

Cultural Orientation Resource Center

Frequently Asked Questions

Orientation is a process that begins overseas and continues, sometimes for several months, in the United States. Both overseas and U.S. orientation deal with the same basic topics, but with one important difference: Whereas overseas cultural orientation (CO) prepares refugees for what they as a group are likely to encounter anywhere in the United States, orientation in the United States helps individual refugees deal with what they are actually experiencing in their new communities. Overseas CO is shaped by group needs, while U.S. orientation is shaped by the specific needs and concerns of individual refugees.

The following provides brief answers to questions that are frequently asked about orientation overseas and in the United States. For additional information on the topics, click on the links that follow the answers.

Overseas Cultural Orientation

1. *What is the purpose of overseas CO?*

The purpose of overseas CO is to help refugees develop realistic expectations about life in the United States and to facilitate their successful resettlement.

<http://www.cal.org/co/overseas/>

2. *Is CO mandatory? Does everyone receive overseas CO?*

While attending CO is strongly encouraged, it is not mandatory. All refugees over the age of 15 who have been approved for resettlement to the United States are eligible to receive CO, and the vast majority of them do attend. Some refugees are not able to attend, however, mostly due to security concerns and pressing family responsibilities.

<http://www.cal.org/co/overseas/>

3. *Where is CO provided overseas?*

CO is provided in more than 40 countries in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and the Caribbean.

<http://www.cal.org/co/overseas/worldmap.html>

4. *Do all refugees in all locations receive the same amount of overseas CO?*

No. The amount of CO varies from location to location, and sometimes by groups within a location. The amount of CO generally depends on the needs of the refugees. Most refugees receive 16-21 hours of orientation. In a few cases, refugees receive an abbreviated session of 6-7 hours.

<http://www.cal.org/co/overseas/worldmap.html>

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5. *What is the content of overseas CO?*

Overseas CO covers 11 topics on processing, travel, and resettlement: Pre-Departure Processing, Role of the Resettlement Agency, Housing, Employment, Transportation, Education, Health, Money Management, Rights and Responsibilities, Cultural Adjustment, and Travel.

<http://www.cal.org/co/publications/welcome.html>

6. *Does CO vary by population, or does everybody receive the same instruction?*

All groups receive instruction on the same 11 topics, but instruction, and instructional methodology, is tailored to each group's background, interests, and concerns. For example, a group that includes many highly educated urban professionals has different employment needs and interests than a group of farmers with little or no formal education.

See Overseas CO Program highlights, such as

http://www.cal.org/co/overseas/highlight/IOM_MOS-CA_and_Europe.html

7. *What materials do CO programs overseas use?*

Each overseas CO program develops its own material. The basic foundation for their content is *Welcome to the United States: A Guidebook for Refugees*. Available in 14 languages (in addition to English), the guidebook provides refugees with basic information about what they will encounter in their first months in the United States.

<http://www.cal.org/co/publications/welcome.html>

Each overseas CO program tailors its material to use with the various populations they serve. For example, programs will emphasize visual materials with preliterate participants, but may use a student workbook with literate participants.

Other resources used by the overseas programs include the *Overseas Service Provider Toolkit*, containing lesson plans developed by CO providers overseas, and three videos produced for the program. One of the videos (*Welcome to the United States: Refugee Orientation*) reinforces the main points in the guidebook, and the other two (*A New Day: Refugee Families in the United States* and *Be Who You Are: Refugee Youth in the United States*) address family and youth issues.

<http://www.cal.org/co/lessonplans/index.html>

<http://www.cal.org/co/publications/orientation.html>

<http://www.cal.org/co/publications/anewday.html>

8. *What resources for orientation design and delivery are available?*

A valuable resource for overseas orientation providers is the [Overseas Service Provider Toolkit](#), containing lesson plans, effective practices, and tools for trainers developed and used by various overseas CO programs.

A similar toolkit developed by orientation specialists in collaboration with orientation providers around the United States, the [Domestic Service Providers Toolkit](#) may also be of use to overseas orientation providers.

<http://www.cal.org/co/lessonplans/index.html>

9. *How can I find out about work opportunities in overseas CO?*

Contact the agencies that provide orientation overseas. Most of the providers are international or U.S.-based agencies. The agencies are funded by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), and have extensive experience in refugee resettlement and education.

<http://www.cal.org/co/overseas/worldmap.html>

Domestic Orientation

1. *What is the purpose of domestic orientation?*

The purpose of domestic orientation is to help refugees adapt as quickly and as smoothly as possible to their new communities in the United States.

<http://www.cal.org/co/domestic/>

2. *What are the requirements for domestic orientation provision in the United States?*

Orientation is part of the Resettlement and Placement (R&P) services that resettlement agencies are required (by contractual agreement with the Department of State) to provide to newly resettled refugees. Refugees are required to receive orientation to housing and personal safety within 5 working days of their arrival, and orientation on other topics within 30 days of arrival.

<http://www.cal.org/co/domestic/>

Asylees, entrants, and other populations eligible for services from the Department of Health and Human Services/Administration for Children and Families/Office of Refugee Resettlement do not necessarily receive orientation, however.

3. *What is the content of the domestic orientation required by the R&P program?*

As with overseas CO, the content of orientation is based upon *Welcome to the United States: A Guidebook for Refugees*, with the exception of the processing and travel sections. As such, the topics are Role of the Resettlement Agency, Housing, Employment, Transportation, Education, Health, Money Management, Rights and Responsibilities, and Cultural Adjustment. Also as with overseas CO, the emphasis placed upon different topics will depend upon the needs of the client.

<http://www.cal.org/co/publications/welcome.html>

4. *How do local resettlement agencies provide orientation?*

Most resettlement agencies use a case management model for orientation. With this model, resettlement services, including orientation, are provided to each refugee, or refugee family, by a case manager. Most orientation is conducted either in family groups or one-on-one, and case managers convey information through discussion, interviews, hands-on demonstrations, conversation, and question-and-answer sessions.

However, many agencies either complement, or have replaced, this case management model with workshop or classroom models for orientation that use staff or designated trainers.

Typically orientation is provided in the context of real-life situations and needs. For example, health orientation is conducted when addressing refugees' pressing health needs, and employment orientation is done as part of an actual job search.

Resettlement agencies may also provide orientation outside of the context of the R&P program, through case management, workshops, social programs, and so forth.

http://www.cal.org/co/domestic/toolkit/program_descriptions/index.html

5. *Do others in the receiving communities provide orientation? How?*

A host of other organizations and individuals in the communities provide orientation, formally and informally. Ethnic and other community-based organizations are an important source of orientation. Employment counselors provide one-on-one orientation to the workplace, and ESL teachers teach basic lifeskills—e.g., how to open a bank account or sit a job interview—in the context of language instruction. Community health, housing, and police departments also provide important information to newcomers about their services.

<http://www.cal.org/co/domestic/>

6. *What resources for orientation design and delivery are available?*

A valuable resource for domestic orientation providers is the [Domestic Service Providers Toolkit](#). Developed by orientation specialists in collaboration with orientation providers around the United States, the toolkit includes lesson plans and effective practices, tools for trainers, and descriptions of domestic orientation programs.

A similar toolkit developed for overseas orientation providers, The [Overseas Service Provider Toolkit](#), may also be of use to domestic orientation providers.

<http://www.cal.org/co/lessonplans/index.html>

In addition, the COR Center publication, [Training for Non-Trainers: Tips and Strategies](#), as well as its accompanying attachments, [Adult Learning and Retention](#), [Methods in Training](#), [Setting Up a Training Room](#), and [Soothing Tensions](#), are designed to assist in the conceptualization, design, and implementation of orientation delivery.

http://www.cal.org/co/domestic/toolkit/tools/training_for_non-trainers.pdf

http://www.cal.org/co/domestic/toolkit/tools/adult_learning.pdf

<http://www.cal.org/co/domestic/toolkit/tools/methods.pdf>

http://www.cal.org/co/domestic/toolkit/tools/setting_up.pdf

http://www.cal.org/co/domestic/toolkit/tools/soothing_tensions.pdf

7. *How can I get involved in delivering domestic orientation?*

Contact resettlement agencies

(<http://www.wrapsnet.org/Contacts/RPAgencyContacts/tabid/100/language/en-US/Default.aspx>) or ethnic community-based organizations, such as those listed on the Office of Refugee Resettlement Web site (<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/partners/maas.htm>).