

2019 BVOR Refugee Sponsorship Fund Ambassador Guide



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1.

DIRECTOR'S THANKS

Dear BVOR refugee sponsorship ambassadors,

Welcome! My name is Emilie Coyle and I am the Director of National Programs at uOttawa's Refugee Hub.



The Blended Visa Office Referred (BVOR) program is a small but mighty program that brings together Canadian sponsors and government to help bring UNHCR referred refugees to Canada. This year there are 1650 spots allocated to this program. 1650 spots means 1650 people. To each person that is sponsored that one spot means so much.

This year, qualifying Canadian groups can apply to have their portion of the settlement costs associated with sponsoring a refugee through the BVOR fully covered by the BVOR fund 2019. Last year we were able to fund 150 groups looking to sponsor under the BVOR program. These groups brought in almost 700 people in 49 different communities across Canada. Perhaps you were one of these groups, or perhaps you wanted to be one of these groups, or perhaps you just want to see more refugees resettled to Canada.

This BVOR Fund Ambassadors' Guide is designed to support former and future sponsor groups, and those interested in encouraging sponsorships through BVOR.

In this guide you will find, 1) An explanation of the BVOR program, 2) a guide on how to sponsor through BVOR and how to access the fund to help you do so, 3) an example of a sponsorship story, 4) resources to help you spread the word.

This guide can be used by the experts (you!) in your community to help bring together more people to sponsor through the BVOR program. These people include, former refugees, sponsoring groups, settlement organizations, and more!

We are all in this important work together and we can all play a role. I thank you in advance for your participation this year and we look forward to hearing from you as you spread the word! If you are interested in being an ambassador, please do not hesitate to reach out to us and ask us about the ways that you can use this guide. We are easily reached at bvorfund@refugeehub.ca and there are additional resources available at refugeehub.ca

2.

The 2019 BVOR Fund

Background

The Canadian Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) refugee sponsorship program is a uniquely Canadian program that enables citizens and permanent residents to directly engage in refugee resettlement efforts. Individuals can form groups to become sponsors who commit to providing financial, emotional, and resettlement support to help newly-arrived refugees integrate into life in a new country.

The BVOR program resettles refugees identified by UNHCR and submitted to Canadian visa offices. Refugees have already met eligibility and admissibility criteria but must be matched with a sponsor before they can travel to Canada. This sponsorship model is one that connects strangers with one another.

In 2019, Canada has approved the resettlement of 1650 refugees from abroad through the BVOR program. All of these individuals receive full background checks and typically arrive in Canada 2-4 months after matching with a sponsorship group. Upon arrival, the Canadian government pays for 50% of their settlement costs.

If we don't use all of Canada's BVOR spaces, we lose that spot in Canada's annual resettlement target and the number of refugees brought to safety around the world drops. Over the past two years, the number of refugees resettled worldwide has decreased significantly while at the same time the number of people in urgent need of a safe place to call home grows daily. These refugees in need of protection require Canadians to step up to provide practical support and raise the remaining settlement funds for the first year of their life in Canada.

2018 BVOR Fund

In 2018, the Refugee Hub and Jewish Family Services – in partnership with founding donors, the Shapiro Foundation and the Giustra Foundation – launched a unique, time-limited fund to support the sponsorship of hundreds of refugees identified by the UNHCR.

The fund was created August 7, 2018 to encourage participation in sponsorship and ensure that no spots in the BVOR program went unused. The Canadian government offered 1,500 spaces in 2018 through the BVOR program – as of August there were over 1,000 spots still unclaimed. Unused spots for sponsorship would have disappeared at year's end without the quick action of the groups and people involved.



The UNCHR, the Refugee Sponsorship Training Program (RSTP), over 35 Sponsorship Agreement Holders, and many community organizations across Canada were integral partners in this rapid mobilization.

The fund mobilized hundreds of Canadians across the country. From large centers such as Vancouver, B.C., to small towns like Antigonish, N.S., Canadians came forward to sponsor, ready and eager to volunteer their time to support newcomers after generous donations were made possible by the fund.

BY THE NUMBERS:

- \$3,479,696.60 was donated by eight philanthropists to cover the costs of sponsorship.
- 685 refugees arrive in Canada in 2018 and early 2019 thanks to the 2018 BVOR Fund.
- 150 sponsorship groups from across Canada stepped up to sponsor refugees accessing the 2018 BVOR Fund.

The 2019 BVOR Fund

After the success of the 2018 BVOR Fund, the Refugee Hub, the Shapiro Foundation, G. Barrie Landry, and the Jewish Foundation of Greater Toronto are relaunching the **2019 BVOR Fund**. This fund is a time-bound funding source that will cover **the sponsor's portion** of the BVOR sponsorship costs. Groups will be responsible for securing funding or in-kind donations to cover start-up costs such as clothing and furniture.

Sponsors can **apply for the funds between May 2nd and August 31st** or until the fund is exhausted prior to the deadline.

Who is paying for this fund?

The 2019 BVOR Fund is housed at Toronto Jewish Foundation and administered by the Refugee Hub. Generous seed contributions have been made by the Shapiro Foundation and G. Barrie Landry.

The fund also welcomes donations from Canadians, international individuals and groups who would like to participate in the resettlement of refugees through the BVOR program. Should you contribute the full amount needed to sponsor a family to the fund, you can choose to be matched to the sponsor group that receives your donated funds to learn more about the sponsoring group that is able to sponsor through your generosity.

Please note, only US and Canadian donors can be issued with a tax receipt for their donation.



What does the BVOR Fund cover?

Traditionally, the BVOR program is cost-shared between the government and sponsoring group. Sponsoring groups are responsible for providing 6 months of income support, in addition to start-up costs such as furniture. Sponsors will now be able to apply to the BVOR Fund to have the sponsor-side settlement costs subsidized (the start-up costs must still be raised by the sponsor group and can include in-kind donations).

In addition, in 2019, Sponsorship Agreement Holders can apply to the fund for a BVOR administrative fee of \$5000 per BVOR case submitted up to a maximum of \$50,000.

Who is eligible to apply to this fund?

Any Canadian sponsoring group that is working with a Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH) and who will submit an application to sponsor an individual or family through the BVOR program between May 2nd, 2019 and August 31st, 2019. **Note: Refugees on the BVOR list are UNHCR referred and cannot be 'named' by individuals in Canada.** The fund is open to experienced sponsoring groups as well as new sponsoring groups.

Partners

The Refugee Hub

The Refugee Hub was founded at the University of Ottawa in 2012. Its mission is to foster justice and human rights for refugees at local, national and international levels through innovative research, programs and partnerships. The Refugee Hub's projects include the Refugee Sponsorship Support Program, which supports Canadian sponsors, and the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative, which encourages and supports the adoption of community sponsorship programs in countries outside of Canada. More: www.refugeehub.ca

The Shapiro Foundation

The Shapiro Foundation, founded by Barbara and Edward Shapiro in 2000, is a U.S. charitable foundation focused on improving the lives of the world's most vulnerable populations. The foundation's primary focus is on children, refugees and immigrants, as well as education, global health and humanitarian aid. Support is provided for organizations in Boston and throughout the US, as well as Canada, Israel, Greece, Rwanda, and Bangladesh. More: www.theshapirofoundation.org

G. Barrie Landry

G. Barrie Landry is a philanthropist focusing on social justice issues often faced by vulnerable populations in the areas of global health, education, refugee resettlement and self-reliance, and child protection.

3. How to Sponsor

HAVE YOU EVER WANTED TO SPONSOR REFUGEES?

Until August 31st, 2019, you can have the settlement costs of sponsorship through the Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) program **fully covered**. The 2019 BVOR Fund facilitates the sponsorship to Canada of refugees.

You can be part of a movement by helping to bring some of the world's most vulnerable people to safety by following the 4 steps below!

1

Talk to your friends, family,
community, or neighbors about
starting a group.
Groups of 5 or 10 people can be great.

2

Let us know you're interested!

Email us at BVORfund@refugeehub.ca

3

Get in touch with a Sponsorship
Agreement Holder (SAH) who
can help you with your
application.

4

Complete the application, get
educated on resources near you,
and fundraise to prepare for the
family's arrival.

Email: BVORFund@refugeehub.ca

Website: www.refugeehub.ca



The
RefugeeHub

Le carrefour des réfugiés

4.

A Shining Example of Sponsorship

THE FACTS

Location: Ontario, Canada.

Name of Sponsoring Group: Seva Food Bank and Sikhs Serving Canada

Number of Sponsors in Group: Core group of 6 with 14 more supporting

Sponsoring Since: 2018

Sponsoring Group Description: A group of Ontario-based volunteers who worked together at the Seva Foodbank



Number of Refugees sponsored: 4 families, 20 people including 13 children

THE CONTEXT

In 2018, a group of volunteers and employees with the Seva Food Bank and Sikhs Serving Canada created a sponsorship group to sponsor four families through the Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) resettlement program. This program shares the costs and settlement responsibilities between the government and community groups in Canada. The sponsorship group accessed funds from the 2018 BVOR Fund, provided by the University of Ottawa Refugee Hub and the Shapiro Foundation, which provided funding for groups sponsoring people through the BVOR resettlement program.

THE EXPERIENCE

How did your workplace sponsorship begin?

Seva translates to 'selfless service,' and it's not only a core value for Seva Food Bank, but of Sikhism, as well. Our organization upholds values such as inclusiveness, diversity (culturally and with respect to life experience), the wellbeing of all, and eternal optimism, all of which are a huge part of why it made sense to sponsor through our organization.

How did you engage colleagues at your workplace?

It was really all word of mouth and who we knew within our own networks. We have four board members involved in the committee providing oversight and leadership. Former clients of the foodbank are also volunteering to support, particularly when we need translation help. There is one special volunteer from Honduras who, six years ago, when she and her sister-in-law were new to Canada, was coming to the Food Bank. Now she volunteers, sharing her experience as a newcomer, volunteering at the food bank, and supporting the sponsorship group with translation.



Our organization has a volunteer management system in place, including volunteer agreements and confidentiality agreements, which were helpful in organizing the sponsorship group. Now many of the sponsorship volunteers have become volunteers at the Foodbank. It's very interconnected. In December 2018, we did a big luncheon, volunteer appreciation event, and invited all the volunteers and newcomer families. We gave out awards to the committee, which was really nice.

How did you fundraise?

Because it was our first time sponsoring, access to the Canadian BVOR fund to cover our costs was very important to us. However, we were going to take on the sponsorship even without the fund, and we did fundraise additional dollars. If we would have fundraised more, we would have thrown some sort of dinner or high-level event through our organization to raise money. We did end up requesting in-kind donations from the community, since we wanted to reduce start-up costs as much as we could.

We used Facebook and personal contacts to let the larger community know that we were sponsoring four families and looking for furniture. We found all the furniture we needed, and, in fact, that was one of the most inspiring parts of the project. One company even donated brand new bunk beds, bedding and mattresses for all four of the families.

Since we know there will be some difficulties adjusting once our sponsorship support officially ends, we have a goal of raising up to \$50,000 by the end of the first year.

What were some key factors in the success of your workplace sponsorship?

Family Coaches: We assign two different people to each family who meet at least biweekly with each family. The coaches sit down and look at mail, budgets, and discuss any questions that arise for the family, particularly questions related to immigration paperwork that are time sensitive. It works well and makes sure that nothing falls through the cracks. It was a huge shift in how we were functioning and allowed for a reduction in everyone's stress level. With the family coaches, not a week goes by that we don't contact the families.

Communication Tools: Seva Food Bank uses a communication tool called Slack, through which we have created communication channels for each settlement topic, using hashtags such as housing and finances. Volunteers and employees find it is fundamental to our communication with each other. We have channels for each family, and any time something comes up, we post it in that group and are able to tag one another.

Organization of Information: We created and organized an excel document that contained the key information about the families. Any time we received information about the families, such as a notice to travel, we were sure to include it in the excel document. We created profile tabs for each family with date of birth, gender, education, visa number etc. This way it was easy to share necessary information with team members as they filled out documents with the families. We also created a work plan through excel with a huge list of tasks, and logged when they were completed and by whom.

What challenges did you encounter and how did you resolve them?

Having daytime availability: Having someone with day-time availability is really important. Luckily, we had the perfect people!

Housing: The biggest challenge for us was finding affordable housing, especially since the Toronto region is so expensive. We got the notice of arrival ten days before the families arrived, and we didn't think the families would arrive so close together. We thought we would have a couple weeks in between each of them. There weren't a lot of houses that were affordable and were clean, so we were lucky to have a real estate agent as part of the group, and eventually, we did find housing. The landlords were also quite risk averse, so it was hard to find someone to rent to the families when they had no credit or leasing history. We overcame this by having Seva Food bank as an organization co-sign the lease.

Volunteer burnout: Volunteer burnout is a real part of this project. On the whole, we have done a good job at checking in on people, and this has really helped prevent burnout. We understand that sponsorship is taxing, and sometimes just acknowledging that people might be under a lot of pressure, does a lot to reduce the chances of burnout.

What has been the impact of workplace sponsorship on you and your colleagues?

"I have done community work for years and years. Last year, I felt stagnant, like I was being pulled to do something bigger. The refugee settlement project motivated me and gave me the fire I needed. It has been a very emotional, personal experience. The work has been challenging, but I have made super friends. It has been a loving experience."

"For me, one of the added benefits of sponsorship was that my son has been able to experience the process first-hand. He's seven years old. He was learning about refugees at school. Now he is experiencing refugee sponsorship through me, has come to meetings, and has helped set up a home for a family. We are trying to establish values in the next generation and raise a new generation of leaders, and you can only do that through leading by example."

NEXT STEPS

What's next for your sponsorship group?

Seva Food Bank is unique in that we have incorporated private sponsorship into our programming. We tried it this year, and hopefully we can grow it under the initiative of settlement in Canada. Now we are assessing what is sustainable programmatically and doing some high-level strategic planning before moving forward. That said, we are all very enthusiastic about the future of sponsorship in our organization and we are having informal discussions about entering into a formal sponsorship agreement with the Government of Canada.

Further Reading

- [Seva Refugee Resettlement Pilot Project](#)
- [GRSI Guidebook: The Experience of a business sponsoring refugees](#)

5. Host a BVOR 2019 Party

One of the many ways you can share the great news about the 2019 BVOR Fund is by bringing your friends and family together and hosting a BVOR party! We have put together some ideas on different ways to talk about refugee sponsorship and encourage people in your community to apply to the fund.

A) Watch “Inside My Heart”

“Inside My Heart” is a film that follows three families that had to flee Syria and Afghanistan as they try to find safety in different countries in Europe. Screen this film with your friends and use the provided toolkit discussion questions to have some conversations about the movie and the global refugee situation, and how sponsorship is one of the ways Canadians can help refugees come to safety. Learn more about the film [here](#) and register to screen the film [here](#). We will share the partner toolkit (which includes discussion questions, sample social media posts, and posters) and the link to the film once you register.

B) Watch the 2019 BVOR Fund Explainer Video

On the RefugeeHub.ca website you can find a video of our Director of National Programs Emilie Coyle explaining the 2019 BVOR Fund: who can apply, how you can apply, and the benefits of community sponsorship.

C) Book the 2019 BVOR Fund Team for a Chat!

To support your BVOR 2019 Party, members of the 2019 BVOR Fund Team from the Refugee Hub are on hand to deliver presentations to your aspiring sponsors! Depending on geography and timing, these presentations can be delivered in person, over Skype, or other internet-based platforms. Contact us at bvorfund@refugeehub.ca to schedule a member of our staff to present to your group!

D) Use and Share 2019 BVOR Fund Information

This Guide and a number of different resources on the RefugeeHub.ca website are easy tools to share and explain the BVOR Fund. We have simple flyers and posters to engage the public and we continue to develop more resources to support ambassadors and sponsors!

6.

How to share BVOR 2019 on Social Media

Our goal on Social Media is to **inform** and **inspire**. We hope to start a conversation around the importance of sponsorship and mobilize groups to get involved. Sharing the Fund with your Social Media networks raises awareness and connects groups together, increasing the potential to fill all 1650 spots for refugee resettlement through the BVOR program.

You are encouraged to share your personal experiences with sponsorship and/or what sponsorship means to you. Any graphics, images, or videos you find throughout the pack or on our platforms are also great resources to attach on social media. Here are some examples that you can build from:

Sample Tweets and Media Attachments

The 2019 BVOR Fund is a wonderful opportunity for you and your community to get involved in refugee sponsorship. Apply today to sponsor a single refugee or a refugee family to come to Canada! #BVOR2019 #RefugeeSponsorship #WithRefugees

Did you know that Canada has approved the resettlement of 1650 refugees from abroad through the 2019 BVOR program? The Fund supports sponsors to ensure that no spots go unused. For any questions contact us at BVORFund@refugeehub.ca. #BVOR2019 #RefugeeSponsorship #WithRefugees

Sponsorship Story: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QQ-aQjAd9_o&feature=youtu.be

News Release: <https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/funds-now-available-for-canadians-to-sponsor-hundreds-of-refugees-in-2019-891207815.html>

UNHCR Graphic: <https://www.unhcr.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/UNHCR-BVOR-Fact-Sheet-2019.pdf>

Connect With Us

Our Social Media platforms share information about the Fund, sponsor stories, and our partners who offer sponsorship support. Connect with us for more to share with your networks.

<https://twitter.com/RefugeeHub>

<https://www.facebook.com/TheRefugeeHub/>

7.

How to fundraise for BVOR sponsorships

What do I need to cover for sponsored refugee(s)?

Start-up costs (also known as start-up allowances) is a one-time payment intended to cover the initial cost of settling in Canada. It includes: staple allowance; basic household needs allowance; furniture allowance; regular and seasonal clothing allowance; winter clothing allowance; utility installation allowance; linens allowance; and school start-up allowance (if applicable).

For more information on how much you should fundraise to cover start-up costs based on the size of the family you are sponsoring, you can refer to further materials on the RSTP website [here](#).

Alternatively, you can lower your start-up costs by requesting donations from your community of things like furniture, clothes, etc.

However, there may be other additional expenses you may need to provide. This could include costs required above the monthly income support rate your group might may receive. For example, the shelter allowance for a family of 4 in Ontario is \$744. If the average monthly rent in your area is higher than that, then you will need to provide the difference. You can review all assistance rates on the RSTP website [here](#).

Donation administration

If you are sponsoring, you are a group with charitable status, or you are working with a Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH) - this means that you should have a system set up that can provide charitable tax receipts if required.

If you are working with a SAH, ask them what their rules and processes are for donations. If you are a charity, speak with your team to discuss how you will process your donations. Ensure that you have a process where you can track your donors and the amounts you've received.

Fundraising ideas:

Create a plan

- Who in your group will keep track of fundraising? Who will you reach out to? What activities will you undertake? When will you do them?
- How will you promote? Review opportunities with local media, online, etc.



Set a challenge

- You can run, walk and cycle
- Keep something up over a period of days

Reach out

- Look to your clubs, universities, local businesses, associations and places of worship for funding or in-kind support

Activities

- Set up silent auctions, raffles, sales
- Organize a viewing of 'Inside My heart', a documentary that chronicles the lives of three families who were forced to flee Syria and Afghanistan, for public viewings
- Host art-related events people can attend

Self-merchandise

- Postcards, crafts, etc.

Sponsorship fundraising success stories

A Workplace Sponsorship

"We formed a fundraising committee and organized all kinds of fun activities – a silent auction, a number of high calorie "Monday Fundays" involving pies, samosas, bake and chocolate sales, a dreidel spinning contest, a concert, a trivia night. One highlight was Carnival week at the firm, with contests and games, like a mini-golf course we constructed throughout the office. We found that clients of the firm pitched in and started volunteering, and we ended up having over 50 lawyers, staff, clients and others involved. Fundraising activities contributed to good morale at the firm, and word spread about the positive work environment."

A group of Ontario-based volunteers who work together

"We used Facebook and personal contacts to let the larger community know that we were sponsoring four families and looking for furniture. We found all the furniture we needed, and, in fact, that was one of the most inspiring parts of the project. Once company even donated brand new bunk beds, bedding, and mattresses for all four of the families"

A staff committee at an international organization

"One of the most successful strategies was fundraising by appealing to our colleagues' sugar cravings through bake sales. We also organized a craft fair, raffle and organized a way for people to donate online. A neighboring barbershop even asked their customers if they'd like to contribute while they were getting their hair trimmed! Every group we have spoken to agreed that fundraising was the easiest part of the sponsorship."