RefugeeRISE Mentorship Program

Mentor Guide

RefugeeRISE AmeriCorps Program & EMBARC- Ethnic Minorities of Burma Advocacy and Resource Center

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Things to Know before you Begin

About RefugeeRISE

Recently, EMBARC (Ethnic Minorities of Burma advocacy and Resource Center) created the RefugeeRISE AmeriCorps program. RISE stands for Refugee - Rebuild, Integrate, Serve, and Empower. The program is currently on their second year and is serving in 7 communities through 10 different organizations. The RefugeeRISE program is a team based project where one member of the refugee community is partnered up with a native English speaker and together they work to identify and remove barriers faced by their community. While this program was created by EMBARC, it is not limited to serving only communities from Burma.

The RefugeeRISE program helps:

- Remove barriers to accessing basic services for employment and healthcare.
- Break the poverty cycle by focusing on providing supports that lead to economic self-sufficiency.
- Provide culturally and linguistically appropriate support.
- Enable refugees to become contributing and engaged members of society.
- Provide basic education to help refugees learn how to navigate modern life.
- Provide leadership opportunities to refugees and other individuals by providing opportunities for service and volunteering.

About EMBARC

EMBARC is a grass roots coalition organized by and for refugees from Burma. Since 2011, Ethnic Minorities of Burma Advocacy and Resource Center (EMBARC), an ethnic community-led 501(c)3, has been easing the adjustment and promoting self-sufficiency for the more than 8,000 newcomers from Burma settling in Iowa. Countless numbers of people from several ethnic minorities were forced to flee their homes and country because of who they were, the language they spoke, and what they believed. Those lucky enough to escape with their lives were confined for years, and oftentimes decades, in primitive refugee camps without hope or opportunity. Now with a chance to rebuild their lives in Iowa, the transition from refugee to a new life in America can be very difficult. Linguistic and culturally appropriate services to aid newcomers from Burma are scarce, and in some cases, non-existent. At the same time, ethnic communities are fearful of losing their rich heritage, traditions, culture, and language as they work to become more integrated into their lives in Iowa.
RefugeeRISE Mentorship

How the Program Works

The RefugeeRISE mentorship program is a minimum six month commitment. The program is designed to help RefugeeRISE AmeriCorps Member with their service goals set out at the beginning of the year. Many of these goals are career driven, but others are different such as, wanting to learn more about college or graduate school preparation, job skills, citizenship. All goals are created by the RefugeeRISE members. Mentors and mentees will meet 4 hours per month. Partners meet one on one to provide specialized support for their mentee.

With the assistance of RefugeeRISE staff, you and your mentee will set new goals or look at pre-determined goals and create a plan to reach those goals. A pre and post evaluation will be used to measure success. After each session, you will complete a brief journal of what was accomplished during that session. RefugeeRISE staff will read these journals and call both you and your mentee throughout the program to provide ongoing support and evaluation.

Mentors as the Knowledge Resource

Materials will be provided to aid you through the mentorship process. However, as a mentor you should be proactive at finding your own materials that meet the specific needs needed for your team.

Volunteer Guidelines:
The most important guideline for your volunteer role is your own common sense. Keep in mind that you serve as a role model and your example will have significant effect on how the refugee views his or her new community and its members.

We ask you to observe the following guidelines while interacting with the ethnic community members:

1. No drugs or alcohol permitted.
2. Romantic relationships of any kind are not permitted - even between consenting adults.
3. If an individual makes a request beyond the scope of your duties or responsibilities, he or she should be referred to the project volunteer coordinator.
4. If you have a need for supplies or training, you may direct these needs to the volunteer coordinator.
5. If you detect that someone has a need not being met in areas un-related to your expertise (food, clothing, housing, financial assistance, job, medical care, unemployment), please contact the project volunteer coordinator.
6. Present yourself in a way that reflects well on RefugeeRISE and EMBARC. Dress modestly, wear clothing without obscenity or references to drugs or alcohol, and maintain good hygiene.
7. Respect differences in cultures. You may be exposed to religious, medical, and cultural practices that are unfamiliar to you. If you would like more information about these differences, please speak to the project volunteer coordinator.
8. Volunteers must abide by reporting laws and codes of confidentiality. This means that suspected child, spouse or elder abuse must be reported to the program. If a client wishes to confide potentially harmful information, you need to remind the client that you must share information with the case manager as necessary.
9. Confidentiality also means that no information about EMBARC staff, volunteers, or project participant may be shared with anyone outside the agency at any time without authorization from EMBARC.
10. As an EMBARC volunteer, you are representing the project. Please keep this in mind while volunteering. If you would like to assist EMBARC by engaging in activities such as lobbying, talking to the press, or any other official acts, you must seek authorization from the program first.

11. Please do not proselytize while performing your volunteer duties. EMBARC serves anyone in need regardless of religious affiliation.

 Orientation
This guide serves as your orientation to the mentorship program. If you have any questions about the program or RefugeeRISE and EMBARC as an agency, please contact the project volunteer coordinator. Before you begin your mentorship, you will have a phone call or in-person visit (depending on location) with the mentorship coordinator. During this time, the individual work to find you a good fit for a mentee and explain more about the program and expectations.

 Resignation
Should you decide to cease volunteering before your time commitment is up, we ask that you let us know as soon as possible. At least 2-week notice helps the project make arrangements to fill your absence.

 Dismissal
Volunteers may be terminated for violating RefugeeRISE and EMBARC policies and procedures as well the guidelines and procedures outlined in this guide.
How to Get Started

Goal Setting

Most RefugeeRISE AmeriCorps members should already have pre-determined goals. During your initial meeting you and the mentee will be mapping out the goal for the rest of the six months. Goal setting is a very important part of the mentorship program. The goal setting process is specialized to each mentorship.

Planning Your Mentorship

Because the mentorship program is limited to six months, it is important that time is used as efficiently as possible. As the mentor, it is essential that you create a plan to reach the goals established. This plan should provide you with an idea of what you will spend each month working on with your mentee.

Create a Plan

The more specific the formulated goals, objectives, and learning tasks, the greater the probability that they will be achieved by the end of the session. It is important that the objectives are clear and unambiguous. There should be no room for free interpretation. For starters, consider the following questions:

- Why is this mentorship being carried out?
- What knowledge and skills will the participants carry away with them after this week’s session has finished?
- What knowledge and skills will the participants carry away with them after the twelfth session has finished?
- How should the participants feel after the session has finished?

Be Practical!

It is easy to overwhelm mentees or even yourself by having too many or too ambitious goals and objectives for one session or even the 6 months. In order to avoid this, it is necessary to determine, which goals and objectives are necessary and which would be achievable. For example, if your goal is to teach your mentee how to drive, you may first need to breakdown the goal into obtaining a driver’s permit and passing the knowledge test, then teaching how to operate a vehicle, understand traffic laws, and the importance of safety/following the law. Next will come the driving skills.

Remember that Mentorship is a Process

Don’t worry about whether your plan is “perfect” or not. The key is to get started, and to have a general idea of how you will be able to complete the goals established. Start simple and do the best that you can, as there is no perfect plan. You do not have to stick to the plan for the sake of the plan. In fact, it is very likely you will need to make changes as you go, and that is fine as long as you have an idea of why changes are necessary.
Cross- Cultural Basics

Cross- Cultural Basics for Volunteers

One of the most rewarding aspects of mentorship is the development of cross-cultural friendships. Culture is a dynamic and often amorphous entity. It is a set of values, beliefs, assumptions, language, aesthetics, ideas, and expectations that is shared between people that share a similar geographical and historical space. It is formed by the collective experience of many and it informs the experience of each participant.

While each of us is in part a product of our cultural heritage, no one is a cultural paradigm perfectly embodying every aspect of a given culture. Each of us stands both in and in contrast to our own culture. Even still, most of us spend the majority of our time relatively oblivious to our own culture. It is the framework for our social lives, as important and unconsciously accepted as the air we breathe.

This unconscious acceptance is one of the contributing factors to possible tension in cross-cultural situations. During interactions, the framework of one’s culture is shifted into unfamiliar territory. If we are unaware of cultural differences, the response might be frustration, impatience, or perhaps even anger or feelings of being offended.

For this reason, it is important to develop cultural awareness. This can be done without any specific knowledge of another culture. All you need to do is keep an open mind to the possibility that your tone or volume of voice, physical touching (even just a tap on the shoulder), posture, or the topics you talk and ask about could be perceived in a way other than they are meant. It is easy to accidentally offend or unnerv someone for whom actions have a different meaning than they do for you. This is true for you and also for your mentee. You may accidentally upset them, and they may accidentally upset you. If somebody is uncomfortable, it’s always good to troubleshoot and check that there has not been a misunderstanding, and in general avoid controversial topics.

Communicating across Cultures

While certainly enriching, cross-cultural relationships can sometimes be challenging. The following guidelines may help in breaking through any misunderstanding and allow you to communicate more easily and appreciate others more quickly.

Pay attention: Try to clear your mind of preoccupation so you can concentrate on what is being said. Try hard to listen and HEAR what is being said.

Set your assumptions and values aside: Try to hear not only what the other people are saying, but also what they mean by what they say. It is easier to understand if you set aside your ideas and thoroughly try to explore other’s ideas.

Withhold judgment: Remember that other people do not have to agree with your ideas and you do not have to agree with theirs. You will have more success in communicating if they know you are trying to understand rather than judge them.
**Be complete and explicit:** Be ready to explain your point in more than one way, and even be ready to explain why you are trying to make a particular point in the first place. Communication is more successful when all involved know the context of the conversation.

**Pay attention to the response of others:** You can usually tell whether you have blundered or been unclear by noting the verbal and nonverbal reactions to what you have said. If you don’t understand a gesture or response, ask the speaker to explain what they mean.

**Paraphrase:** After someone has spoken and before you respond, restate what you heard that person say and what you thought was meant; e.g., “As I understand it, you are saying ... is that correct?” Add your comments only after the person has assured you that you have understood correctly. This helps prevent situations in which you and the other person are assigning different meanings to the same word or phrase.

**Ask for verification:** After you have spoken, try to confirm that you have been understood. Ask the person to restate what you have said; e.g., “I want to be sure I made myself clear, so would you tell me what you understood me to say?” It does not usually work to ask the other person “do you understand?” Most people will say “yes” whether they understood or not. This works the other way, and we need to be sure we’re understanding the other person, as well.

**Be alert for different meaning being assigned to certain words, phrases, or actions:** Sometimes you will think you understand what the other person is saying, when suddenly you realize you do not. When this happens, stop your conversation and discuss the point of misunderstanding.