

TANF-RCA BRIEF

OPRE Report
No. 2017-75

September 2017

Understanding the Intersection Between TANF and Refugee Cash Assistance Services: Findings from a Survey of State Refugee Coordinators

Bethany Boland and Angela Gaffney



About the State Refugee Coordinator Survey

This research brief presents findings of data collected for the *Understanding the Intersection between TANF and Refugee Cash Assistance Services* (TANF-RCA) study, sponsored by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The study's main purpose is to learn how state and local systems serve refugees through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) programs, how these programs interact, and how they might foster positive employment outcomes and refugee self-sufficiency. A key study task was the administration of an online survey to State Refugee Coordinators (SRCs), who are responsible for overseeing the design, implementation, and coordination of refugee services in each state.

The study team used these survey findings to identify noteworthy program structures and practices to further explore as part of fieldwork conducted under the TANF-RCA study.

The online survey was administered in January 2016 to SRCs in 49 of the 50 states (Wyoming has no refugee program) plus the District of Columbia and California's San Diego County (which operates a refugee program separate from the rest of the state). Of the 51 SRCs sent a survey, 49 responded.

See the survey methodology section for further information about the online survey and selected characteristics of the survey sample.

Disclaimer: Information presented in this brief comes from SRCs' survey responses and reflect the SRCs' perspectives only. The survey asked SRCs to provide responses to the best of their knowledge at the time the survey was administered. To the extent that survey questions focused on topics that may have fallen outside of some SRCs' purviews, the findings may not necessarily reflect actual state policies and practices. For example, SRCs may have been unaware of the full range of services available through TANF and therefore did not accurately report the availability of some services to TANF recipients.

Highlights From a Survey of State Refugee Coordinators

States exercise broad flexibility to structure and implement federally funded refugee cash assistance programs and accompanying employment services to help refugees move toward self-sufficiency. Each state (except Wyoming, which has no refugee program) has a State Refugee Coordinator (SRC) who implements the state's plan for refugee resettlement. This brief summarizes findings from a 2016 survey of SRCs. It describes the structure of programs that deliver cash assistance and employment services to refugees, the challenges refugees experience during the resettlement process, and innovative strategies states have implemented to improve service provision and coordination among refugee service providers.

Program Structures and Services Offered to Refugees

- The majority of SRCs, whose offices coordinate services for refugees across multiple agencies in each state, report formal relationships with resettlement agencies and state Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) agencies to deliver core refugee services.
- Resettlement agencies are more likely to conduct Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) program eligibility determination and enrollment on-site than TANF eligibility determination and enrollment. SRCs report that on-site enrollment reduces delays in service and miscommunication between applicants and program eligibility staff.
- Both TANF- and RCA-receiving refugees can access employment and associated services. These include job readiness workshops, transportation assistance, and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. SRCs report that TANF employment program providers are less likely to tailor employment services to refugees than are RCA-affiliated service providers.

Challenges Refugees Face

- Newly arrived refugees experience several common challenges, regardless of their source of cash assistance. These include lack of affordable housing and culturally appropriate mental health services. SRCs also note that in many parts of the country, RCA and TANF benefit levels are low relative to the cost of living.
- The majority of SRCs (35) report that refugees applying for TANF experience challenges, while a smaller share of SRCs (11) report similar challenges for refugees applying for RCA. These challenges include difficulty communicating with agency staff and difficulty completing required paperwork because of language or literacy barriers.

Innovative Strategies to Improve Service Delivery

- **Employment Practices.** Some resettlement agencies have dedicated employer outreach staff. Some states offer occupation-specific training programs tailored for refugees.
- **Physical and Mental Health.** Standardized physical and mental health screening tools, dedicated mental health staff at resettlement agencies, and refugee-specific training for healthcare providers are designed to meet refugee health needs.
- **Language Acquisition.** Innovations in ESL instruction include the use of technology-based platforms that use graphics and phone applications.
- **Leveraging other funding sources.** SRCs report using other sources of funding for refugee services in addition to refugee-specific funding streams. Federal sources include Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment & Training (E&T) funding. SRCs also use state transportation, economic development, and general funding.

Introduction

Refugees resettled in the United States arrive with a diversity of backgrounds, academic and employment skills, and cultures.¹ After they arrive, a network of public and private organizations offer programming designed to help them become self-sufficient in a short period of time.

Refugees are sponsored by local affiliates of nine national resettlement agencies, which facilitate refugees' integration into American society. Through cooperative agreements with the U.S. Department of State, these local resettlement agencies provide federally funded Reception and Placement (R&P) programming during the initial 30 to 90 days that refugees are in the country.² Services include physical and mental health screenings and assistance with expenses such as rent, furnishings, clothing, and food. In addition to federal dollars, resettlement agencies also receive support to provide these services from individual and corporate donations, foundations, and religious organizations.

Refugees in all states (except Wyoming) may access Reception and Placement program services, cash assistance programs, and associated employment services. States, however, have broad flexibility to structure and implement programs. The goal is to help encourage newly resettled refugees to become economically self-sufficient and integrate quickly into their new communities.

Upon arrival to the U.S., low-income refugee families with at least one dependent child may be eligible for the TANF program in their state. Refugees without dependent children, who otherwise would be eligible for TANF, may apply for the RCA program. States generally provide comparable benefit levels between TANF and RCA; however, many aspects of the cash assistance program requirements and opportunities vary based on whether the refugee is receiving TANF or RCA and by the state in which the refugee is resettled. Resettlement caseworkers introduce refugees to these available programs.

In addition to available cash assistance programs, caseworkers also inform refugees about SNAP and Medicaid. Caseworkers may also directly provide or refer refugees to employment assistance. All cash assistance recipients are expected to participate in employment-related services, unless exempt due to physical or mental health challenges. Refugees may also access other self-sufficiency activities such as job readiness workshops, transportation assistance, and ESL classes.

Refugees in all states (except Wyoming) may access R&P program services, cash assistance programs, and associated employment services. States, however, have broad flexibility to structure and implement programs. The goal is to encourage newly resettled refugees to become economically self-sufficient and integrate quickly into their new communities. **Exhibit 1** summarizes each component of the refugee resettlement process and corresponding features that vary by state and cash assistance source.

Each state (except Wyoming) has an SRC who implements the state's plan for refugee resettlement.³ This includes managing federal grants for refugee services, working across various state-level departments and agencies to coordinate services, and working with community partners to maximize resources for refugee integration. Depending on the state's refugee resettlement model (described below), SRCs may be employed by a state agency, a resettlement agency, or a local nonprofit organization. Regardless of model, they share the same general responsibilities across states.

Exhibit 1: Refugee Services That Vary by State/Locale and Cash Assistance Source	
Resettlement Stage	Features that vary by state/locale and cash assistance source (TANF or RCA)
 Initial Reception and Placement (R&P) services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R&P services are similar across states regardless of cash assistance source
 Application and enrollment for cash benefit programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level of administrative burden (e.g., number of offices visited) Language and cultural competency of eligibility staff Process for screening refugees for health or mental health challenges Coordination with and exposure to other social services (e.g., SNAP, Medicaid, child care)
 Employment and self-sufficiency support services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Types of employment-related services available (e.g., subsidized employment) Types of activities that meet program participation requirements Level of integration with non-refugee program participants Support services: child care, transportation, and work-related expenses Availability of financial bonuses for refugees who gain employment quickly
 Ongoing case management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff language capacity, cultural competency, and location Access to additional support services through state or partner agency funds

¹ This brief uses the term "refugee" to refer to all populations eligible for refugee services, including refugees, asylees, Cuban-Haitian entrants, and Special Immigrant Visa holders.

² This brief uses the term "resettlement agencies" to refer to the local affiliates of the nine national resettlement agencies.

³ This brief summarizes responses to an online survey of State Refugee Coordinators and Wilson-Fish Program Coordinators and refers to all respondents as "SRCs" or as "states."

Contents of this Brief

The first two sections of this brief provide a broad overview of federal cash assistance programs and refugee resettlement models. The remainder of the brief reports the findings from the online survey of SRCs, including a summary of the diversity of state policies and practices used to administer refugee cash assistance programs and employment/self-sufficiency services; the challenges refugees face within the resettlement system; and innovative steps states have taken to improve service provision and coordination among service providers.

Cash Assistance Programs Overview

As summarized in **Exhibit 2**, states administer three types of cash assistance programs for refugees.

- **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)** is the primary cash assistance program for low-income families with at least one dependent child (or a pregnant woman in her third trimester). TANF is a federal block grant administered to states by the Office of Family Assistance (OFA) within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). TANF block grant and state maintenance-of-effort

Exhibit 2: Cash Assistance Programs Available to Refugees		
Program	Which refugees are eligible?	For how long?
 Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)	Refugee families with at least one dependent child in the United States . Refugee children may also be eligible for TANF	Up to 5 years of benefits total, but varies by state
 Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA)	Adult refugees who meet the income eligibility requirements for TANF but are not eligible because they are an individual or couple without a dependent child	Up to 8 months from arrival in U.S.
 Matching Grant	Refugees expected to become economically self-sufficient within 4-6 months	Within 4-6 months of program eligibility

(MOE) funds can be used to fund a variety of activities as long as they meet one of the four purposes of TANF.⁴ States administer TANF benefits to families and have broad authority to determine income eligibility thresholds, benefit levels, benefit duration, and sanction policies for those who do not follow program requirements. Generally, states are required to engage adult TANF recipients in work activities for a specified number of hours each week. Refugees with children may be eligible for TANF and may receive assistance for up to 12 months to five years, depending on the state.⁵ Like other TANF recipients, refugees are subject to work requirements. They receive case management and employment services through the TANF agency or a contracted TANF employment service provider.

- The **Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA)** program is funded by the ACF Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). Adult refugees who meet the income eligibility requirements for TANF but do not have dependent children are eligible for RCA. Adults can receive RCA benefits for a maximum of eight months after arriving in the country.⁶ States provide RCA, case management, employment services, and other services to refugees through one of three refugee resettlement models discussed below.
- **Matching Grant** is an ORR grant program that serves as an alternative to public cash assistance. Under the Matching Grant program, resettlement agencies provide services such as case management, employment, and cash allowance to refugees with the goal that new arrivals achieve economic self-sufficiency within six months, without accessing public cash assistance.⁷

⁴ The four purposes of the TANF program are to: 1) Provide assistance to needy families so that children can be cared for in their own homes; 2) Reduce the dependency of needy parents by promoting job preparation, work and marriage; 3) Prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and 4) Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families (Source: ACF's TANF overview page, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ofa/programs/tanf/about>). In fiscal year 2015, states spent, on average, about one-quarter of federal TANF and state MOE funds on cash assistance and seven percent on work, education, and training activities. (Source: OFA's FY2015 TANF and MOE data, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ofa/resource/tanf-and-moe-spending-and-transfers-by-activity-fy-2015>).

⁵ States may not use federal TANF funds to provide cash assistance to a family for more than five years, with some exceptions. Some states choose to use state funds to provide cash assistance to families after five years.

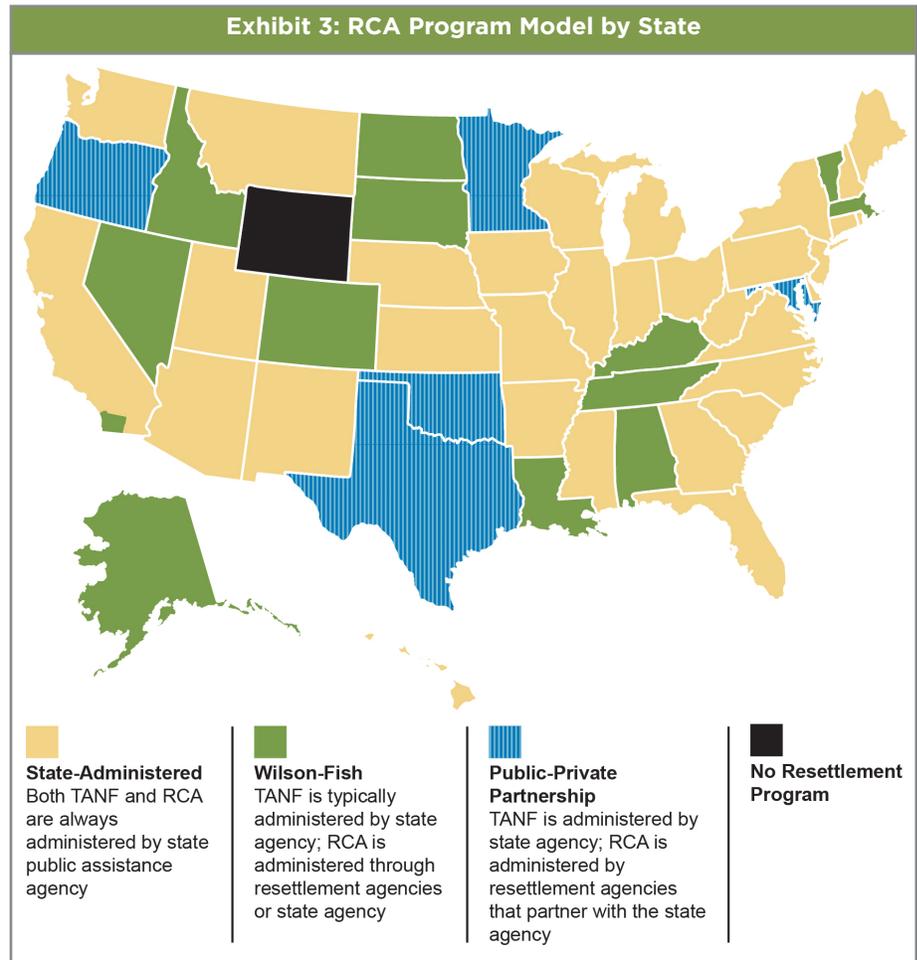
⁶ For asylees and Cuban-Haitian entrants, RCA eligibility is based on when they obtain asylee or entrant status, rather than their physical arrival in the United States.

⁷ The Matching Grant program was not a primary focus of the study because it is considered an alternative to public cash assistance and the program eligibility requirements are different from TANF and RCA; however, the Matching Grant program was frequently mentioned during the study since program eligibility and placement are often determined at the same time as TANF and RCA eligibility determination.

Refugee Resettlement Models Overview

As shown in **Exhibit 3**, states administer RCA and associated “self-sufficiency programs,” such as employment services, ESL, case management, and other programming, through one of three models.⁸ Within these models, states vary in how they implement services, which in turn affects the services provided to refugees.

- **State-administered:** 32 states and the District of Columbia administer ORR-funded RCA benefits and self-sufficiency programs through a state public assistance agency. In this model, RCA benefit levels are typically based on TANF benefit levels for a household of the same size.
- **Wilson-Fish:** In 12 states and one county (San Diego), ORR administers grants directly to public or private nonprofit organizations to operate the refugee program. In most Wilson-Fish states, resettlement agencies serve as the nonprofit grantees and administer ORR-funded RCA benefits directly without involvement of a state agency. In a few Wilson-Fish states, a state agency serves as the grantee and administers RCA benefits. RCA benefit levels for a given household size may exceed TANF benefit levels for a household of the same size in contrast to state-administered programs in which RCA benefit levels are the same as TANF benefit levels. In addition, financial bonuses may be available for refugees who gain employment quickly.⁹
- **Public-Private Partnership:** In five states, the state agency has the option to partner with a resettlement agency to administer RCA. Under this model, local resettlement agencies may provide cash assistance and services while the state agency is responsible for policy and administrative oversight. Like the Wilson-Fish model, ORR-funded RCA benefit levels may exceed TANF benefit levels for a family of the same size.



Note: This map reflects the distribution of state resettlement types when the SRC survey was administered in January 2016. As of September 2017, several states no longer operate state-administered programs, including Maine, Kansas, and New Jersey. Texas no longer operates a Public-Private Partnership program.

The SRC’s primary role is to coordinate refugee services. SRCs rely on a cohesive group of experienced service providers and ethnic community-based organizations (ECBOs) to provide refugee services, though formal collaboration between these partners and the SRC offices varies across states.¹⁰

⁸ Exhibit 3 reflects the distribution of state resettlement models when the SRC survey was administered in January 2016. As of September 2017, several states no longer operate state-administered programs, including Maine, Kansas, and New Jersey. Texas no longer operates a Public-Private Partnership program.

⁹ When RCA benefits exceed TANF benefits for a family of the same size, states can choose to use RCA funds to provide a TANF differential payment equal to the difference between the TANF and RCA benefit levels, which TANF-eligible refugees receive for the first eight months upon entry into the country.

¹⁰ ACF defines ECBOs as refugee-led organizations that “promote community organizing that builds bridges between newcomer refugee communities and community resources.” ECBOs facilitate refugees’ cultural adjustment and integration, deliver mutually supportive functions such as information exchange, encourage civic participation, provide direct services and referrals, and educate the larger community on refugee-related community issues.

(Source: ORR’s Ethnic Community Self-Help program page, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/resource/ethnic-community-self-help>).

Findings From a Survey of State Refugee Coordinators

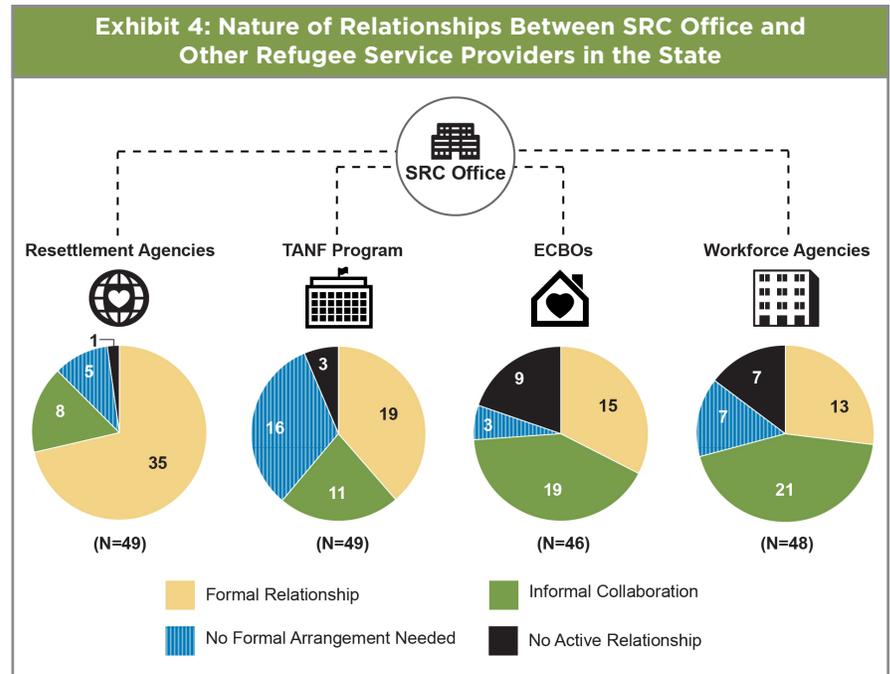
The following sections highlight the key survey findings. Please note that the information presented comes from survey responses from the SRCs and reflect the SRC's perspectives. The survey asked the SRC to provide responses to the best of their knowledge at the time the survey was administered. To the extent that survey questions focused on topics that may have fallen outside of some SRC's purviews, the findings may not necessarily reflect actual state policies and practices.

Nature and Formality of Relationships Between SRC Office and Other Refugee Stakeholder Agencies Vary Across States

Exhibit 4 illustrates the relationships between the SRC office and other refugee service providers across states. According to the survey, the majority of SRC offices have formal relationships (e.g., formal memoranda of understanding or contracts) with resettlement agencies (35 states). One SRC has no relationship with resettlement agencies.

SRCs in 19 states have formal relationships with the state TANF program. In 16 other states, SRCs do not need a formal arrangement with their TANF program, often because the SRC office is located in the same agency as the TANF program. Three SRC offices lack a formal or active relationship with the state TANF program.

The majority (34 states) of SRC offices have at least an informal relationship with ECBOs, and 34 states also have at least an informal relationship with workforce agencies that administer the WIOA-funded employment and other services. Fewer among those are formal, however.



Application Processes Vary Across States

Most States Require TANF-Eligible Refugees to Apply for Benefits at Local TANF Offices. Application Locations for the RCA Program are More Varied.

As a part of the Reception and Placement (R&P) process, all newly arrived refugees first meet with resettlement agency staff. R&P caseworkers review their initial eligibility for cash assistance programs based on household composition, income, assets, and other criteria. In many states, a key distinction between TANF and RCA enrollment is *where refugees go to apply for benefits*. **Exhibit 5** depicts the pathways for application to TANF and RCA in the 48 states that responded to questions about TANF eligibility determination in the survey.

For the TANF program, refugees must apply and be screened at a local TANF office in most states. Although resettlement agency caseworkers often accompany refugees to the TANF office, SRCs report frequent communication challenges because TANF staff often do not speak the refugees' languages and the resettlement agency caseworker often cannot stay for the entire appointment to translate.¹¹

In 29 states, refugees apply at a local TANF office, following the same TANF application procedures as all other applicants. According to SRCs, this model offers coordination with other social and health service programs (e.g., SNAP, Medicaid, and child care), accessibility statewide (in areas where few or no resettlement agencies operate), and ease of data tracking and reporting.

Nine states operate a specialized unit within the local TANF office whose staff understand the refugee eligibility rules and may be multilingual. SRCs report that this model enables refugees to meet with staff who are familiar with the resettlement process and that refugees who do not qualify for TANF can then be seamlessly enrolled into RCA at the local TANF office.

¹¹ Among the 48 SRCs who responded to questions regarding challenges in applying for TANF, 42 report that most refugees in their state who meet the eligibility criteria for TANF do in fact receive TANF assistance. Five report that most refugees who meet TANF eligibility criteria do not receive TANF assistance; reasons include diverting TANF-eligible refugees to the Matching Grant program due to low TANF benefit levels.

In four states, the process for TANF enrollment varies by locality. For example, areas of the state that have the largest refugee populations may have specialized units, whereas other areas process refugee applications along with other TANF applications.

In another four states, the state TANF agency stations a TANF eligibility worker who processes applications on-site at resettlement agencies.¹² This reduces the burden on refugees and resettlement caseworkers because they are not required to go to the local TANF office to apply for benefits.

Finally, two states do not refer refugees to TANF due to low benefit levels, instead referring them to the Matching Grant program.

The variation in RCA eligibility determination and enrollment location is a function of each state's refugee resettlement model: state-administered programs administer RCA through state TANF agencies, whereas Wilson-Fish and Public-Private Partnership states may administer RCA through resettlement agencies.

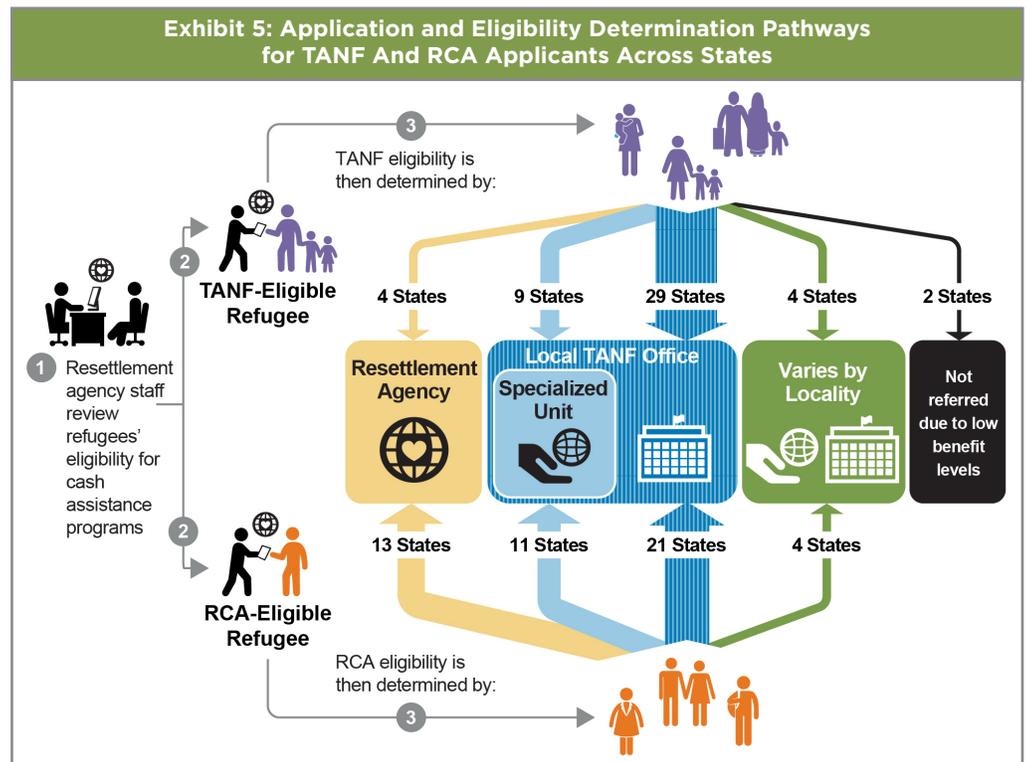
Compared to TANF, RCA-eligible refugees more often apply for benefits at resettlement agencies (13 states) or at specialized units within local TANF offices where language is not a barrier (11 states). Still, 21 states require RCA applicants to apply for benefits at a local TANF office.

SRCs Report TANF-Eligible Refugees Face More Challenges Applying for Cash Assistance than RCA-Eligible Refugees.

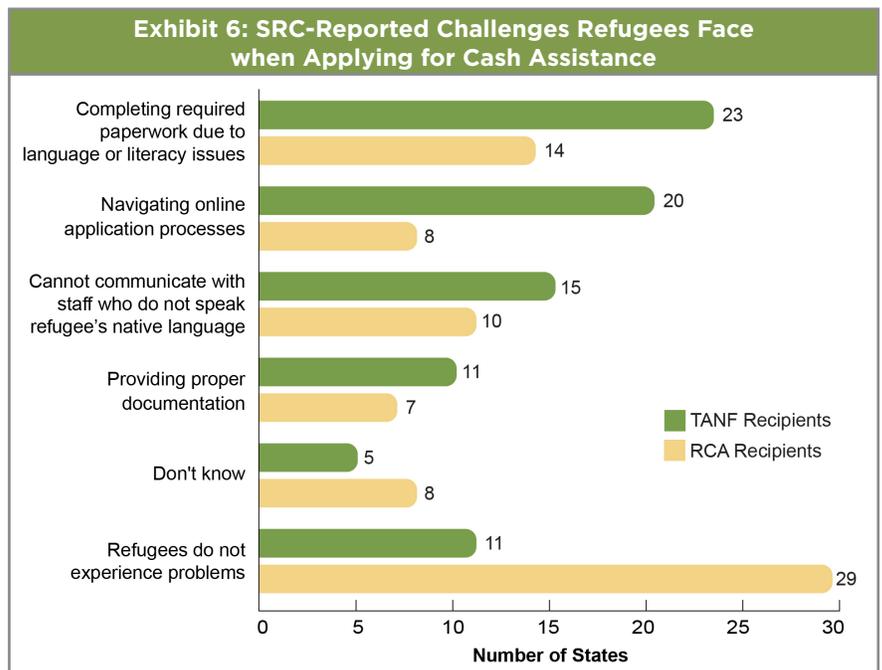
As discussed above, refugees applying for TANF cash assistance most often are required to go to their local TANF office to complete the TANF application. This additional step may make the application process challenging. **Exhibit 6** shows the most commonly reported challenges refugees face when applying for either TANF or RCA.

In all categories, SRCs report more challenges for TANF applicants than for RCA applicants.

More SRCs report that TANF applicants have difficulties completing required paperwork because of language or literacy issues than report that RCA applicants have difficulty (23 SRCs versus 14). Similarly, more SRCs report that TANF applicants have difficulty navigating online application processes than RCA applicants (20 SRCs versus eight). SRCs also report that TANF applicants often have difficulties fulfilling certain eligibility requirements during the application process, such as a mandatory upfront job search (not shown).



Note: One state did not report where TANF eligibility is determined



Note: Survey questions asked respondents to mark all challenges that apply for TANF recipients and RCA recipients, respectively.

¹² Three of these states use a Wilson-Fish model; one uses a Public-Private Partnership model.

SRCs reported fewer challenges during eligibility review and enrollment for refugees applying for RCA benefits than for TANF benefits; 35 SRCs reported at least one challenge for refugees applying for TANF, while 19 SRCs reported at least one challenge for refugees applying for RCA. SRCs in 29 states report that refugees in their state do *not* experience problems when applying for RCA, whereas SRCs in only 11 states report the same for refugees applying for TANF.

Among the SRCs who report RCA applicant challenges, language barriers are a primary challenge for RCA applicants. SRCs note difficulties completing required paperwork (14 states) and difficulty communicating with staff who do not speak refugees' languages (10 states). Difficulty communicating with program eligibility staff is reported only by states that require RCA applicants to complete the application at the local TANF office. Some SRCs report that language barriers at local TANF offices can be mitigated if resettlement agency staff conduct some or all enrollment duties for both TANF and RCA.

Employment and Self-Sufficiency Activities Vary Across States

TANF and RCA recipients have access to an array of employment-related programs, including on-the-job training and vocational training. Both TANF and RCA recipients are expected to participate in employment activities unless they are exempt due to physical or mental health challenges. RCA-affiliated employment services focus on rapid employment of refugees, given that RCA benefits last only eight months.

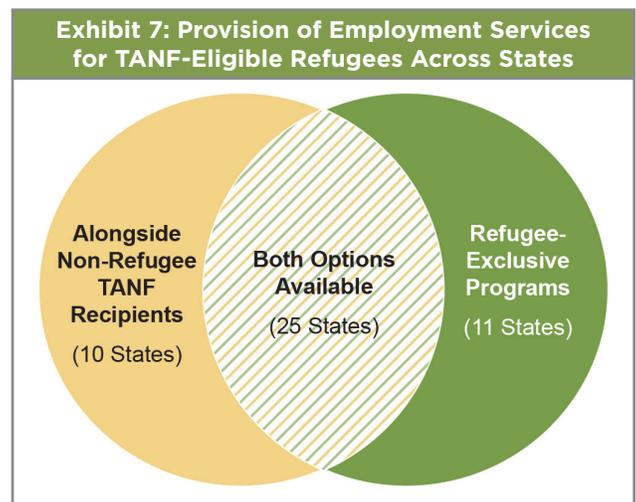
Nearly all SRCs report that refugees receiving RCA benefits in their state have access to ESL classes, employment workshops, case management, and ongoing education and GED programs. Fewer SRCs report that refugees receiving TANF benefits have access to similar services and programming.¹³

In addition to employment programming, TANF and RCA recipients are also eligible for services such as transportation assistance and driver's education.

TANF-Receiving Refugees are Typically Subject to the Same TANF Work Requirements as Non-Refugees.

A key focus of the TANF-RCA study is to understand work requirements and employment services for refugees.¹⁴ In order to meet the federal TANF work participation rate, states impose work requirements on TANF recipients and may have different requirements for different populations.¹⁵ For example, two-parent households have different work requirements than one-parent households, and individuals with limited English proficiency may be required to participate in ESL classes instead of work preparation activities in some states. All but five SRCs report that once refugees enroll in TANF, they are subject to the same TANF work requirements as non-refugee TANF recipients. The remaining five SRCs report that refugees are subject to different work requirements for at least their first six months in the program, then the same requirements as non-refugee TANF recipients thereafter. TANF-receiving refugees who are subject to *different* work requirements are either 1) referred to resettlement agencies or ECBOs for services; 2) assigned to tailored activities including ESL, financial literacy classes, and work experience; or 3) given temporary exemptions.¹⁶

SRCs report that refugees in the TANF program generally have access to the same array of employment-related services available to other TANF recipients (40 states). However, the provision of employment services for TANF recipients varies across states. **Exhibit 7** shows that in 10 states, TANF-receiving refugees participate in employment services alongside non-refugees exclusively, though in some states refugees also receive additional, related services through other programs funded by ORR. In 11 states, all refugees receive refugee-specific employment services through resettlement agencies or ECBOs. However, 25 states report that both options are available. In some states both options exist but vary by locality. For example, in areas with the highest concentration of refugees, states may offer refugee-specific services through providers who specialize in refugee employment services. In other, less concentrated areas refugees may receive employment-related services through locally contracted providers alongside other non-refugees. In other states, refugees may transition from refugee-specific services to non-refugee-specific services at a certain point (e.g., after one year).



Note: Two states did not report where TANF-receiving refugees participate in employment services.

¹³ SRCs may have been unaware of the full range of services available through TANF and therefore underreported the availability of some services to TANF recipients.

¹⁴ This section is also based on SRC survey responses. SRCs may not be aware of the full range of services available through state and local TANF programs.

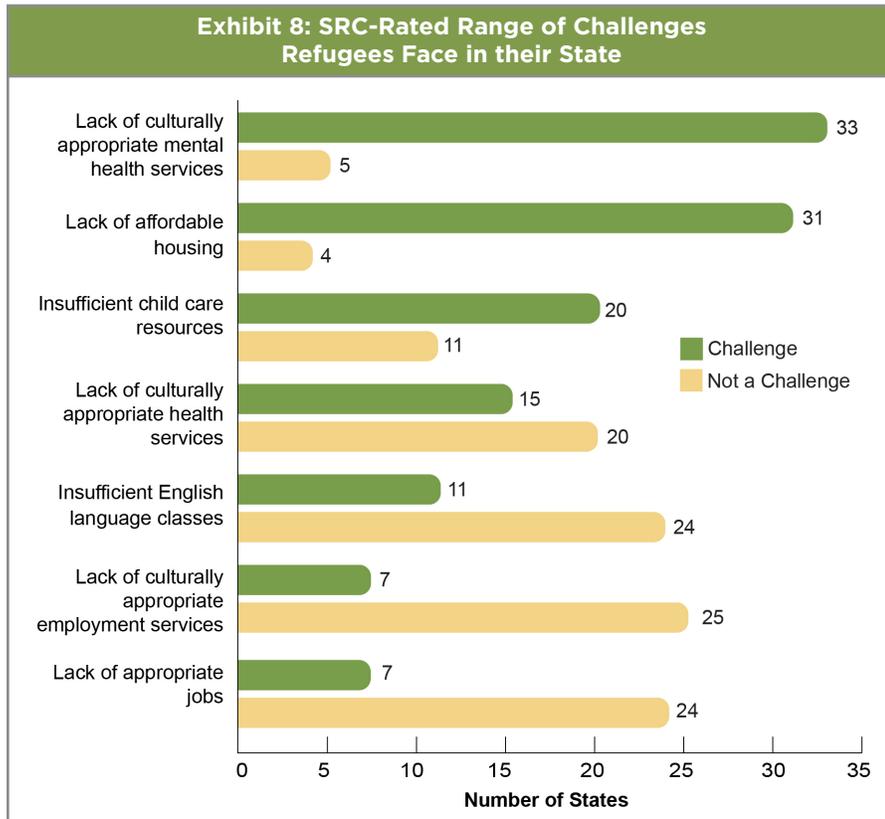
¹⁵ The TANF work participation rate measures the degree to which a state engages families receiving TANF cash assistance in specified work activities.

¹⁶ "Work experience" refers to activities in a workplace that provide individuals with an opportunity to acquire the general skills, training, knowledge, and work habits necessary to obtain employment in order to improve the employability of those who cannot find unsubsidized, full-time employment. (Source: OFA's "Work Experience" definition, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ofa/resource/q-a-work-experience>).

Refugee Challenges

Lack of Culturally Appropriate Mental Health Services and Affordable Housing are the Most Serious Challenges to Refugees' Self-Sufficiency.

Exhibit 8 illustrates the extent to which SRCs consider a number of issues to be challenges for refugees. SRCs most often report lack of culturally appropriate mental health services (33 states) and lack of affordable housing (31 states) as challenges refugees face. According to SRCs, culturally appropriate mental health services include services provided in refugees' native languages; health care options that provide for different customs and beliefs; alternative treatment approaches for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other traumatic experiences associated with refugees' experiences (e.g., art therapy or support groups); and health care providers equipped to serve diverse populations, including working with patients with limited English proficiency.



Note: Survey questions asked respondents to mark all challenges that apply for TANF recipients and RCA recipients, respectively. Each state did not respond to each category or in some instances indicated "Don't know".

In addition to culturally appropriate mental health services, respondents also reported a lack of culturally appropriate physical health services and employment services (15 and seven states, respectively), often driven by lack of service providers in both fields trained to work with diverse populations, many of whom have limited English proficiency. However, 25 states reported that lack of culturally appropriate employment services were not a challenge for the refugees they serve.

Finally, SRCs reported challenges for refugees living in areas where benefit levels are low relative to the local cost of living. For example, transportation is particularly challenging when there is a lack of affordable housing near employment centers. Refugees must take public transportation long distances because they cannot afford cars. In addition, public transportation is often unavailable during the hours when refugees must commute to many low-skill jobs. When asked about the adequacy of TANF and RCA benefits, SRCs report that benefit levels in both programs are inadequate in meeting refugees' basic needs.

Innovative Strategies

The survey asked SRCs to describe innovative strategies implemented in their state aimed at addressing refugees' employment needs, physical or mental disabilities, and limited education. SRCs also described strategies to improve coordination among refugee service providers and improve funding for refugee services.

Existing Employment Services are Enhanced by Dedicated Employer Outreach Staff and Increased Access for Refugees to Occupation-Specific Training.

Refugees who participate in RCA- or TANF-associated employment services arrive in the U.S. with a range of technical job skill levels, literacy levels, English language proficiency, and exposure to American workplace policies or norms. These factors, combined with a lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate employment service providers in many areas, present challenges for states designing and delivering employment services for refugees. In addition, many employment-ready refugees face challenges finding or maintaining employment due to transportation barriers. SRCs shared strategies their states have implemented to improve existing TANF- and RCA-affiliated employment services, including:

- Hiring specialized staff to conduct employer outreach to increase refugee hiring opportunities. For example, one state houses AmeriCorps VISTA members in resettlement agencies to supplement job development activities.
- Developing specialized training modules for high-demand positions (e.g., cashiers, machine operators) or for specific refugee populations. For example, one SRC described specialized youth employment programs to help refugee youth transition to work.
- Reducing transportation barriers. One SRC described development of a driver's permit preparation course and car donation

program to reduce transportation challenges for refugees seeking work.

- Expanding access to TANF-funded on-the-job training opportunities. For example, some SRCs work with local employers to develop and increase access to experiential learning opportunities.
- Creating and providing linguistically appropriate employment services. Many states integrate employment services with ongoing vocational ESL or resettlement case management services. One SRC also reported working with the local workforce agency to produce a version of a job orientation video with translation into Burmese and Arabic.

Physical and Mental Health Services are Improved through Standardized Screening Tools, Dedicated Mental Health Staff, and Refugee-Specific Training.

All newly resettled refugees receive a physical and mental health screening upon arrival as part of standard Reception and Placement programming. Given the unique physical and emotional trauma, harsh environmental conditions that many refugees have experienced, and wide range of cultures from which refugees arrive, specialized screenings help providers to fully assess refugees' needs in a culturally competent manner. However, the extent of screenings and the availability of services vary by state. SRCs shared strategies their states have implemented to better serve refugees with physical or mental disabilities, including:

- Partnering with university hospitals and primary care centers to strengthen or standardize physical and mental health screenings.
- Transitioning initial health screenings from public health departments to community health centers to promote ongoing primary care with community health providers.
- Directing financial resources to build capacity for mental health services in resettlement agencies. Some states fund dedicated mental health coordinators or medical teams within the state's busiest resettlement agencies to supplement existing services for refugees experiencing mental health challenges.
- Employing dedicated mental health coordination staff within the SRC office. For example, one SRC hired a dedicated staff person to coordinate referrals and follow-ups for physical and mental health disabilities between resettlement agencies and healthcare providers.
- Investing in refugee-specific trainings and in-treatment programs for mainstream physical and mental healthcare providers. For example, one state has used Preferred Community funding through ORR to develop a training resulting in a Certificate in Refugee Mental Health.

ESL Curricula and Format—Including Technology-Based Platforms—Enrich Services for Refugees with Limited Education.

ESL services are typically facilitated by resettlement agencies or ECBOs or through state contracts with community colleges and adult education service providers. Classroom-based programs may present challenges for refugees unaccustomed to formal educational settings. SRCs shared changes that providers made to ESL curriculum formats for refugees with limited education, including:

- Developing alternative pre-literacy or “acculturation” curricula focused on life skills and refugee aspirations; facilitating group meetings for ongoing enrichment outside of the classroom.
- Incorporating a mix of technology-based learning platforms (e.g., tablets and computers) that use graphics with one-on-one instruction to serve refugees with varying education levels.
- Increasing linkages between English instruction and employment; providing refugees with certificates upon successful completion of Vocational ESL modules.

SRC Offices Serve as a Conduit for Promoting Coordination and Streamlining Services Statewide.

Given the number of agencies involved in the resettlement process, cash assistance provision, employment services, and health and social support services, communication between agencies often present challenges to the interwoven refugee support system, in which SRC offices serve as the “hub” in each state. In addition to serving as a conduit of information and funding between the various agencies involved, SRC offices also play an active role to increase coordination of refugee services statewide. SRCs described innovative strategies their offices have taken to streamline application and eligibility systems, facilitate regular meetings with program partners, and promote improved service coordination for refugees. For example:

- SRC offices in some states executed agreements with state TANF agencies to allow refugees to receive employment services at resettlement agencies or ECBOs instead of at the local TANF office or other standard TANF employment services provider.
- One SRC office actively works with state agencies to ensure that all local TANF offices have at least one eligibility worker trained in state public assistance policies for refugees, as some refugees may relocate to parts of the state that do not have specialized units or other refugee-specific services.
- In addition to ORR-required quarterly stakeholder meetings, some SRC offices facilitate bi-weekly or monthly partner meetings with all agencies and providers that serve refugees to discuss service coordination, funding issues, and local community initiatives to meet the needs of refugees.

Leveraging Additional Federal and State Funding Streams Supports States' Efforts to Provide Refugee Services.

Refugee service providers access a range of regular federal funding sources. For RCA recipients, employment and social services are funded by ORR-administered Refugee Social Services (RSS) and Targeted Assistance Formula Grant (TAG) programs. TANF dollars support employment services for refugees receiving TANF, though TANF recipients may also access RSS- and TAG-funded services. Coordinating these various funding streams as well as seeking funds for additional refugee services outside of these federal funding streams presents challenges for SRCs. SRCs shared strategies implemented by their states to access other federal and state funding that was *not* specific to refugee programming and efforts to increase and improve refugee services offered, including:

- States use TAG funds for specialized services such as Young Adult Refugee Mentoring (18- to 24-year-olds), recertification of specialized skills, or services to older refugees.
- States use WIOA and other U.S. Department of Labor funds to provide refugee employment services beyond those funded by RSS and TAG.
- One state uses general funds as the required match to access federal SNAP E&T program funds to offer employment services for all SNAP-eligible refugees.¹⁷ This funding expands the reach of refugee employment services beyond those associated with TANF or RCA. For example, refugees who secure employment after their initial months in the United States through RCA-affiliated employment services can access additional employment services via SNAP E&T after they are no longer receiving RCA benefits, so long as they are eligible for SNAP.
- SRC offices also work with other state agencies to direct existing state funding streams to serve refugees. For example, some states allocate economic development funding to provide ESL classes, GED services, and sliding-scale child care subsidies to refugees. Some states provide subsidized transit vouchers for refugee job seekers or leverage state funding to provide citizenship services for refugees.
- One SRC office applied for and received a private foundation grant dedicated to improving service delivery for refugees within the state's public assistance agency. In addition, some SRC offices alert refugee service providers of competitive federal, state, and local funding opportunities available to serve populations with similar characteristics to refugees (e.g., low income, TANF recipients, limited-English proficiency) so that they can apply for funding opportunities themselves.

Next Steps

Survey responses provide an overview of how states coordinate cash assistance and employment services to refugees. They also identify common challenges and strategies that SRCs implemented to address them. The study team used these survey findings to identify noteworthy program structures and practices to further explore in the fieldwork portion of the *Understanding the Intersection between TANF and Refugee Cash Assistance Services* study. Building on these survey findings, subsequent reports for the TANF-RCA study will report on in-depth fieldwork conducted in eight states that represent a diverse range of program structures, refugee populations, and economic contexts. This fieldwork provides additional details about how states and localities integrate the delivery of cash benefits and employment programming for refugees.

Survey Methodology

The online survey was administered between January and February 2016 to State Refugee Coordinators in 49 of the 50 states (Wyoming does not have a refugee program) plus the District of Columbia and California's San Diego County (which operates a Wilson-Fish program separate from the rest of the state). Of the 51 SRCs sent a survey, 49 completed it (a response rate of 96 percent). SRCs in Alabama and Texas did not respond.

All respondents were asked to think generally across communities in their state where refugees are resettled. Information presented in this brief comes from survey responses from SRCs and reflects their perspectives. The survey asked SRCs to provide responses to the best of their knowledge. To the extent that survey questions may have focused on topics outside the purview of some SRCs, the findings may not necessarily reflect actual state policies.

Respondents self-reported they had worked on issues related to refugees for nearly 14 years, on average. They reported working in their current position for an average of seven years and at the current agency for 15 years.

¹⁷ States cannot use Refugee Social Services funds to access matched federal funding.

*Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE), Administration for Children and Families,
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*

The Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) studies Administration for Children and Families (ACF) programs and the populations they serve through rigorous research and evaluation projects. These include evaluations of existing programs, evaluations of innovative approaches to helping low-income children and families, research syntheses and descriptive and exploratory studies. www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre



PROJECT OFFICER:

Tiffany McCormack, Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation

PROJECT DIRECTOR:

Robin Koralek, Abt Associates

CONTRACT NO:

HHSP23320095624WC

This report is in the public domain. Permission to reproduce is not necessary. Suggested citation: Boland, Bethany and Angela Gaffney (2017). *Understanding the Intersection between TANF and Refugee Cash Assistance: Findings from a Survey of State Refugee Coordinators*, OPRE Report #2017-75, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

This report and other reports sponsored by the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation are available at www.acf.hhs.gov/opre.



**BOLD
THINKERS
DRIVING
REAL-WORLD
IMPACT**

4550 Montgomery Avenue
Suite 800 North
Bethesda, MD 20814-3343

ABOUT ABT ASSOCIATES

Abt Associates is a mission-driven, global leader in research, evaluation and implementing programs in the fields of health, social and environmental policy, and international development. Known for its rigorous approach to solving complex challenges, Abt Associates is regularly ranked as one of the top 20 global research firms and one of the top 40 international development innovators. The company has multiple offices in the U.S. and program offices in more than 40 countries.