



## **East Bay Refugee Forum**

### **By-Laws**

#### **Structure**

The East Bay Refugee Forum (Forum) has existed in the East Bay for over 30 years and has been effective in promoting collaboration among agencies serving refugees. The following bylaws serve as the structure for the overall management and organization of the Forum. It includes roles and responsibilities within the Forum, the Steering Committee structure, a definition of membership, voting, election, and decision-making policies, a discussion of committees, and Forum meetings.

#### **I. Forum Roles and Responsibilities**

##### ***Lead Agency/Fiscal Agency (selected/confirmed by annual review and vote by the Steering Committee; no limit on term of service)***

- Maintain separate accounting records to manage Forum income and expenses;
- Contract with and pay the Forum's Coordinator, an independent contractor;
- As directed by the Steering Committee, communicate directly with funder(s) re: release of funds to the Forum;
- Issue checks as required by the Forum within 30 days of request/invoice;
- Report quarterly to Steering Committee re: Forum income and expenses;
- Support fund development and reporting requirements by providing agency financial statements, references and signatures;
- Provide liability insurance as needed for Forum activities;
- If requested by Steering Committee, may assume management responsibilities over a grant received by the Forum;

- Notify the Steering Committee of any Fiscal Agent fees claimed, and of any changes to the Fiscal Agent staffing or role.

### **Forum Steering Committee**

- Committee members serve to represent the interest of new arrivals rather than individual agencies and should be drawn from across the service realms with which new arrivals routinely interact within their first five years of arrival.
- Negotiate and approve Fiscal Agent fee;
- Develop and approve Forum annual budget;
- Define the annual scope of work, deliverables, and contract terms for the Forum Coordinator;
- Provide oversight for the work of an independent contractor in the role of Forum Coordinator;
- Provide input on agendas for full Forum meetings;
- Serve as a mechanism to regularly collect community feedback amongst service recipients which will help strategically inform the regular work plan of the steering committee, coordinator and work groups.
- Represent the Forum externally with prior permission of the steering committee;
- With Forum Work Group members, designate work areas and Chairs for Work Groups;
- Support the Coordinator in identifying and leveraging resources for the Forum.

### **Forum Chair (or, in the event that a Forum Coordinator is not in place, Co-Chairs)**

- Facilitate Steering Committee meetings
- Confirm Steering Committee meeting agendas;
- Serve as liaison to the Forum Coordinator;
- Serve as liaison to the Fiscal Agent to oversee Forum income and expenses and
- Drive the annual work plan

## Forum Coordinator

- The Steering Committee will engage a Contract Coordinator. See *Contractor Scope of Services* for scope of work which outlines services and deliverables.

## Forum Work Groups (Education; Health; Communications/Community Awareness; Policy & Systems Change; ad hoc, as needed)

- With the Steering Committee, designate a Chair or Co-Chairs, who will set and distribute meeting agendas and periodically attend Steering Committee meetings to report and receive feedback on Work Group activities;
- Coordinate with the Chair and Forum Coordinator to carry out and support the activities included in the annual Scope of Services;
- Support the development of new and emerging refugee leaders.

## Full Forum

- Elect Steering Committee members;
- Provide input and guidance to inform key decisions of the Steering Committee;
- Share information and resources with one another.

## II. Membership

### Steering Committee

- The Steering Committee will be composed of 12 members, as follows:
  - Voting seats (9): The Oakland Unified School District Refugee and Asylee Student Assistance Project, 2 resettlement agencies (IRC, CCEB), 3 ECBOs/emerging leaders as determined by high-need population, and 3 non-designated seats
  - Non-voting seats (3): Alameda County Social Services Agency representative responsible for refugee services, Alameda County Health Care Services Agency – Public Health, Alameda County Health Care Services Agency – Behavioral Health
- ECBO/community leader and non-designated seats will be subject to the vote of the full Forum.

- Unless the seat is a designated system's seat, consistent participation in the Forum for a two-year period prior to nomination is recommended but not required for Steering Committee applicants.
- Committee members are voted in by Forum members for two year terms. There is no maximum number of terms a Committee member may renew but the seats shall be subject to the vote of the full Forum every two years.
- Voting for Committee membership is held on an as-needed basis to fill vacancies as members term out.
- Forum members can nominate themselves or other members of the Forum for Committee membership.
- The Committee is limited to one voting member per agency.
- Each member of the Committee is encouraged to chair or participate in Forum Work Groups.
- Alternatives cannot be sent to Steering Committee meetings in place of Steering Committee members.

#### Full Forum

- Forum membership is open to all service providers, community-based organizations, government agencies, and individuals that share the mission and vision of the Forum and are in good standing with the Forum.
- In order to become a member of the Forum, agencies have to agree to a Memorandum of Understanding between the Forum and service providers, community-based organizations, government agencies, or individuals.
- Membership is ongoing and open any time.
- As of January 1, 2012, member agencies and supporting individuals are requested to pay a membership fee. Agencies unable to pay the membership fee will be granted a fee waiver upon request.
- An active member is defined as an agency representative that attends four or more full Forum meetings a year. Members can resign at any time deemed necessary by the Forum and member organization.

#### Work Groups

- Work Group meetings are open to all active Forum members.

- Work Group members are responsible for regularly attending and participating in Work Group meetings; reviewing materials distributed prior to Work Group meetings; working with the Work Group chair to draft and implement the work Group work plan; and sharing resources with Work Group members.

### III. Meetings

#### Steering Committee

- Steering Committee meetings are held bi-monthly in person.
- Steering Committee meetings are open to Steering Committee members and invited guests only.
- Steering Committee members are required to commit to attending at least 4/6 of Forum meetings and 4/6 of Steering Committee meetings annually. If a Steering Committee member is unable to attend a meeting, the member is expected to communicate with the Forum Coordinator and other Steering Committee members via email or telephone. If a Steering Committee member is unable to continue to commit to the Steering Committee in the middle of their term, then based on the decision of the Steering Committee body, a new Steering Committee member will be nominated as a replacement.

#### Full Forum

- Full Forum meetings are open to all interested parties, whether active member, non-active member, or member of the community.

#### Work Groups

- The Steering Committee has the authority to create or eliminate Forum Work Groups, based on need.
- Forum Work Groups can exist for an undetermined amount of time, at least as long as the Steering Committee deems the committee necessary.
- Forum Work Groups shall draft work plans in coordination with the Steering Committee so that plans are devised according to identified community needs and/or overall annual strategic planning of the Forum.
- Steering Committee members are encouraged to chair Forum Work Groups, but their leadership is not necessary.
- Work Group chairs are responsible for scheduling, convening, and facilitating Work Group meetings; recruiting Work Group members; drafting meeting agendas and ensuring the recording of meeting minutes; working with Work Group participants to draft work plans; presenting the work plan to the Steering Committee; and representing the Work Group on a regular basis to brief the full Forum.

- The Steering Committee has the authority to make any final decisions regarding Work Group work plans and implementation.

#### **IV. Voting, Elections, and Decision-Making Policies**

##### **Voting**

- All active Forum members (see definition for active member in Section III above) who have agreed to the Memorandum of Understanding are eligible to vote on items presented to the full Forum or to the Forum Work Groups in which the member is participating.
- The Steering Committee will vote on issues of importance to the Forum, and will seek input from the full Forum prior to voting.
- A Steering Committee member may choose to abstain from voting.
- The Steering Committee may conduct a vote via email or in person.
- Any items issued in the name of the Forum (eg., grant proposals, letters of support, etc.) must receive prior approval of the Steering Committee.
- The Forum Fiscal Agent is not a voting member of the Steering Committee but will designate a representative to attend meetings at least quarterly to report on Forum income and expenses.
- If a Steering Committee member is from an organization that the Steering Committee has agreed will serve as the Fiscal Agent of the Forum, to avoid conflict of interest, that individual will be required to recuse themselves from budgetary decisions which require a vote.
- If there is a conflict of interest between an active member and a decision being made, then the active member cannot participate in the voting process and the Steering Committee will serve as arbiter.
- Each agency/organization has one vote per item presented to the full Forum or one vote per item presented in a Work Group in which the member is participating.
- Absentee voting is not allowed, but alternatives may be sent to vote
- Any items related to the policy or fiscal management of the Forum must be voted on by the Steering Committee in person and signed by the Committee members.

##### **Elections**

- Steering Committee membership must be voted on by the full Forum. Steering Committee members will nominate individuals or individuals may self-nominate to serve on the Steering Committee.
- Elections for Steering Committee membership will take place as vacancies occur.

- Forum Chairpersons are elected by the Steering Committee to serve for two-year terms.
- Forum Work Group chairs serve on a voluntary basis and do not need to be elected.

### Decision-Making Policy

- The Steering Committee has the authority to make decisions regarding all aspects of the fiscal and administrative management of the Forum.
- Any item that affects the full Forum must be presented by the Steering Committee to the full Forum for discussion and input prior to Steering Committee vote.
- A quorum of two-third of voting Steering Committee members is necessary to make decisions on behalf of the whole Steering Committee via meeting in-person, email, or telephone. If a quorum of two-thirds is unavailable, the Chair and Coordinator have the authority to make emergency decisions on behalf of the Steering Committee.
- The Steering Committee will decide by majority vote.
- Active members from at least nine Forum member agencies have to be present to constitute a quorum, unless determined otherwise by the Steering Committee.

Prepared: March 1, 2010

Revised: January 12, 2011

Revised: April 25, 2012

Revised: August 9, 2012

Revised: October 9, 2012

Revised: November 13, 2012

Revised: November 12, 2013

Revised: March 4, 2014

Revised: September 24, 2015