



Fact Sheet: Role of Supporting Community Organisations in the Group Mentorship Program

Background

Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia (CRSA) has been developing a detailed vision for a future community refugee sponsorship program in Australia. One key recommendation that CRSA has made for the design of this program is for sponsor groups to either be incorporated or, alternatively, organise themselves to come under the auspices of a Supporting Community Organisation (SCO). This is similar to the role of 'Sponsorship Agreement Holders' in Canada or 'Lead Sponsors' in the United Kingdom.

While Australia's borders have largely been closed to international and humanitarian arrivals, CRSA has developed a modified version of a future Australian sponsorship program – which we call the Group Mentorship Program (GMP) – that trains and matches local volunteer mentor groups to provide holistic support to refugee households already living in Australia but still early in their settlement journeys. CRSA launched this program as a pilot in 2020, and due to its success, will run the program again in 2021. You can view our short film of the pilot program [here](#).

In our pilot program CRSA worked directly with loose groups of local volunteers who were keen to act as 'mentor groups'. For the second round of the program, CRSA has carved out a specific role for supporting community-based organisations to assist in the mobilisation, organisation and oversight of mentor groups. This has been done to further refine elements of this role, test its functionality and ascertain scalability for a future sponsorship program.

Looking towards a future sponsorship system

Community refugee sponsorship is a practice that enables individuals in a local area to come together to form a sponsor group, which commits to providing financial, emotional and settlement support to refugee newcomers for a fixed period of time (eg 12 months).

We expect that under a future program sponsor groups will either need to be incorporated themselves or form under the auspices of a Supporting Community Organisation (SCO), willing to take on the legal responsibility for the group. In the latter situation, sponsor groups would need to find an SCO that will agree to auspice them and support their application to sponsor refugees. Sponsor groups will receive training and ongoing support from experienced settlement organisations.



This brief outlines our vision for the role of an SCO and their responsibilities and obligations in our Group Mentorship Program which links local volunteer ‘mentor groups’ with refugee households who are already in Australia (unlike a full sponsorship program which would involve the sponsorship of refugees arriving directly from overseas).

Terminology: ‘Sponsorship’ vs ‘Mentorship’

The GMP was initially envisioned as a one-off, pilot project to pave the way for a future large-scale community refugee sponsorship program backed by the federal government. This project involves local volunteer groups supporting refugees who are already in Australia (rather than arriving directly from overseas), who often have some level of government-funded settlement support. To distinguish this initial program from the ultimate sponsorship program that we hope to see introduced we adopted the terminology of ‘mentors’ and ‘mentorship’ rather than ‘sponsors’ and ‘sponsorship’. Additionally, we will refer to refugee households involved in this program as mentee/s.

Why get involved?

We’re heard from a lot of Australian organisations who share our vision for expanding and improving refugee protection and the settlement experience in Australia. In fact, more than 120 organisations have signed up to a civil society pledge to support the success of a community refugee sponsorship program in Australia – see the list on our website [here](#). The GMP offers Australian community organisations a chance to turn their in-principle support into practical action.

By being involved as an SCO, you can offer your members, volunteers, staff or other stakeholders a new, exciting and rewarding way to express their generosity and compassion towards refugees, while also strengthening connections and capacity in your local community. Your organisation can tap into the training, support and a national community of practice that CRSA provides while remaining fully engaged with those members, volunteers etc. Those who form mentor groups will still be connected with your organisation, but also feel a part of a national and international community seeking to provide local welcome and support to refugees.

In countries around the world that have sponsorship programs we’ve heard time and time again that this community-led opportunity is, for many volunteers, ‘one of the most meaningful things they’ve ever done’.



We want to problem solve and innovate with you

Part of the intent of this program is to partner with community organisations who are willing to explore and innovate - to help further articulate a future framework for community sponsorship of refugees in Australia. We have some of the answers, but need community organisations as partners to help us complete the picture. What is outline in this document is our vision for the role of SCOs but we want to explore this with interested organisations and are willing to be adaptable to your needs and processes.

What organisations can become SCOs?

Under the GMP, we are seeking to work with SCOs that are legal entities registered and incorporated under relevant state or federal legislation including, for example, churches, schools, universities, sporting clubs, community associations, charities, non-profit organisations and businesses. Experience in providing support to migrant/refugee communities is an asset for an SCO but definitely not mandatory – part of the objective is for more organisations to become active in working with newly arrived refugees.

The idea is that SCOs will work with one or more mentor groups made up of people already engaged with that SCO (eg members of a sporting club or church congregation) OR independent groups of individuals who are in the same geographic area as the SCO and who need an organisation to support their involvement in the GMP.

It is desirable (but not mandatory) that SCOs have existing infrastructure to support mentor groups such as financial management systems, insurance and codes of conduct.

What is the role of an SCO in the program?

We envisage that individual mentor groups will have day-to-day responsibility for providing support to refugee mentee households. SCOs will be there to back them up - helping with the mobilisation, organisation and oversight of the mentor groups that they auspice. The following is a summary of the functions that we hope SCOs might be willing to perform:

- Mobilising volunteers to participate and helping them form mentor groups
- Assist mentor groups with the application process, including obtaining and maintaining valid police checks and working with children checks
- Ensuring all mentor group members agree to abide by a mandatory mentorship code of conduct as set by CRSA (supplemented by the SCO where needed)
- Helping mentor groups set up or gaining access to a bank account in which the group's funds can be safely held



- Where possible, allow groups to offer tax deductible receipts for fundraising donations (if SCO has its deductible gift recipient (DGR) status)
- Helping mentor groups access public liability insurance (with minimum cover limit of at least \$10 million) for their mentorship activities, and assist them to acquire any other necessary insurances after helping groups make an assessment on what other types of insurance may be appropriate given their proposed activities
- Check in from time to time with mentor groups and mentees and be a first point of contact for mentor groups who require assistance with issues arising during the mentorship period

We envisage that SCOs would be self-funded to perform the above functions, though it is possible that SCOs could charge individual mentor groups a modest nominal fee in return for the support that the SCO provides to the mentor group.