

LIST OF POSSIBLE COMMUNITY GUESTS

- Apartment managers
- Bank or credit union
- City government
- Potential employers, corporate liaisons
- Energy assistance organizations
- Firefighter
- Health clinic, hospital, mental health staff or organization
- Home buying organizations
- Legal professionals
- Library staff
- Representatives from mutual assistance associations
- Police officer
- Public benefits officer
- Religious leaders from churches, mosques, synagogues, etc.
- School or college representative, computer literacy trainers
- Tax representatives
- Transportation authorities
- Women-focused support organizations staff
- Community center staff
- 911 operators

PRACTICE IN ACTION

At the Catholic Charities Diocese of Charlotte, North Carolina, they use a range of community guests, including representatives from the local community college, the police department, healthcare professionals, and a speaker from Mental Health America, who provides an interactive and engaging presentation on the phases of cultural adjustment.

HIAS has various offices that draw on community guests as a part of CO. For example, in Florida, through the University of Southern Florida, they have identified a Congolese professor in the school of public health who leads discussions with Congolese refugees around health and hygiene.

Also, the Gulf Coast Jewish Family and Children's Services office has an organization that comes in and teaches financial literacy as a guest. The same community organization expanded their partnership by offering more financial education for refugees outside of CO.

STEP BY STEP GUIDE CONTINUED

5

MEET PRIOR TO THE CO SESSION

Prior to the CO session, you should provide the community guest with an overview of CO. During this pre-session overview, you can include information on refugee resettlement, cultural competence, working with low-literacy populations, and/or working an interpreter. This overview could also include an opportunity to observe a CO class or meet with organizational leadership. As with the other steps, make sure you are engaging with the appropriate organizational leadership or staff members.

6

CO DELIVERY

Schedule the community guest for the appropriate CO session. Ensure they are set up for success in delivering their session. This means not only familiarizing the community guest with CO, but also the best ways to engage with refugees in delivering information. Guiding community guests to be successful also includes informing them on how much time they will have, and in some cases assisting them to facilitate the session. At the same time, you will also want to ensure that the refugees are expecting and prepared to welcome the community guest and have clear expectations on what they will learn. During the session you will also need to do additional monitoring around speed, clarity, and time.

7

POST CO FOLLOW-UP

After the session, you will want to check-in with your community guest. This check-in is an opportunity to exchange feedback and, as applicable, determine next steps in the partnership. You will also want to thank him/her formally. If you employed any evaluative tools to collect feedback from participants or measure results of knowledge learned from the community guest, you will need to analyze and communicate the results with your organization and with the community guest as appropriate. This will be dependent on your strategy and goal for engaging the community guest in the future.



TIPS FOR SUCCESS

The following are a list of tips and recommendations based on feedback collected from CO leaders as well as research on the engagement of the community in K-12 education.

- **Develop a shared vision** by ensuring that all stakeholders involved agree and are clear on goals and objectives. This also includes setting clear expectations and evaluating these over time.
- **Build strong partnerships** based on clear communication and trust. This may include reviewing existing partnerships to see what has or has not worked in the past.
- **Use targeted outreach** when possible to ensure alignment with the developed shared vision, and as possible, focus on high-need areas.
- **Ensure structure for the community partner**, in terms of how much time they have, what they may present and do during the CO session, or even help them prepare their session, if appropriate.
- **Address cultural differences** between all stakeholders involved, particularly as this may be the first time for some community guests to engage with the refugee community.
- Use this promising practice as an opportunity for professional development and to **build your capacity** as a CO provider, while **ensuring that you have the appropriate buy-in** from organizational leadership.

Cultural Orientation Resource Exchange

8719 Colesville Road, 3rd Floor • Silver Spring, MD 20910

www.coresourceexchange.org



The contents of this document were developed under an agreement financed by the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, United States Department of State but do not necessarily represent the policy of that agency and should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government. This material is in the public domain and may be reproduced.