Preparedness Playbook

A Guide for NSTs and Newcomers Version 1.0

ALIGHT

Welcoming Initiative for Newcomers

COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP HUB

welcome nst

The PURPOSE of this Playbook

This checklist helps Neighborhood Support Teams (NSTs) prepare responsibly and lawfully to support newcomers, recognizing that rights, risks, and available legal options vary by immigration status. It outlines general preparedness steps before, during, and after any immigration enforcement contact.

The goal is to help NSTs and families prepare for potential immigration enforcement contact, reduce fear, protect legal rights, and ensure continuity of care.

Preparation is not about panic. It is about protecting dignity, legal rights, and family stability. Calm, informed NSTs make all the difference.

But first, a DISCLAIMER ...

This resource is provided for general informational purposes only and is not legal advice. It is intended to help Neighborhood Support Teams prepare for and navigate conversations with newcomers about emergency planning, preparedness, and continuity planning.

NSTs and families should consult a qualified immigration attorney or Department of Justice (DOJ) Accredited Representative for case-specific legal guidance and recommendations.

The immigration and humanitarian operating environment is evolving rapidly. Laws, enforcement practices, and available protections may change, and guidance may be updated over time. NSTs and newcomers should continue to seek current, case-specific information from trusted legal and professional sources.

Preparing to protect immigrants and refugee newcomers in the event of immigration enforcement operations in your community.

LEVEL I: ESSENTIAL STEPS TO PREPAREDNESS

A. INFORMATION GATHERING

Family to collect and organize personal information

- ☐ Country of nationality/citizenship
- ☐ Country of birth
- ☐ Mailing and physical address, phone, email
- ☐ A-Numbers
- ☐ Social Security numbers (if issued)
- ☐ Current immigration status
- ☐ Green Card filing status (Form I-485):
  - ☐ Pending
  - ☐ Approved
  - ☐ Received

Family to collect medical information

- ☐ Medical conditions, allergies, or special needs
- ☐ List of current medications, dosages, and prescribing doctors
- ☐ Vaccination records
- ☐ Health insurance information
- ☐ Emergency contact and preferred hospital or clinic

B. COMMUNICATION PLANNING

Emergency and Continuity of Care Contacts

☐ Children's school, daycare, or elder care contacts
Allows designated contacts to notify schools or caregivers and arrange continued care if a parent or primary caregiver is detained.

☐ Employer or manager contact information
Allows someone to inform the employer if a working adult is detained and help protect employment, wages, or benefits.

☐ Landlord or property manager contact information
Allows someone to communicate with the landlord if a family member is detained to request extensions, prevent eviction, and address rent or lease issues.

Pet Information

Pet information (if applicable) ensures pets can be safely cared for and not lost or surrendered if an owner is detained. This should include:

Pet name(s), species, breed, and microchip number (if any)

- ☐ Designated temporary caregiver or boarding facility contact
- ☐ Veterinarian and emergency vet contact information
- ☐ Vaccination records and medications
- ☐ Feeding schedule and special care instructions
- ☐ Proof of ownership (if retrieval from animal control or a shelter is needed)
- ☐ Microchip information and/or licensing information

Emergency Contact List (also shared with NST)

- ☐ NST members
- ☐ Immigration attorney (if applicable)
- ☐ Resettlement agency (if applicable)
- ☐ Employer(s)
- ☐ School/childcare
- ☐ Emergency family contacts

Establish clear roles for points of contact

- ☐ First point of contact (available 24/7; usually an NST member)
- ☐ Back-up point of contact
- ☐ School/childcare liaison (person who will communicate with school in case of an emergency)
- ☐ Employment liaison (person who will communicate with employer/manager in case of an emergency)

Create a clear "first call" plan if someone is stopped or detained.

- ☐ Identify who to call first, second, and third.
- ☐ Ensure these contacts know their role and what steps to take.
- ☐ Help newcomers memorize the phone numbers of the first and back-up points of contact (do ***not*** rely only on the phone).

To determine which documents to carry and whether to carry an original or copy, consult an immigration attorney who is familiar with your case and the varied guidance based on status.

C. IMMMIGRATION DOCUMENTATION

- ☐ Collect immigration and identity documents (see below for specifics and examples)
- ☐ Gather and make copies (both physical and digital) of all immigration documents
- ☐ Everyone should keep one complete ***physical*** set of copies for themselves
- ☐ A second complete set should be stored with a trusted person (family member, friend, or NST member)
- ☐ Originals should be kept in a safe, secure location

Valid Proof of Immigration Status

U.S. law requires most non-citizens aged 18 and over to carry valid proof of their immigration status with them at all times. This has been in the law for many years, and in 2025 federal authorities began enforcing it more strictly. (Statute 8 U.S.C.S.1304(e))

Common Immigration Documents

- [ ] Country of nationality/citizenship passports
- [ ] Birth certificates
- [ ] Marriage licenses
- [ ] Country of nationality/citizenship ID cards (e.g., Tazkira)
- [ ] U.S. government issued IDs (e.g., state ID or driver's license)
- [ ] Social Security cards
- [ ] School ID

Common Identity Documents (vary by immigration pathway)

- [ ] Refugee transportation boarding letter (travel document)
- [ ] Boarding FOIL
- [ ] I–94 Arrival/departure records
- [ ] Employment authorization document (work permit)
- [ ] Lawful permanent resident cards (Green Cards)
- [ ] USCIS benefit applications (e.g., application for residency) USCIS I-797C notices, showing pending or approved USCIS benefit applications (e.g., receipt notice or approval notice)
- [ ] IOM and USCIS medical records
- [ ] Immigration court documents (e.g., notices to appear, final orders)
- [ ] Sponsorship or resettlement paperwork

D. ACCOUNT ACCESS AND CASE TRACKING

Ensure each family member has access to a working email account (required to create a USCIS account)

- [ ] Confirm login information to email is known and securely stored
- [ ] If family does not have a USCIS account already, create USCIS logins for each family member. Remember to save and store login information
- [ ] Email access information shared (as appropriate)

ESSENTIAL LEGAL ACTION FOR THOSE WITH REFUGEE STATUS

If a refugee has been in the U.S. **for more than one year** and has not filed Form I-485 (Application for Permanent Residence/Green Card), **consult a qualified immigration attorney or DOJ-accredited representative immediately** and take steps to apply **as soon as possible.**

LEVEL II: EXPANDED STEPS TO PREPAREDNESS

A. KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

- ☐ NSTs attend Know Your Rights training
- ☐ Refugee and immigrant newcomers attend Know Your Rights training
- ☐ Family reviews and understands:
  - ☐ Right to remain silent
  - ☐ Right to an attorney
  - ☐ What to do if immigration enforcement comes to the home
  - ☐ What to do if stopped in public or at work
  - ☐ What to do if a family member is detained

B. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT (FOIA)

FOIA requests can be a helpful self-protection and preparation tool for a newcomer because it allows the individual and their attorney to see what the Department of Homeland Security has on file including refugee applications, interview notes, credible fear records, and background check results.

For those with refugee status, if the Department of Homeland Security agencies are reinterviewing cases, having access to this information helps identify inconsistencies and reduces surprises during questioning. A FOIA request can be slow, so this may not be a realistic tool depending on timing of a refugee re-interview or immigration enforcement operations.

Please note that an FOIA request can take several weeks or months to receive. Learn more at the U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services web page.

Explaining FOIA Requests to Newcomers

FOIA allows non-citizens to request copies of their full immigration and refugee case records from USCIS and other relevant federal agencies (such as CBP or EOIR).

- ☐ Make decision about whether to file a FOIA request
- ☐ Submit FOIA request. Requests are filed through the USCIS FOIA portal (and other agency portals if needed).
- ☐ NST and newcomer understand the purpose of FOIA:
  - ☐ Obtain complete application and case history
  - ☐ Review interview notes and officer records (when available)
  - ☐ Prevent future discrepancies in future filings
  - ☐ Support legal representation and future applications (green card, citizenship, travel)

C. COORDINATION WITH RESETTLEMENT AGENCY AND LEGAL SUPPORT

Identify the newcomer's immigration attorney or legal provider (if applicable)

- ☐ Confirm attorney name, organization, phone, and email
- ☐ Confirm whether representation is still active
- ☐ Clarify scope of representation (e.g., green card, EAD, travel, court, emergencies)

Identify who filed the I-485 (Adjustment of Status/Green Card application) (if applicable)

- ☐ Resettlement agency
- ☐ Legal service provider
- ☐ Private attorney
- ☐ Self-filed (with or without assistance)

Attorney representation and authorization confirmed

- ☐ G-28 (Notice of Appearance) on file, if applicable
- ☐ Attorney knows they are the point of contact in case of detention or emergency
- ☐ Family and sponsor understand what support the attorney can and cannot provide in an emergency

NST listed as emergency point of contact where appropriate

- ☐ Roles clarified between NST, resettlement agency, and attorney
- ☐ Clear plan for who is contacted first if someone is detained or receives legal notice

Note that state-level legal aid organizations may have more specific state-level guidance for forms such as described above. Sponsors and refugee newcomers should seek current and case-specific information from trusted, local legal organizations and immigration attorneys.

HELPFUL CORE RESOURCES

- I live in the US and I have refugee status. What should I know?
- ILRC Emergency Preparedness Guide
- ILRC Red Card (in many languages)
- Understanding Refugee Re-vetting and Detention
- USCRI Know Your Rights and Safety Planning (in many languages)
- Know Your Rights: Guidance for Parents on Children's Care if a Parent is Detained
- Planning for Families: Guidance on Detention, Deportation, and Children's Care

LEVEL III: ADVANCED STEPS TO PREPAREDNESS

The following are steps and activities that some volunteers and newcomers are choosing to pursue. They start to involve signing legal documents that would give trusted contacts powers of delegation on behalf of newcomers (allowing the trusted contact(s) to care for children, access family finances, etc.) if an emergency scenario occurs where newcomers are detained.

These steps are often less daunting than they may appear but do represent materially more complexity and higher levels of effort required. They contain complexities and risks in themselves, so they are not appropriate in all situations, nor should any volunteer or newcomer feel as though they need to take these steps if not comfortable.

We hope to provide further guidance on some of the steps below in upcoming resources, but in the meantime, note that the best place for NSTs to begin is to make sure first that, at minimum, all Level I steps of preparation are well in place. After completing all of Level I and II, groups may consider pursuing some elements of Level III.

A. POWER OF ATTORNEY (POA) varies by state and type

A power of attorney can be helpful for newcomers in case they are detained to ensure continuity of daily life, care for children and dependents, access to legal and immigration documents, protect employment, make medical or emergency decisions, and give overall peace of mind.

- ☐ POA and discussed with family
- ☐ Scope defined (financial, medical, caregiving, etc.)
- ☐ POA executed and notarized (if appropriate)
- ☐ Copies stored securely and shared as needed

B. CHILDREN AND CARE PLANNING (Varies by state; elder caregiver may apply)

- ☐ Delegation of Parental Authority (DOPA) discussed and notarized (if applicable)
- ☐ Trusted caregiver identified
- ☐ Copies shared with caregiver and NST

C. LEGAL READINESS

- ☐ Blank G-28 forms signed for each newcomer (if applicable)
- ☐ Forms stored securely and accessible
- ☐ NST knows when and how to use them in an emergency

The Preparedness Playbook is an expanded version of CSH, WIN, and Alight's Sponsor Guide. The Sponsor Guide is specific to refugees in the U.S. The Preparedness Playbook was adapted by WelcomeNST to include preparedness recommendations for people with various legal status.

Appendix A

Plan if Detention Occurs (Chain of Action)

1. Identify one primary NST Point of Contact and one back-up.
2. Point of Contact documents details (time, place, agency, location of detention).
3. Point of Contact contacts attorney or legal provider immediately (e.g., habeas corpus, if appropriate).
4. Point of Contact notifies the full NST.
5. Education/childcare liaison informs school or arranges care.
6. Employment liaison notifies employer (if applicable).
7. Email WelcomeNST as soon as possible at help@welcomenst.org and include the following:
   - ☐ Newcomer full name
   - ☐ Your Team name
   - ☐ Your full name
   - ☐ Your phone number
   - ☐ Date of U.S. arrival
   - ☐ Whether the newcomer has legal representation
   - ☐ Location of detention (if known)
   - ☐ Date and time of detention
   - ☐ The best callback number

Plan if a refugee welcomed through the Welcome Corps receives a call-in notice (for re-interview)

For refugees welcomed through the Welcome Corps, our partner, Community Sponsorship Hub, has organized a coordinated response. Below are the instructions for how to connect.

Email postarrival@sponsorcircles.org and copy help@welcomenst.org as soon as possible and include:

- ☐ Confirmation of whether the newcomer has legal representation
- ☐ Newcomer full name
- ☐ Your Team name
- ☐ Your full name
- ☐ Your phone number
- ☐ A good contact phone number and email for follow-up
- ☐ The date and time of the appointment
- ☐ A copy of the appointment notice attached to the email

If you receive a call-in notice scheduled within 48 hours, please call the CSH team at (332) 236-9896 as soon as possible!