

**FAQs for Congregational/Group Sponsorship
Asylum Seekers Sponsorship Project
A Collaborative Effort with SURJ, FFI, ILL¹ and Other Organizations**

January 30, 2019

Can a faith community or congregation act as the sponsor for an asylum seeker?

- Having a wide community of support is crucial for a successful and sustainable sponsorship relationship so, in many ways, congregations are ideal for offering this kind of support.
- Many current asylum seekers are family units and having the support of a congregation makes the demands of sponsoring multiple asylees more easily manageable.
- However, a congregation cannot be the named sponsor. Immigration services requires that an individual must be the identified sponsor and that person, presumably, would act as the coordinator of all the logistical and support activities the compa needs.

Our congregation has not made a public declaration of Sanctuary. Are we still eligible to be sponsors to asylum seekers?

- Sanctuary and Asylum are very different things, although both involve stepping up to act as advocates for immigrant friends wishing to gain the right to remain in this country — but there are crucial differences.
- Sanctuary is invoked (in most cases) when an immigrant has been issued an order of deportation and that person's legal support team needs more time to continue the legal process to advocate for permission for the immigrant to remain in the country. The person may resort to taking shelter in a house of worship during those proceedings (which may extend many months) and, as a result, may not leave the premises. In most cases, the attorneys for that person are in communication with immigration authorities about the location of their client. Taking sanctuary is not in itself unlawful but it obviously involves some level of risk to the congregation and is an extreme hardship for the person in sanctuary and their family. It is also not a legal status — while the Obama Administration authored guidance asking ICE to avoid detaining an individual who is seeking sanctuary in a “sensitive location” like a house of worship, there is no law that prevents ICE from entering the building and detaining that individual (or other individuals in the building at the time).

¹ SURJ = Showing Up for Racial Justice www.showingupforracialjustice.org; FFI = Freedom for Immigrants www.freedomforimmigrants.org; ILL = Innovation Law Lab www.innovationlawlab.org

- Sponsoring an asylum seeker, on the other hand, is precisely complying with the law. If a person in a foreign country has credible fear for their safety in their home country, they are permitted to enter the U.S. and make a plea for asylum. While authorities are reviewing that claim (which might also take many months), the asylee needs a sponsor who is a U.S. citizen (or legal permanent resident) to help them get through the initial stages of the process and to help them learn life in this country.

Are there considerations that should be weighed before a congregation takes on a commitment like this?

- Yes, most definitely. Among them is anticipated support (or push back) from your denominational authorities, the congregation outside of the immediate support team, and your neighbors. Each denominational hierarchy and polity functions a bit differently, of course, and each congregation has their own ethos and self-characterization; some neighborhoods are far more welcoming than others. As you weigh bringing a compa (or compa and family) into your setting, it is important that the environment is thoroughly and realistically assessed. The asylum seekers are fleeing violence and fear; the last thing we would want to do would be to place them in a setting where they were made to feel unwelcome or that they were somehow a source of acrimony.
- Another important consideration for you to be aware of: when an asylee's address is registered with the immigration authorities, they *could* make an unannounced visit. Anyone in the building whose status is a concern would be at risk. For that reason, we ask you to think carefully about any persons who might regularly be at the location who are outside one of these categories: 1) a US citizen, or 2) a Legal Permanent Resident, or 3) a holder of an Employee Authorization Document, or 4) an exchange student. We would hate to inadvertently place others with whom you have a relationship at risk.

Does the asylum seeker have to live with the named sponsor?

- Congregations may have parsonages, apartments, or access to other living quarters which might better accommodate a family unit. The required governmental paperwork should be accurately filed showing the true address where the compas are residing.
- Whether the asylees live with the named sponsor or elsewhere, the sponsor agrees to be the one who takes primary responsibility to oversee the coordination of needs — especially travel to/from ICE/ISAP check-ins and court dates.
- Even if living in separate residences, the sponsor takes on a very active role, especially at first, to be sure that the asylees get acclimated to life in the U.S. with plenty of support. They will need assistance with learning local laws, grocery

shopping, clothes shopping, acquiring cell phones, etc. For the first weeks or months, frequent contact and availability is needed. This is why it is helpful to have a team of people who are working in concert with the named sponsor to offer all the support needed.

- Use of an online coordinating application such as Care Calendar can be helpful to keep everyone informed and to coordinate the volunteer help:
<https://www.carecalendar.org>

What are the requirements to be a named sponsor for an asylum seeker?

- Sponsor must have current legal immigration status in the US (US Citizen, Legal Permanent Resident)
- Sponsor must provide proof of housing
- Sponsor must be able to provide asylum seeker with safe housing
- Sponsor must be able to provide asylum seeker with basic necessities
- Sponsor must provide proof of income
- Sponsor must ensure that asylum seeker attends all ICE/ISAP check-ins and scheduled court dates

What is the time commitment?

- We ask that a sponsor agree to provide housing, clothing, and all meals for the asylum seekers for 6 months to a year. (This is because an asylum seeker is not eligible to apply for a work permit for 150 days after the asylum petition has been filed, and not allowed to work for 180 days after.) This is definitely a long term commitment.
- The asylum seeker has the right to move at any time for any reason — though we try to continue to find ways to help the asylum seeker should they move.
- Should the relationship become difficult, please reach out to us for support. In rare cases where the match of compa & sponsor is not sustainable, we do our best to make a smooth transition to a new sponsor as quickly as possible.

What if the asylum seeker moves, is it our responsibility to inform ICE?

- It is the asylum seeker's responsibility to inform the immigration authorities if they move, BUT It is always best for the sponsor to assist the asylum seeker and to aid in their understanding that it is crucial to keep ICE informed of any change of address.

What if the asylum seeker doesn't show up to court?

- It is the responsibility of the asylum seeker to show up in court

- It is a best practice for the sponsor to be well aware of all court hearings and make plans with the asylum seeker to be able to attend their hearings in court
- If the asylum seeker does not show up in court, it is possible that ICE may come to the sponsor's residence to inquire about the whereabouts of the asylum seeker
- There is no legal repercussion for the sponsor if the asylum seeker does not show up in court

Can asylum seekers travel across state lines?

- Yes, the asylum seeker can travel outside of the state, unless specifically prohibited in the custody determination with ICE and/or the immigration court, or prohibited in distance of travel by an electronic monitoring device
- The sponsor is not required to tell anyone of the asylum seeker's travel
- The asylum seeker should always let their ICE office know if they intend to travel outside of the state (location and period of time), most especially if they are wearing an electronic monitoring device

If someone commits a crime or gets in trouble with ICE, can the sponsor be held liable?

- The sponsor is not liable if someone commits a crime unless they have participated in the crime or can be implicated in the crime
- The sponsor is not liable if the asylum seeker violates the terms of their custody agreements with ICE

Is the sponsor financially responsible for the asylum seeker?

- The sponsor is not *legally* financially responsible for the asylum seeker, but SHOULD take responsibility for the asylum seeker's basic necessities while they are living in their care (food, basic clothing, required transportation, etc.)
- This is another reason why congregational settings can be helpful as it expands the options for fundraising and increases the number of people helping raise those funds
- If your congregation determines that sponsorship is not a good fit, there is significant need for financial sponsorships, wherein your community could help support asylees who are sponsored elsewhere
- Many people set up social media solicitations, such as Go Fund Me sites, to expand the number of contributors

What about health insurance? If they get hurt, what do we do?

- Asylum seekers do not have health insurance

- If they get hurt they should seek appropriate medical services within the collective means of the sponsor and asylum seeker
- Sponsors should do research on the cost of a quickcare visit before it is needed — there can be a big difference in price between one clinic and another
- Checking within your congregation for skilled professionals who may be willing to donate their time can be very beneficial for all. For instance, if there are medical providers, dental providers, lawyers, social workers, etc. it is helpful to speak with them ahead of time about their willingness to offer pro bono assistance.

Can the compa get a driver's license?

- It depends case by case, state by state.
- The asylum seeker should consult with their immigration attorney and/or legal service provider. Competent legal support and guidance is extremely important to their asylum petition.

This is new territory for us. What kind of support will be offered once a match is made?

- There is an online network of people who are currently sponsors and those awaiting compas (information on that is included in your Sponsor Kit.) We strongly urge you to connect with others who have taken on this role and learn from their experience.
- Much of this is uncharted territory and we are all employing a lot of patience and flexibility as we navigate the complexities of the immigration system and its impact on the lives of compas.
- Again, having an identified congregational team acting in support of the named sponsor is very important. This is a major commitment that sponsors are making, helping the asylees navigate this confusing and often unwelcoming society. Depending on where you are in the country, even the weather could be shockingly new to them. And you've agreed to join them and offer whatever support you can as they continue on their journey toward a new life. The entire process can be overwhelming for everyone involved.
- Here are a few additional tips:
 - Develop your support network - In addition to the congregational team, there may be other sponsors living near you. Contact them to talk through ideas for supporting each other. For example, if you will both be sponsoring families with children, you can share any research school enrollment in your area. If there are no sponsors near you, reach out to friends, family, churches, and other organizations in your area. (As we

indicated before, you will also have online access to a group of folks who are also going through this process.)

- Research the immigration advocacy organizations that operate in your area. What kind of resources are available? Share those resources with other sponsors in your region. www.immigrationadvocates.org is a great place to start internet research. If you can make time to visit local community centers, especially community centers that work with immigrants or specifically Central Americans, we encourage you to do so! They might know of support networks for everything from legal support to childcare to English classes to food assistance.
- If your area has a public transportation system, try to learn it, or ask a friend who uses it to help teach compas how to use it.
- Remember: It takes a village. You may decide to have individual team members take on separate roles in support of the compa - e.g. transportation, groceries, other shopping, check-ins, legal paperwork, etc.
- And be in touch with us, your support team! We can help troubleshoot legal questions and point you in the right direction for community resources.
- Get as many bilingual people onboard as possible. Speaking your compa's language fluently is not a requirement for sponsorship, but it makes everything that much more complicated if you cannot communicate with some degree of ease. So gather people on the team who are able to facilitate communication.
- Keep your phone on you and on ring even at night if possible; answer even if you don't know the number, as ICE calls are unpredictable and often come from strange or unlisted numbers.

If our compa is still in detention, how can we support them prior to their release?

- Answer the phone when they call. Write letters. Start raising money. Gather your village. Start doing research about resources in your area.
- Sponsors put money in their commissary accounts. (Asylum seekers are not given free phone calls while in detention, and the food is horrible. Money in the commissary account allows them to make phone calls and buy a few personal items. The support team will assist you in learning how to accomplish this. See below for more info.)

How will the compa get from the detention center to my home?

- Once the compa has received parole or a bond (and that bond has been paid), ICE will contact the sponsor about travel arrangements. At this point, you will

need to arrange transportation at your expense — either via plane or bus. Be in touch with the compa's lawyer about whether a plane or bus would make more sense in terms of finances, but also in terms of ease of travel — airports are VERY difficult to navigate if you don't know English well.

- Sponsors will usually need to email or fax a copy of the detainee's flight or bus itinerary. ICE will then bus them to the airport or Greyhound station for their travel.
- **IMPORTANT: Do not purchase tickets for the compa until ICE/DHS has asked you to do so.**

What is a commissary account? How do I deposit money to it?

- A commissary account is the account created for individuals while they are detained. Each detention center has a different way of depositing money on a person's commissary account. It is best to wait until you hear from them and confirm the detention center where they're located, as well as their "**A-number**" so you can then find out what system is set up in their particular location. The detention center will have information online if you google the detention center name.
- BE AWARE of scams — do not deposit money into someone's account in any way other than the "official" mechanism used by the detention center. Sometimes sponsor names/numbers are sold within detention centers in order to scam you — do not fall for calls requesting money from people you don't know!

How can I meet other sponsors in my area?

- There is a GoogleGroup for all sponsors. We want to make sure that you have all the support possible to ensure a great experience for both you and the compa(s)! The group is a great way to learn from and support each other. Ask in the group who else is in your area and plan a meet up. Showing Up For Racial Justice will also facilitate connections between local SURJ chapters and sponsors. Finally, we also have a monthly sponsor support phone call, and once you are matched, you will receive invites to these calls.
- Additionally, the number of faith communities sponsoring under this congregational model is growing. We anticipate building a separate GoogleGroup which will allow communication, brain storming and sharing of resources around the issues particular to group sponsoring.

Is there an estimate of how much we should count on budgeting for this?

Here is a sample budget based on a single compa living with a family in Las Vegas. Actual fees and monthly costs may vary widely but this gives a listing of the sorts of expenses the sponsors should be prepared to find funding for:

SAMPLE BUDGET FOR SPONSORS		
NOTE: This is a sample budget for someone living in Las Vegas (a medium-priced city). Your costs will vary based on your location and the needs of the compa, so please adjust accordingly. Remember that ideally your village will assist in covering some of these costs.		
Expense	Monthly cost	One-time fee
Passport		\$100.00
State ID		\$30.00
Phone with unlimited minutes and text	\$25.00	\$200.00
Phone data card 3G	\$10.00	
Toiletries, vitamins, etc.	\$100.00	
Clothes and shoes (at thrift store)	\$100.00	
Groceries	\$200.00	
Public transportation	\$30.00	
Bike and helmet (used)		\$50.00
Fun and dining out	\$180.00	
Legal representation for immigration case*		\$0
Health care (physical, mental, dental, vision)	\$100.00	
Blood test for hormones		\$150.00
Hormones	\$35.00	
TOTAL:	\$780.00	\$530.00

(*Please note that it is possible to find pro bono legal support if you look for it in a timely manner.)

Do you have any tips on how the finances should be handled in a congregational setting?

- For ease of accounting, it may be best to set up a separate account that is solely dedicated to sponsorship-related income and expenses.

- Some congregations set up a separate web page (or tab on their existing page) that includes some of the background story (only what the asylum-seeker feels comfortable sharing, of course). This page can also have links to a donation site (like GoFundMe) as well as a place for people to sign up to offer logistical help.

Can you share what you have seen other congregations do to offer solid and thorough support as congregational sponsors?

- One congregation that is sponsoring a larger family has set up several teams to help manage the initial arrival and acclimation process; and they are planning to keep the teams in place for the ongoing needs as they evolve. These teams don't necessarily to have large numbers of people on them, but they each have a lead person who accepts primary responsibility to ensure that the compas' needs are met in each area. Your situation may be different, but this is how this particular congregation divvied up the accountabilities:
 - A legal team
 - An education team (to get the children registered for school)
 - A finance team
 - A health team
 - A language team
 - A fundraising team
 - A housing team
 - A shopping team
- Regarding language and communication, (as noted previously) if at all possible, having a few people who are native speakers of the compa's language who are "on call" will be really helpful. Even for those who have studied another language, the speed at which native speakers speak can make communication cumbersome so it is very helpful to have people who are truly fluent available, if possible.

Thank you so much for your interest in exploring how your faith community might do the work of justice by volunteering to journey with asylum seekers! If you have questions about this process, we welcome further conversations. Please contact:

**Heather Cronk, heathercronk@gmail.com or
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