

PRESIDENTS' | ON HIGHER EDUCATION ALLIANCE | AND IMMIGRATION

Offering Scholarships for Refugee Students Overseas

A limited number of U.S. colleges and universities offer scholarships specifically for refugee or displaced students. You can find many of these scholarships listed on [UNHCR](#) or [IIE](#)'s websites. These scholarships create opportunities for refugee students to access U.S. higher education and a way for colleges and universities to welcome and bring the incredible talents of refugee students to their campus. While refugee students follow similar guidelines and pathways as international students, there are some unique considerations for colleges and universities when developing or offering scholarships for refugees overseas.

8 Tips and Things to Consider:

- 1. Manage expectations.** It's important to be as transparent, detailed, and upfront with the information and details about the scholarship as possible. For example, explicitly state any direct or indirect costs that the student will be expected to cover (ex: airfare). Do not assume that the student already knows and understands those costs. Furthermore, to the extent possible, aim to communicate the competitiveness of the scholarship so students don't have false hopes. At the same time, make the opportunity feel accessible and attainable so potential strong candidates are not discouraged from applying. Current refugee students serving as mentors or ambassadors for the scholarship can support this.
- 2. Create an accessible application process.** When possible, consider accommodations for refugee students who might not have access to computers, the internet, and testing centers. Writing lengthy essays, having a video interview during U.S. business hours, securing a typed letter of recommendation from a teacher, and traveling to testing centers may not be accessible for all applicants. Create options to meet the diverse needs and environments of refugee students. Be mindful of required questions and essays that may not be applicable or relevant to the refugee contexts.
- 3. Support students with visas, travel documents & exit permits.** Depending on their country of origin and current location, refugees may require additional or special permission to exit their current country. Refugees also may not be able to obtain a national passport and therefore may need to apply for a refugee passport (Convention Travel Document, or CTD), which can be a lengthy, complicated process. They often face additional barriers scheduling and traveling to a consulate interview in time to arrive for the start of the semester. Refugee students need a clear and dedicated point of contact at the college or university to help them navigate their unique situation. It is also advised that the college or university establish a connection with UNHCR or a local NGO that can support and advocate for the student in-country.

- 4. Fund additional fees & costs.** There are a lot of additional expenses that refugee students will incur before they even arrive on campus, including vaccines, visas, testing fees, domestic travel, and flights. These costs can be prohibitive for refugee students, especially those in camp settings. If possible, colleges and universities should try to cover these costs, or as mentioned above, or at least be transparent with students about the estimated costs. While the costs may seem minimal, even \$100 can be a significant barrier for refugees who do not have work authorization or have limited to no income or savings. In addition, some of these fees require a bank account and credit or debit card, which many refugees do not have access to. Lastly, if the scholarship includes a living stipend, it's helpful to support the refugee student in setting up a bank account and to provide some initial pocket money upon arrival to meet immediate needs.
- 5. Provide academic preparation.** Some refugee students feel overwhelmed by the pace of U.S. college courses and surprised by the style of instruction. When possible, refugee students should be connected to or enrolled in an orientation or pre-departure program that offers academic and campus culture orientations.
- 6. Create a cohort or mentorship program** to facilitate social integration. Once on campus, students may feel isolated or overwhelmed by navigating a new culture and environment. Connecting students to other international or refugee students as a cohort or mentors can provide invaluable peer support.
- 7. Accommodate students with families.** Refugee students, both undergraduate and graduate, may be considered a non-traditional age for U.S. colleges and universities. They may therefore also have partners and/or children that they will leave behind or want to bring with them. Campuses should be aware of this potential reality for students and provide related accommodations and support when possible.
- 8. Support students navigating uncertain futures.** Refugee students who enter the U.S. on an F1 or J1 visa are on a “non-immigrant” visa and therefore will need support to determine what immigration pathways are available to them beyond their time as a student. Supporting refugee students to pursue asylum or other visa options will ease some anxiety so students can focus on their studies.

Looking for more tips? Check out the [Toolkit](#) that provides the information and tools for you to join and spread awareness about the [RESPONSE Campaign](#) or reach out to info@presidentsalliance.org.