



Conseil canadien pour les réfugiés
Canadian Council for Refugees

Refugee
Sponsorship
Training
Program

Code of Ethics for the private sponsorship of refugees Toolkit

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Introduction to the Code of Ethics

What is the Code of Ethics for the private sponsorship of refugees?

The Code of Ethics is a tool for use by groups involved in the private sponsorship of refugees who want to adopt a code of ethics.

It may be useful to Sponsorship Agreement Holders, Constituent Groups, Co-sponsors, Community Sponsors, Groups of Five and sponsors engaged in Quebec’s “parrainage collectif” program. Each group will want to adapt the text to suit its own mission and reality. In particular, the choice of sub-points under the principles will depend on how the group functions. To simplify, we have referred to the various groupings of people that sponsor refugees as “private sponsors” or “sponsorship groups” more generally throughout this document.

The refugees that we are referring to are those that have come to Canada under the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program, Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) program, Joint Assistance Sponsorship (JAS) program, “Parrainage collectif” in Quebec, and any other private sponsorship initiative. Since there is a private sponsorship component to all of these programs, throughout this document we generally refer to all these programs as “private sponsorship” or the “private sponsorship of refugees program”.

The code was originally adopted by the Canadian Council for Refugees’ Working Group on Overseas Protection and Resettlement¹ in 2010, following extensive consultation. In 2020, the code was reviewed and revised, in collaboration with the Refugee Sponsorship Training Program (RSTP). We hope this tool will continue to be useful for sponsorship groups in Canada to make the best of the sponsorship experience for both newcomers and sponsors.

Power Imbalance

The relationship between private sponsors and privately sponsored refugees is unique. Multiple power imbalances exist at the core of this relationship. Sponsors provide the newcomers they have sponsored with the money they need to cover the costs of their basic needs, such as food, shelter and clothing. Most sponsored newcomers depend on their sponsors for this essential financial support, as well as support in navigating and connecting with their new community. Some questions that may help sponsors to better understand how this power imbalance may impact the sponsorship include: *How would you feel if you had to rely on the financial support of a group of people? What if you couldn’t feed yourself or your children without the financial support that this group provides? How would you feel about them? Do you think you could feel fully comfortable with them? Would you be careful not to upset them to ensure that they continue to provide you with financial support that you need to survive? Could you confidently assert your needs and wishes with them?*

There is no single way to answer the questions above, as sponsors answering those questions will likely have different responses. However, although everyone that reflects on the questions above may feel and experience the power imbalance differently, ultimately the power imbalance still exists. Being aware of the power imbalance between sponsor and sponsored newcomer, and working to minimize it, is key to a successful sponsorship.

¹ At the time it was known as the Working Group on Overseas Protection and Sponsorship.

We hope this code of ethics will be a helpful tool for sponsors to explore how power imbalance impacts the sponsor-newcomer relationship, examine potential ethical considerations that require attention, and commit to certain principles during the sponsorship.

How to use this Code of Ethics

We encourage you to promote this Code of Ethics in your networks and adapt it for use within your sponsorship group. Some of the ways that sponsorship groups have used this Code of Ethics include:

- making it part of their regular orientation;
- ensuring that all sponsors review, discuss, and sign the code before submitting sponsorship application forms;
- using the code in sponsor training sessions, including by adding case scenarios and discussing them as a group. (See annex with some **Case scenarios**, following the text of the Code.)

The Code of Ethics

The Code of Ethics is a tool for use by groups involved in the private sponsorship of refugees who want to adopt a code of ethics. Each group can adapt the text to suit its own mission and reality. In particular, the choice of sub-points under the principles will depend on how the group functions. This text is also available at ccrweb.ca/en/code-ethics.

PREAMBLE

- [Our group] sponsors refugees because [fill in what motivates your group: religious call to help others or seek justice? Community obligations to respond to others' needs?]
- All refugees have a right to protection and a durable solution. Through sponsorship, we contribute to some refugees being safe and having a permanent home in Canada, in addition to those refugees resettled by the government.
- In our sponsorship activities, we commit to respect and promote the dignity and human rights of refugees.
- Although we can only sponsor a small number of refugees in need of resettlement, we will respect the principle of non-discrimination in selecting whom we sponsor (for example, not discriminating on the basis of religion, race or sexual orientation).
- Recognizing that there is an inherent power imbalance in the relationship between sponsors and sponsored persons, we commit to act in ways that minimize the risk of oppression in the relationship.
- We will seek to promote gender equity and to prevent gender-based violence, mindful of the need for sensitivity in the cross-cultural setting and in the context of the unequal relationship between sponsors and those sponsored.
- We will strive to be sensitive to diversity. We will accept and welcome differences based on – but not limited to – race, ethnicity, nationality, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs and personal histories.
- We will strive to understand how oppression happens within our society and will make every effort to ensure that we do not oppress anyone in our sponsorship activities.
- We commit to respect our obligations, including our legal obligations, to protect the rights of sponsored children and other sponsored persons with particular vulnerabilities (for example, as a result of health or disability).
- We believe that sponsorship creates personal relationships that could enrich the lives of all involved. We commit to make the relationships as warm and as welcoming as we can.

PRINCIPLES

We commit to respecting the following ethical principles in our sponsorship work:

1. Right to self determination. We will respect and support the right of those sponsored to make their own decisions about their lives.

- We will inform those sponsored of their right to make their own decisions.
- We will provide those sponsored with relevant information so that they can make informed choices.
- We will support those sponsored in managing their own budgets.
- We will support those sponsored in progressively gaining confidence in making their own decisions as they familiarize themselves with Canadian society.
- We will not make judgments about choices made by the persons we sponsor.
- We will respect the right of those sponsored to make decisions regarding questions of faith and religious affiliation.
- We will not require those sponsored to start working or volunteering before they are ready.
- We will not use possessive language in relation to sponsored persons (in other words, language that suggests that they “belong” to us, such as calling them “our refugees.”)
- We will respect the choices of those sponsored about how they wish to be described and identified (including whether they wish to be identified as “refugees” and their chosen gender identity and pronouns).

2. Right to privacy. We will respect the right of those sponsored to privacy.

- We will inform those sponsored of their right to privacy.
- We will keep the personal information of those sponsored private, and will only share information after permission is granted and only with the people that we are given to permission to share this information with.
- We will respect the sponsored persons’ right to privacy about their past, including their experiences of persecution, flight and exile, and follow their lead on what, if anything, they want to share.
- We will obtain explicit informed consent from sponsored persons before publishing information about them or photos of them in any form, including in emails, social media and newsletters. We will recognize that due to the power imbalance sponsored persons may not be comfortable saying “no” and we will therefore give careful attention to ensuring that consent is truly being voluntarily provided.
- We will require sponsors to sign an undertaking to respect our organization’s policy on privacy requirements.
- We will require interpreters to sign a confidentiality agreement if they are not already bound by professional standards, and we will inform those sponsored of the interpreters’ role and duty to respect privacy.
- We will make sure documents containing personal information are kept safe and private, and are either handed over to those being sponsored or destroyed at the end of the sponsorship.
- We will respect the privacy of sponsored persons’ homes.
- We will act as advocates for the right to privacy of those sponsored.

- 3. Financial integrity.** We will maintain integrity in financial and business relationships and avoid actual or perceived conflicts of interest.
- We will not accept gifts that are more than token (in other words, only gifts of very small financial value).
 - We will develop and follow a protocol for sharing financial information between sponsors and those being sponsored.
 - We will declare potential conflicts of interest to each other and seek solutions to minimize the risk (e.g. involving a third party if a sponsor offers to hire a sponsored person).
 - We will require sponsors to sign an undertaking to respect our organization's policy on conflicts of interest.
 - We will strive to ensure that sponsored persons do not feel that they are receiving charity from or owe anything to individuals who contribute to the sponsorship.
- 4. Competence.** We will respect our duty to act competently.
- We will acquire appropriate cultural and diversity understanding.
 - We will screen, train and supervise volunteers.
 - We will request a criminal record check for those working with vulnerable individuals.
 - We will assess potential sponsors/constituent groups according to criteria established by our organization.
 - We will inform sponsored persons of all parties that sponsored them, including any Sponsorship Agreement Holder or other organization or person that may be involved in the sponsorship.
 - We will provide sponsored persons with accurate information on their rights, services available to them, etc.
 - We will recognize our own limitations and make appropriate referrals.
 - We will ensure that the basic needs of sponsored persons are met, in accordance with the obligations set out in the Undertaking to Sponsor, and we understand that this may include mentoring on financial management.
 - We will work to ensure that sponsored persons understand us, and we will aim to provide information and services in the sponsored persons' own language.
- 5. Transparency.** We will be transparent in our services, towards those seeking sponsorship, those sponsored and the public.
- We will provide clear and transparent information about how we make decisions on who to sponsor.
 - We will provide sponsored persons with full information about all matters that concern them.
 - We will address complaints through an established complaints mechanism involving a third party.
 - We will strive to be open and to make sure information and expectations are clear.
- 6. Expectations.** We will refrain from having unrealistic expectations of the persons we are sponsoring.
- We will attempt to acknowledge and manage our expectations of those we sponsor and restrict our expectations to those essential for the functioning of the sponsorship.

- We will inform the sponsored persons of the limits of those expectations and that they are not required to do more (bearing in mind that sometimes sponsored persons may perceive pressures to do some things even when there is no such intention).
- We will not expect or ask those sponsored to do anything for us “in return,” such as performing domestic services, running errands, volunteering for our organization, etc.
- We will not expect sponsored persons to follow any particular cultural or religious norms or practices, or to associate with others based on ethnicity, national origin or religion/fait.
- We will remember that sponsored persons may have their own expectations, and we will strive to understand their expectations and sensitively discuss any unrealistic expectations that they may have.

7. Equity. We will strive to make our relationships as equitable as possible, by being aware of power dynamics and guarding against risks of abuse of power.

- We will select who to sponsor based on equitable principles.
- We will avoid assumptions based on gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, age, ability, religion, culture, race, ethnicity or nationality.
- We will work to develop trust in relationships.
- We will inform sponsored persons of the colonial history of Canada, including the treaty system and the current struggles of Indigenous Peoples across this country.

8. Conduct. We will act appropriately, put measures in place to protect sponsored persons, and act seriously and swiftly where there is an allegation or evidence of abuse or exploitation perpetrated by a sponsor.

- We will establish appropriate boundaries with sponsored persons.
- We will be attentive to sponsored persons’ attitudes to physical contact and avoid any physical contact that might make them feel uncomfortable.
- We will not engage in any behaviour towards the sponsored persons that we believe may not be welcomed.
- We will make every effort to make sponsored persons feel safe by listening attentively to any concerns and by letting the sponsored persons choose where, when and with whom to meet.
- We will not abuse our position of power by implying, requesting, or forcing sponsored persons to render services, such as those of a sexual nature.
- We will not contact or meet with sponsored persons if we are inebriated or under the influence of illegal drugs.
- We will take allegations of abuse seriously, and act quickly and appropriately in accordance with our accountability mechanisms and prevailing laws.
- We will support a sponsored person to report cases of illegal acts to appropriate authorities if they wish to do so.

9. Accountability. We will be accountable to the sponsored persons and to each other for respecting our obligations as sponsors and under this Code of Ethics.

- We will have a plan in place to resolve differences between the sponsored persons and sponsors, as well as between sponsors, including a protocol for handling complaints with an option of involving a third party.

- We will treat all complaints confidentially and will only share information with the informed consent of the person making the complaint, and only with the people designated in our protocol and persons involved in the complaint.
- We will inform the sponsored persons about the protocol and ensure they know how they can raise an issue or make a complaint (including to the third party), what the protocol is, that complaints will be treated confidentially and that they will not suffer negative consequences for making a complaint.
- We will make sure that each individual sponsored person is able to make a complaint without the knowledge of the other sponsored persons.

10. Concluding a sponsorship. We will work to ensure a satisfactory conclusion to the sponsorship for all concerned.

- We understand that self-sufficiency can take longer than the sponsorship period, and we will not measure the success of the sponsorship solely on the ability of the sponsored persons to be self-sufficient by the end of the sponsorship period.
- We will prepare sponsored persons for the end of the sponsorship and attempt to address any anxieties in advance.
- We will ensure that sponsored persons are aware of their rights and entitlements, including their entitlement to government benefits and services.
- We will have a clear process for deciding how to re-direct funds remaining at the end of a sponsorship.

Case scenarios

Many case scenarios could be used to engage sponsors in important discussions to further the understanding of key points of this Code of Ethics. The following are some examples that could be used to start a conversation and point you to certain sections in the Code:

1. What would you do if the sponsored newcomers are sending some of the money that you are giving them to their relatives in their home country?

Ethical principles to consider include: right to self-determination, financial integrity, expectations.

2. What would you do if the newcomer has been sponsored by a family member in Canada who speaks on their behalf and provides advice that you do not agree with?

Ethical principles to consider include: right to self-determination, accountability.

3. What would you do if the sponsored newcomers do not listen to important medical advice?

Ethical principles to consider include: right to self-determination.

4. How would you react if the newcomers you sponsored are seemingly very unhappy to be here?

Ethical principles to consider include: expectations.

5. How would you react if the sponsored newcomers are not showing any gratitude for the support that you are providing?

Ethical principles to consider include: expectations.

6. What would you do if a member of the sponsorship group is disclosing the sponsored person's medical information to people outside of the sponsorship group?

Ethical principles to consider include: privacy, accountability.

7. What would you do if the newcomer you sponsored wants to move to a different community to be closer to a friend?

Ethical principles to consider include: right to self-determination, competence, transparency.

8. How will you address the desire of people who contributed financially to the sponsorship to meet the newcomers you sponsored or hear about how they are settling?

Ethical principles to consider include: right to self-determination, privacy.

9. How will you respond if a third party reports that the sponsored person has complained about the support that they are receiving from you as sponsors?

Ethical principles to consider include: accountability, privacy, competence, expectations.

Resources

The following resources may be helpful for sponsors in the process of understanding the role of sponsors and ethical principles to consider.

- [Rights of Privately Sponsored Refugees \(RSTP\)](#)
- [Managing Expectations \(RSTP\)](#)



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