

# Libraries and Community Anchors Planning for Refugee Resettlement: Learning Globally, Acting Locally

## Introduction

Many images of Syrian refugees in Europe flashed across our screens in summer 2015. What was not visible was the work of agencies, individuals, and non-profit organizations currently working with the newly arrived refugees. Libraries and museums in Europe are key institutions actively engaged in understanding the needs of the refugees and developing appropriate programs and services. What can librarians in the United State (U.S.) with our own experiences with refugee resettlement learn from our European colleagues? This planning grant seeks to answer that question. By bringing together European colleagues with U.S. librarians and community anchors, the “Libraries and Community Anchors Planning for Refugee Resettlement: Learning Globally, Acting Locally” Project, a one-year planning grant, will develop recommendations on information resources and services for refugee resettlement, and library training needed to prepare U.S. librarians to serve resettling refugees, and identify action partners. The project will be led by PI Clara M. Chu and Co-PI Susan Schnuer of the Mortenson Center for International Library Programs <http://www.library.illinois.edu/mortenson/>. The Center, with its extensive international experience, is well-positioned to develop this collaborative learning space for U.S. and European librarians and community anchors.

## Statement of Need

The journey of fleeing one's home to finally relocating in a recipient country is fraught with challenges reports Tara Horn in her Ignite presentation “On Being a Refugee.” (<http://igniteshow.com/videos/being-refugee>) At the time of her presentation in 2010, Horn cited over 30 million people living in exile worldwide. Five years later, the number has doubled according to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), in its *UNHCR Global Trends Forced Displacement 2014* report ([http://www.unhcr.org/556725e69.html#\\_ga=1.198977071.1009440741.1443463275](http://www.unhcr.org/556725e69.html#_ga=1.198977071.1009440741.1443463275)). The 59.5 million people now displaced worldwide is the highest number since World War II, and includes 19.5 million refugees, 38.2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), and 1.8 million asylum-seekers.

Touchpoints between libraries and refugees can occur at any time, starting from the time prior to displacement to their stay at refuge shelters/camps to resettlement to post-resettlement. Touger Vang, a Hmong refugee and now a public librarian in California, has encountered limited library services to refugees through his many years of experience as a community organizer and research fellow at the Center for New North Carolinians <http://cncn.uncg.edu>. As a result, he notes the need for services to refugees and proposes, in a co-authored presentation in 2013, a 10-step community insider guide for librarians to serve refugees and assist in their resettlement (see: <http://www.slideshare.net/entrelib/community-partners-21672442>). A review of information needs and services for refugee resettlement and post-resettlement in the U.S. reveals disparities, the unprecedented number of refugees from diverse regions indicates a complex set of issues, and the refugee crisis being global in nature, all indicate that an international perspective and understanding of the challenges is needed, with potential solutions that can be acted locally. The following knowledge gaps were identified in order for libraries and community anchors to effectively address refugee resettlement:

1. information needs and experiences of refugees
2. information resources and services libraries can provide for refugee resettlement
3. library training needed to prepare U.S. librarians to serve resettling refugees

This planning grant addresses IMLS Agency Goal 2 focused on Community in order to learn how libraries and other community anchors can better serve refugees, and the IMLS “Learning in Libraries” funding priority, with an emphasis on designing participatory learning programs that demonstrate innovation and scalability. By creating a collaborative learning space, U.S. libraries and other community anchors can learn from European libraries and museums. The project will develop recommendations to influence the development of information resources and

services for refugee resettlement, and library training needed to prepare librarians to serve refugees, as well as identify partners to take action on the recommendations.

### **Project Design**

This one-year project will commence on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2016, and will include the following activities:

- Identify and invite to the meeting 15 thought leaders, experienced with refugee resettlement needs and services, who work in community anchors and refugee support organizations in the U.S. and Europe.
- Organize a 2.5-day collaborative learning space (meeting) that will bring together representatives from libraries (national and international), other community anchors, refugee support groups, and refugee community leaders to examine and address the role they play in the resettlement process. In order to design relevant and scalable refugee library services, nationally and internationally, we will ask and learn: a) what are refugee resettlement needs and how do libraries learn about them?, b) how do they address these needs?, and c) how can they collaborate with other community anchors to deliver needed services?
- We intend for this meeting to lead to a set of recommendations listing what is needed to equip US librarians with strategies to determine information needs and experiences of refugees, for ideas that could be developed around services libraries can provide, and for continuing education for librarians on the topic of refugee resettlement.
- Based on the meeting recommendations, the Mortenson Center will then identify potential US national and regional organizations who might be interested on working on the development of strategies, services and continuing education needed for US public libraries to best serve refugee populations.

### **Goals, Outcomes, and Impact**

This planning grant, the “Libraries and Community Anchors Planning for Refugee Resettlement: Learning Globally, Acting Locally” Project, seeks to bring together European colleagues with U.S. librarians and community anchors in order to learn how to effectively serve refugees resettling in their recipient countries, to develop recommendations on information resources and services for refugee resettlement, and library training needed to prepare U.S. librarians to serve resettled refugees, and to identify U.S. partners to put into action selected recommendations.

As part of this planning grant, the Mortenson Center will develop a website for this project to capture the discussions, presentations, and recommendations and will work to make this work widely available. We will explore other strategies that will reach out into the broader library community. We anticipate working with crucial and dedicated partners to develop a future proposal that would focus on designing library materials, services, or training identified as crucial to meeting the needs of refugee populations. A vital aspect of this future work would be a well-designed and far-reaching dissemination strategy to the U.S. libraries and community anchors.

### **Budget**

We request \$49,995 to fund a 33% graduate research assistant or hourly employee for the duration of the grant (2016-17) to assist with conference planning, research and documentation, travel costs for 12 U.S. and 3 European thought leaders to attend a 2.5-day meeting (collaborative learning space), travel costs for the PI and Co-PI to attend two national meetings (one 3-day and one 2-day) with potential partners, and conference materials and planning costs.