

Social & News Media Guidance for Certified Sponsor Circles

The Sponsor Circle Program for Afghans is a community-led resettlement initiative that allows everyday Americans to take on the responsibility of welcoming an Afghan newcomer to their communities. An emergency response launched to ensure that all arriving Afghans receive welcome and support, the Sponsor Circle Program pairs Afghan newcomers with community groups eager to provide support.

This document provides your certified Sponsor Circle with guidance on how to describe your experience with sponsorship in social or traditional media, ensuring that it is rooted in consent-based practice.

It is important for Sponsor Circle members to spend a little time thinking about this for a few reasons.

- The people you are welcoming to your community may need to protect their identity and location for their own safety or for the safety of friends and family members still in a precarious situation.
- There may be people in your community who will want to harass or attack these newcomers because they do not agree with the policy that brought them here.
- An extra level of care needs to be taken when children are involved in the settlement.
- Finally, it is important to make sure that these newcomers in your community have a high level of control on how and where their story is told.

As a certified Sponsor Circle, **you are not required to engage with social or traditional media**. If you are contacted by the press and do not want to engage, you can either send the reporter to the Community Sponsorship Hub (info@communitysponsorship.org) or you can tell them “no.” As each Sponsor Circle’s story is unique and compelling, if you do choose to engage with the media, we prepared the following guidance to support you in these efforts.

Consent

If you choose to describe your sponsorship experience on social media or choose to engage with the news media, please center the story around your own experience as a certified Sponsor Circle. You must acquire the full consent of any newcomer with whom you are matched before sharing their story on any platform. No photos or video recordings should be shared on social media or with the press without the written consent of the newcomer with whom you are matched. As the situation in Afghanistan is ongoing and remains tenuous, you must not disclose any personally identifying information about the newcomer with whom you are matched without their express consent. In all cases, the newcomer should be given the opportunity to share their own story in spaces and ways that they feel comfortable. A sample consent form for media engagement is included at the end of this guidance.

Note: Be cognizant of your social media security settings. You can find suggestions on how to keep your social media secure [here](#).



Understanding “the Record”

Before you say anything to a reporter, make sure you are on the same page about what these terms mean, as well as when they apply and when they do not.

On the record: This means that everything in the conversation can be used and attributed to your source by name and job title. Unless you specify otherwise and explicitly gain the prior agreement of the reporter, as reporter Mary Beth Schneider makes clear, assume that everything you say is on-the-record.

In conversations like this, it is most important to weigh your words carefully. What you think is the main point of the conversation may not match up with what the reporter quotes you as saying.

Not for attribution: The comments may be quoted directly, but the source may only be identified in general terms (e.g., "a government insider"). It's up to you and the reporter to determine how precisely you will be identified. Keep in mind that even if you're not specifically identified, it still may be obvious to the audience who the source was.

On background: Some say this is the same as “not for attribution”; others believe you can't even quote it, just paraphrase the information in the story. In any case, the information provided by a source can be used, but the source cannot be named directly. This form of communication is useful if you want to give context to a situation you are sharing with the press.

Off-the-record: the information provided is not for publication. However, the information you provide can be used without attribution to verify its veracity with another source. Off-the-record conversations work best in one-on-one situations.

Before you employ any of these tactics, besides speaking on the record, always bear in mind that none of these agreements are legally binding. It's an honor code built on the trust you and each individual reporter share.

Suggested Talking Points When Speaking About Sponsor Circles

- I first heard about Sponsor Circles when [insert the story of when you first heard of the Sponsor Circle program]
- I decided to become a certified Sponsor Circle because [insert your motivation to welcome a newcomer through Sponsor Circle program]
- The process of becoming a certified Sponsor Circle required me to find at least four other people in my community who were also interested in supporting a newcomer through sponsorship. Together we had to complete an application that required each of us to undergo and pass a background check, fundraise a minimum of \$2,275 per newcomer, complete an online course that taught us how to be successful Sponsor Circles and pass a knowledge check following, and put together a Welcome Plan detailing how we would find housing, services, arrange doctors' visits, and other important tasks during the newcomers' first 90-days in our community.

Note: Consent must be obtained before sharing details about the newcomer, including experiences during the first 90-days.

Here are a few other suggestions to consider when speaking with the media:

- Most reporters will end their interview with a question like, “Is there anything else you think I should know?” It is good to be prepared for this question. One of the things you can do with that question is reiterate a key point. Examples might be:
 - “We decided to do this because we saw a need but we also saw a way that we can come together as a community and do something positive.”
 - “We think it is really important to get involved because we want to make sure our community is known as a welcoming place. We can do that.”
 - “When someone comes to a new place they need someone to show them around. We love our town and we are proud of it, so we think we are some of the best people to help new people when they come here. “
- It is best not to use this interview to make political points or highlight problems. One of the things that we all hope media attention will do is draw more people into being involved in welcoming newcomers to our communities.
 - If you get asked about problems, one thing you could do is say, “There are certainly challenges, but we are working together to try and solve those, because part of goal is to build a strong team beyond our group to make our community welcoming to anyone who wants to come here and work with us to build our community.”
 - The political questions may come in the form of questioning community security. One possible response to that might be, “We think that a way to make sure that we keep our community safe is to get to know our neighbors. We think this program allows us to get to know our new neighbors but also work closely with the people who already live here.”
- There are different types of media and the way they collect and tell stories is different. Here are some basic things to keep in mind:
 - Generally, print media reporters have more time to speak and longer deadlines so they tend to go into more detail.
 - Radio reporters have a little less time but more than television reporters. Radio and TV reporters often function much the same way. Television, particularly local television, will typically involve an on-camera interview where they will insert quotes from the interviewees into their story. It is not unusual for them to contact people in the morning for a story that will run later in the day. When they get all the interviews done, they will put together the story and insert the quotes which fit into the story. The quotes are rarely more than a sentence or two “sound bite.” Because of this, it is good to think about your “sound bite” and say that at least once in response to a question. However, the reporter may find a different sound bite than what you would like.
 - A good sound bite will be short, passionate and invoking a strong image.
- Shortly after an interview it is a good idea to write an email to the reporter and thanking them, and reiterating your key point in writing, so they have something to go on and can even cut and paste into an article. This makes their job easier and it also gives you some control over the story. It is also a good idea to provide more information from official websites with information that supports the story. In this way you are helping them do their research which they will usually appreciate and again helps you to make sure that they are accurate in what they are reporting.

Social media

Social media is a way that many people get information these days. It can be a powerful tool, but there are important things to keep in mind if you post about your experience with your sponsorship Circle.

- In the time leading up to the arrival of the newcomers do not post details about when or where they will be arriving.
- When you write about the experience do not use the names of the newcomer or where they will be living or staying.
- Always get permission when taking pictures of people and if you are taking pictures of children, you must get permission from their parents or guardians. Again, avoid mentioning or identifying places or names of the newcomers.
- Consider having a discussion with the newcomers about social media so you have a shared understanding of how it might be used. They too might relate to social media and may or may not be aware of dangers. In this conversation as in many aspects of their settlement, you need to be aware of the inherent power imbalance between you as the long-time resident in the community whom they rely on, and they who may have no other contacts in the community to turn to.