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IPSS Fellow at the International Rescue Committee in Sacramento

Innovation and Expansion of the US Ties Project “Draft”

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I. Background Information

Relevant Terms:

IRC - International Rescue Committee

R&P - Receiving & Placement/Resettlement Dept.

ORR - Office of Refugee Resettlement

ASB - Alternative Spring Break from CU Boulder

US Tie - Friend/Relative providing assurances on behalf of client pre-arrival

JRT - Job Readiness Training

MG - Match Grant Program

CIK - Cash-in Kind

USP - IRCs US Programs

The International Rescue Committee

The IRC is an INGO which has been providing humanitarian assistance worldwide to some of the most vulnerable populations since 1933. Currently, they are active in over 40 countries around the world, with 29 domestic field offices located throughout the US. The IRC is one of the few refugee resettlement agencies which has a comprehensive approach to assisting refugees from the point of conflict all the way to resettlement and citizenship.

Economic Empowerment / Match Grant Program

The IRC's intensive Economic Empowerment program was created in conjunction with the ORR's "Voluntary Agencies Matching Grant Program." This program has been tailored in conjunction with the ORR to spur early job-placement for clients who arrive in the US possessing suitable skills. The MG program in the IRC Sacramento is tailored to address the needs of our client populations in attaining self-sufficiency within 120 to 180 days after arrival in the US. The matching component of Economic Empowerment program entails the organization to raise a USD \$1 for every USD \$2 of the federally allocated funding.¹

The goals of the MG program entail a rigorous process to prepare clients to enter the workforce rapidly upon arrival in the US. Clients who enroll in this program agree to forgo assistance from the DHA instead receiving financial assistance from the organization directly. This assistance is coupled with rigorous JRT, weekend skill-building workshops, interview practice with continual check-ins to ensure that clients have all resources necessary to attaining their first job in the US.

US Ties Project

The US Ties project works as a complimentary tool to assist the MG program to meet its funding requirements. The project works with clients to identify their US Ties and support mechanisms which have provided substantial amounts of assistance in addition to IRC services. Through an interview process, the project seeks to identify activities the clients US Ties have helped provide which correlate to attaining self-sufficiency. The project directly benefits the MG program by contributing to the federal funding match requirement. **This project is not available, but not standardized across the IRC national network.** The outcomes from this project have already resulted in a substantial contribution to the CIK report with our office meeting our yearly goal six months early.

¹ <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/programs/matching-grants/about>

II. Innovation & Implementation

A. Pre-Arrival Considerations and Inputs at IRC - 2/2/2017

1. The US Ties project, also known as the US Anchor project, is an available program throughout the IRC to accompany MG programs.
2. The US Ties/US Anchors program is not used in a standardized form across the IRC network.
3. Intern who ran the project previously created a rough of interview process.
4. The Forms needed to record data.

B. Post-Arrival Input

1. Step 1: Understanding the IRCs MG program (Research)
 - a) Within this guide I was able to read and comprehend the regulations behind the Match Grant program and its donations process.
 - b) It allowed me to have a concrete understanding of what the definition of a US Tie is in this projects context.
 - c) It gave valuable information to differentiate between Eligible vs Ineligible donations.
2. Step 2: Script improvement and inclusion of observed best practices (Innovation)
 - a) Reformatted and edited script to ensure conciseness while maintaining cultural sensitivity.
 - b) Held multiple small meetings with different R&P caseworkers.
 - c) Began interviews looking to identify best practices and ambiguous activities.
 - d) Worked with volunteer to create better flow and formatting.
3. Step 3: (ongoing) Continuously edit with additional content and formatting updates to improve project (Implementation)
 - a) Adding section on pre-considerations prior to the project instructions.
 - b) Continually identify best practices and include them within the project.
 - c) Updating explanation processes of US Ties project to allow easy transferability.
4. Step 4: (ongoing) Expand the project throughout IRC US Offices
 - a) Spoke with Turlock Volunteer Coordinator to establish US Ties training
 - b) Train Turlock office on US Ties project (6/12)
 - c) Present to Adviser, Office Director and Possibly Regional Rep (6/21)

C. Tracking

1. To easily track clients and US Ties, I created a system which utilized both our internal database and google drive.
 - a) The Gdrive file allows a team to work on the US Ties data from outside of the office to give real time updates regarding client meetings etc...

- b) Having an excel file on our internal database works as a backup in case of tampering or file loss on Gdrive.
- c) Furthermore, this excel file along with other US Ties documents have been placed in a folder together to allow any staff to access them.

D. Training

1. ASB students from CU Boulder
 - a) Participated in an intensive two hour training with US Tie interviews following:
 - (1) Minor mistakes, with oversight during the interviews
 - (2) Interviewer anxiety was leading cause of missed data
 - (3) With group of 10 students was able to carry out three in depth US Tie interviews
2. US Ties volunteer field training
 - a) Started to work with one specific volunteer for US Ties work outside business hours
 - b) Spent first two weeks teaching program through explanations of background documents
 - c) Have been able to expand scheduling capabilities
 - d) Have been able to increase frequency of US Tie contact
3. Turlock office site training (6/12)

Implementation Map

US Ties Project Timeline

Feb '17

- Begin researching project with IRC resources.
- Utilize input from previous work in development phase.
- Begin editing script for easy use.
- Begin carrying out client interviews.
- Make observations of best practices. Consulting with R&P and MG caseworkers.

Mar '17

- Continuous script editing for preciseness and cultural sensitivity.
- Set Goals with supervisor for project
- Begin full immersion into project activities.
- Carry out training of 12 CU Boulder students on Alternative Spring Break (ASB)
- Identify common mistakes, and where to improve training
- **Break office record for CIK donations in 1 month**

Apr '17

- Begin working with personal volunteer, training on US Ties.
- Finalize format choices.
- Work with volunteer to tailor script further.
- Train volunteer through shadowing and practice.

May '17

- With established script start to expand project to other offices.
- Coordinate with Turlock/Stockton to do in person training
- Coordinate with San Jose to receive documents relating to project.
- Finalize project and training with volunteer
- Feedback with supervisor

Jun '17

- Site-visit to Turlock/Stockton to train staff on US Ties project.
- Present project to supervisor and office director, (possible regional rep).
- After presentation discuss possibility of including US Ties manual and documents in MG manual nationally.
- Finish Internship with volunteer available as US Tie resources

III. Analysis

A. Quantitative

1. February was used for planning and script renovation, with March being the first month I began tracking the project results
 - a) In March the IRC in Sacramento set an office record for CIK contributions to the MG program, with the **US Ties project contributing over 13% of the monthly total.**
 - b) In April we came close to reaching the record breaking amount as the previous month with the **US Ties project contributing over 15% to the MG program CIK monthly total.** Furthermore, this month we reached our yearly goal 5 months early.
 - c) In May, this trend of reaching tremendous amounts continued. While the total amount of CIK was slightly less than the previous, the US project broke its record for contribution totals. **This month the US Ties project contributed over 17% to the MG programs CIK monthly total.**
2. Time input vs Overall Output
 - a) *February (on-boarding in volunteer coordination)*
 - (1) Maximum 3 hours per week on US Ties project.
 - (2) US Ties project focus was on improving script.
 - (a) 11.5 hours total
 - b) *March*
 - (1) 5 to 7 hours per week towards implementing and improving the US Ties project.
 - (a) 22.5 hours total
 - c) *April*
 - (1) 7 to 9 hours per week towards implementing, improving and training for the US Ties project.
 - (a) 30 hours total
 - d) *May*
 - (1) 5 to 7 hours per week towards implementing, improving and training for the US project.
 - (a) 22.5 hours total
 - e) *June*
 - (1) 3 to 5 hours per week with focus on editing, improving and training volunteers and staff on US Ties project.
 - (2) Visit of Pacific West Executive Directors of IRC to IRC in Sacramento office
 - (a) Supervisor discussed cost-benefits of US Ties project
 - (3) Site visit to Turlock for US Ties Training (6/12)
 - (4) Meeting with Supervisor, Office Director, and possibly regional rep. (6/21)
 - (a) 14 hours total

Total hours contributed = **100.5 hours over 5 months**

of clients interviewed = **27**

Cases fully closed = **18** # Cases Active = **4** Cases suspended = **5**

Total financial output of innovated US Ties Project (**3 months active**) FY '17 = **14,xxx**

Total financial output done prior to innovation (**initial 5 months active**) FY '16 = **12,xxx**

The previous US Ties project intern solely focused on carrying out the US Ties project. My work has been spread across multiple departments with the US Ties project being one of many responsibilities. **Had a single staff or intern been tasked with running the newly improved US Ties project the outcomes would have unquestionably increased.**

B. Qualitative

1. General Observations

- a) 27 Clients interviewed over 4 months Feb-May
- b) 3 clients said they have received no outside assistance.
 - (1) Either received no assistance, did not understand the question, or were hesitant to divulge the information.
- c) On average clients received a majority of outside assistance from 1 or 2 sources.
- d) Most clients in the MG program are willing to work with the organization due to the relationship the program builds with its clients.

2. Challenges Observed

- a) Building personal trust with client
 - (1) Explaining the project to client
 - (2) Explaining why we need to know specific information
 - (3) Explaining we need to contact US Tie
- b) Contacting US Ties
 - (1) Explaining the projects goals
 - (2) Issues with Ties following through on calling back

3. Volunteer/Supervisor feedback and review

- a) Observed ASB student to understand challenges training US Ties
 - (1) Confidence issue
 - (2) Understanding how to fill out hours form
- b) Held review with supervisor to tailor script and improve training mechanisms.
 - (1) Having dedicated US Tie intern with new script would bring large benefit
- c) Held review with US Ties volunteer to identify challenges and brainstorm solutions to carrying out US Ties project.

IV. Conclusions

A. General

1. The US Ties projects results have already shown how it can effectively work to bear some of the burden funding requirements place on the MG program
2. Through its manual and included documents the US Ties project at the IRC in Sacramento has been tailored to be an intuitive project applicable to all IRC offices.
3. The US Ties project can be run with minimal human resources to produce an exponentially positive result.

B. Challenges & Solutions

1. Building Client Trust
 - a) Ensuring to phone client multiple times in lead up to in-person interview.
 - b) Identifying clients needed donations prior to interview shows our intentions.
2. Explaining the project to clients
 - a) Have tailored language to explain program reinforces MG program for future clients.
3. Contacting US Ties
 - a) Include instructions at end of client interviews to walk clients through the next steps to ensure they know we will contact US Ties.
 - b) Contacting Ties on the weekends has most success.
 - c) If unable to contact a US Tie go through client.
4. Build personal confidence in project prior to client interviews
 - a) Practice script to the point that you know the outline
 - b) Fully comprehend MG manual ch 7, 8 to accurately record eligible donations
5. Difficulties correctly filling out US Tie hours form
 - a) Inclusion of detailed descriptions in US Tie Manual
 - b) Inclusion of sample hours form in US Tie Manual

V. Expansion & Future Research

The intended outcome for this US Ties project is to improve the capacity of the IRC's US offices. With the work done since February, I believe that this report is able to show that this project when implemented correctly substantially boosts monthly CIK revenue. Expansion of this project is poised to begin with multiple volunteers trained on the project at the IRC Sacramento office, and staff who will be trained at the IRC Turlock office. Through utilization of the US Ties manual, and the "How to Set-Up a US Ties Project" document, any office within the IRCs USP network will be able to implement the project quickly.

For future research, I have discussed my results with MG staff and have seen that an interesting component of the US Ties project is to establish the support networks clients with US Ties utilize after arrival in the US. Further research can be done by utilizing this project which may provide insights on how to better accommodate our clients.