



# CULTURAL ORIENTATION GUIDANCE FOR STATE PUBLIC ASSISTANCE STAFF

## BASIC INFORMATION

Cultural Orientation (CO) provides newcomers (e.g., refugees, Special Immigrant Visa holders, and humanitarian parolees) with the vital knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to adapt to their new lives and achieve self-sufficiency. CO generally begins overseas and continues in the U.S. within the community, usually with a local Resettlement Agency. Some topics covered during CO include the importance of learning English and early employment. Receiving communities, including public assistance staff also play an important role in delivering key CO messages.

## TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE SERVICE DELIVERY

- ✓ **BE TRAUMA-INFORMED**  
Consider the events that led to the newcomer's displacement, such as the trauma of unwillingly fleeing their country of origin and the cultural adjustment experienced from resettling in a new country. Given the length and complexity of the resettlement journey, newcomers can have many different goals and concerns competing for their attention. Try providing information about the program multiple times and in different ways (e.g., verbally and translated written resources).
- ✓ **TAKE A STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH**  
It is often easier for us to do something ourselves when we feel rushed for time. Instead, make the effort to show newcomers how to accomplish certain tasks on their own. For example, show newcomers how to search for and complete online job applications. While newcomers arrive with a range of experiences with digital technology, there are certain digital skills related to the employment process which all newcomers could benefit to learn.
- ✓ **PROVIDE GENDER EQUITABLE SERVICES**  
Include all adults in case management meetings. Once you identify the newcomer's native language, call an interpreter. If one family member speaks English, avoid speaking only to that individual or asking them to interpret. Direct your questions to all adults to ensure they understand their rights and responsibilities under the program.
- ✓ **PRACTICE CULTURAL AWARENESS**  
American culture is still new for newcomers. Newcomers will need help navigating American systems to find, get, and keep a job. This includes training on how to find jobs, how to avoid scams, basic interview skills, and U.S. work culture. Incorporate CORE's translated Settle In resources into the newcomer's employment plan, such as CORE's video on employment in the U.S.

## RESOURCES

CORE's multilingual resources include the Settle In website and Settle In app. Resources are available in Arabic, Burmese, Dari, English, Kinyarwanda, Spanish, Swahili, Pashto, Russian, and Ukrainian.

The following are additional resources that may assist law enforcement in delivering CO.

- **CORE: Employment Activity Bank**
- **CORE: Digital Technology and Literacy Activity Bank**



Settle In App  
[desktop.settlein.app](https://desktop.settlein.app)



Settle In Website  
[settleinus.org](https://settleinus.org)



## KEY CULTURAL ORIENTATION MESSAGES ABOUT EMPLOYMENT



- 1 There are responsibilities associated with the type of assistance you receive, such as attending job training and English classes.
- 2 You should not delay employment until you learn English. You will need to continue learning English while working, even if your schedule prevents you from attending in-person classes.
- 3 There are many ways to learn English, independently and online.
- 4 Employment is not guaranteed by the government. You play a central role in obtaining employment in the U.S.
- 5 You are expected to accept the first job offered to you, even if it is not in your chosen profession.
- 6 Adult education can be expensive in the U.S. For many newcomers, the best option may be to work full-time while going to school part-time or beginning the process to re-certify your overseas credentials.
- 7 Public assistance is limited and you need to work to earn an income. Know when you are responsible to cover your household expenses.
- 8 All employable adults in your household may have to work to meet your household expenses.
- 9 Once you start working, there are withholdings in your paycheck for taxes, social security, etc. Paying taxes is a legal obligation in the U.S.

# DELIVERING KEY CULTURAL ORIENTATION MESSAGES

When delivering key CO messages, apply adult learning strategies, such as asking open-ended questions and engaging in a two-way conversation.

The following activity provides an example on how to deliver key CO messages that review the basics of employment in the U.S.



## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 **Explain to newcomers: I will read three statements. Ask newcomers if they agree or disagree with the statement, and if possible, explain your answer.**

**Statement 1: It is the government's responsibility to find you a job.**

 **Key Messages: Disagree.** Employable adults are enrolled in an employment program. You are responsible for finding a job. It may take weeks or months to find a job, and you may have many job interviews. You should be prepared to pursue employment right away.

**Statement 2: You will have little trouble finding a job in the same career you had at home.**

 **Key Messages: Disagree.** You are expected to accept the first job that is offered to you, even if it is not in your field. Your first job will help you build a work history and begin to support your family. To build a good work history, you should stay at the job for at least six months. Typical first jobs include positions in customer service (e.g., restaurant servers, cashiers, or housekeeping) or factories (e.g., packaging or assembly line workers).

**Statement 3: All adults are expected to work in the United States.**

 **Key Messages: Agree.** All employable adults work in the U.S. Women make up half the workforce, do the same jobs as men at all levels, and often supervise male coworkers. Families with young children need to consider childcare when determining who will work. Childcare is expensive in the U.S. Parents can work opposite schedules to accommodate their childcare needs. It is illegal to leave underage children home alone.

- 2 **Assist newcomers in navigating the Settle In website. Under "Life in the U.S.," select the topic: Employment. Explain this lesson will review information about employment in the U.S. Play the video "Employment in the U.S. Slideshow."**

Cultural Orientation Resource Exchange

For more information, visit CORE at [coresourceexchange.org](http://coresourceexchange.org).



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