The Role of the Private Sector in Refugee Resettlement

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Abstract

There are more refugees in the world right now than at any point in history. Traditionally, the U.S. State Department and non-governmental organizations have partnered to facilitate the US Refugee Resettlement Program, but the program is limited by resources, political pressure and a lack of political will. In light of the growing scale of the refugee crisis, the Obama administration encouraged the private sector to become more involved in providing services and aid to refugees during the summer of 2016. This qualitative study explores what role the private sector should play to meet the rising demand for refugee services. The data is comprised of 25 semi-structured interviews with refugees in Europe and the United States, academics, government employees, and employees from local and national resettlement agencies. The two types of private sector engagement that emerge in this study are corporate sector engagement and civic engagement from private citizens and communities. An unexpected trend emerged during the interview process: co-sponsorship models that pair volunteers with newly arrived refugees are more impactful and sustainable for both the refugee program and refugees themselves than corporate sector engagement. While my interview data suggests that the corporate sector still has the ability to meaningfully engage with refugee issues and support the work that the humanitarian field is doing, the findings of this study show that the most promising form of private sector engagement is utilizing the resources and political advocacy power of private citizens. The long-term policy implications of this study are that the federal government should provide refugee resettlement agencies with funding to establish co-sponsorship programs. Given that this is unlikely to occur in the current political environment, local and national resettlement agencies should collaborate to establish and systematically evaluate co-sponsorship programs in order to persuade the federal government to provide funding for these programs in the future.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Naw Moo Eh Wah lived in a refugee camp in Thailand for twelve years before her resettlement application to the United States was accepted. She fled across the Thai border to a refugee camp from Burma when the Burmese army burned her village. She later met her husband and gave birth to her three children in the camp. She was told that her family would be sent to California, but her parents had already resettled in North Carolina and she wanted to be close to them. Her parents had a co-sponsor who called the refugee agency and explained that if Naw Moo’s family was resettled to North Carolina, she would help the agency support them by co-sponsoring them as well. Naw Moo Eh Wah’s family landed in Raleigh and her co-sponsor brought them to their new apartment, which she remembers was beautifully decorated for Christmas. Her husband found a job working as a cleaner at the local hospital, but he was injured in a car accident just three months after arriving in the United States. Her co-sponsor helped the family pay their rent until her husband recovered and she could also find a job cleaning at the hospital. The most challenging thing for Naw Moo about moving to the United States was learning English. She has lived in this country for eleven years and became a US citizen in 2013. Through Habitat for Humanity, she and her family received a brand new single family home and she has been able to go back to Thailand twice to visit her family who are still living in the refugee camp.

Nour was born in Daraa in Southern Syria, a beautiful city near the border with Jordan. She went to university and then became an English professor. She fled to Jordan with her husband and children in 2013 and lived in an apartment building with other Syrian refugees for three and a half years. Her husband is a chef and he was luckily able to find a job to support their
family. They would have been in a dire situation if he had not been able to work because they received no services from any international aid group or the Jordanian government.

After a two year long application process, her family was approved for resettlement in the United States and they arrived at Chicago’s O’Hare international airport in August 2016. Her first month in America was a dark period for Nour. She barely left the house, slept for most of the day, and says that she hated herself, her family and her husband. She missed hearing the mosque calling worshipers to prayer and missed being surrounded by her family, who are all still in Syria. Even though her husband was a trained chef, he could only find work at McDonalds and now works long hours to be able to pay their rent each month. While they have found safety in Chicago, the other parts of their life have been incredibly difficult. They now live in an area with very few Arabs and her children are struggling to learn English in school. Nour has just started a job as a translator for a local resettlement agency to help financially support her family and get out of the house more. She hopes to become a US citizen and go back to school so that she can get a bachelor’s degree that is valid in the United States. Her main goals are for her children to receive an education and for her husband to find a better job. She says that the transition to life in America has been much more challenging than her transition from Syria to Jordan because she is surrounded by an entirely unfamiliar culture and it is much harder to earn a living here than they expected.

Policy Debate
Naw Moo Eh Wah and Nour are just two of the millions of people who have been forced to flee their homes because of violence or persecution. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that as of October 2017 there were 65.6 million forcibly displaced people globally, more than at any point in history. Of this number, 22.5 million of them are refugees. According to the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees, a refugee
is a person who “has a well-founded fear of persecution because of his/her race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion” (UN General Assembly, 1951). Conflicts such as the civil war in Syria, continued violence in places like Somalia, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and genocide of the Rohyingah in Burma have all contributed to this historically high number. As more and more people have sought safety across borders in communities that are far from their own, policy debates have raged about who deserves refugee status, where refugees should be allowed to live, how to provide them with safety and basic needs, and who is ultimately responsible for these people. In 2016 fewer than 1% of refugees were permanently resettled to another country through agreements between the UNHCR and national governments, so in fact Naw Eh Moo Wah and Nour were part of a highly select group that receives official protection from another government (UNHCR, 2017).

**Problem Significance**

In comparing these two women’s resettlement experiences, it is clear that resettling in the United States is often not the type of fresh start that refugees hope for when they leave behind the violence of their home country. The severe lack of federal funding and limited period of support for resettled refugees has led to a situation where refugees coming to the United States often find themselves living below the poverty line and relying on federal welfare programs. Historically the United States has had one of the most robust resettlement programs in the world (US State Department, 2017). In FY 2016 the United States resettled 62.3% of the total number of resettled refugees in the world (US State Department, US Department of Homeland Security, 2017). In 1980 when the Refugee Act was first passed, Congress agreed to fund refugee cash and medical assistance for the first 36 months that a refugee lived in this country (Refuge Act of 1980, 1980). However in 1982 this financial support was cut down to 18 months and then in 1991 it was once again cut to only eight months, which is still the current policy (Brown, et al.,
Because of a lack of federal funding and an emphasis on self-sufficiency, many refugees who participated in this study reported that they did not receive adequate support upon arrival. The tides changed once again during the 2016 presidential election when President Donald Trump ran on a largely anti-immigrant and anti-foreigner platform. On January 27, 2017 he issued a temporary ban on resettling refugees in the United States and an indefinite ban on refugees from Syria (Shear, et al., 2017). Only since the most recent refugee crisis starting in 2015 have refugees become a source of political controversy in the United States. Prior to 2015 the refugee resettlement program did not receive much press attention and many citizens were not even aware of its existence. Refugees have become a salient topic due to current refugee crises in Europe with streams of refugees flooding across the Mediterranean in wooden boats, marching along the highways of Hungary and Greece, and settling in Western Europe. Prominent terror attacks such as the attacks in Lyon, Paris, and the sexual harassment of hundreds of women in Cologne, Germany on New Year’s Eve 2015 have stirred up anti-migrant and anti-refugee sentiment across the West, regardless of whether the attackers were formally resettled refugees or not (Wike, et al., 2016). As public opinion has shifted in the United States over the past five years, there has been less political will to support the resettlement program, culminating with the Trump Administration’s various attempts to end the program altogether.

Alternatives

As the number of refugees continues to grow, one way that policy makers and advocates have sought to increase the effectiveness of the resettlement program is by promoting private sector engagement. This initiative was started by the Obama administration in June 2016 when the White House issued a Call to Action to private companies to make “new, measurable and significant commitments that will have a durable impact on refugees residing in countries on
the frontlines of the global refugee crisis and in countries of resettlement, like the United States” (The White House, 2016, June 30).

In response, over 51 companies pledged over $650 million to address the refugee crisis internationally and support the resettlement program domestically (The White House, 2016, Sep 20). For example, Accenture agreed to provide $3 million in financial support, consulting, and digital services and Airbnb committed to start a program that allows hosts to temporarily accommodate refugees if no permanent housing options are available. In addition to corporate sector support, private citizens have also increased donations and sought ways to get involved in response to stirring images such as three-year-old Aylan Kurdi who drowned in the Mediterranean and washed up on a beach in Turkey. This increase in corporate engagement and private citizen support has contributed to the broader policy debate that has occurred since 2016 when the refugee crisis became such a high-profile issue. Despite the attention these programs have drawn, however, there has been little federal oversight of these private actors and no long-term models for how to sustain and improve these partnerships over time.

The central question of this thesis is what the role of these private sector partners should be in strengthening the refugee resettlement program, and how they can effectively partner with the federal government without assuming the government’s responsibility. This study evaluates two primary models for private sector engagement based on extensive interviews with refugees resettled in the United States, employees of refugee resettlement agencies, policy makers from the US State Department, and representatives from private companies. These two models are the corporate sector engagement model and the private co-sponsorship model.

As I will explain further in chapter two, corporate sector engagement describes for-profit companies choosing to donate or devote specific skills or resources to help refugees resettling in
the United States or the international refugee crisis. The co-sponsorship model resettles refugees through a partnership between a refugee resettlement agency and a group of private volunteers who provide refugees with additional financial and emotional support for a longer period of time than the three-month federal program. This study concludes that the co-sponsorship model directly improves the services that refugees receive and strengthens the resettlement program by creating greater community awareness and advocacy for refugees. Corporate engagement, on the other hand, has so far not proven to provide sustainable solutions that address the needs of refugees as effectively or as directly as the co-sponsorship model. However, there is potential for this to improve with greater attention to the needs of the population and more effective communication with refugee resettlement agencies that work with refugees directly.

This study seeks to give refugees themselves a voice to inform the policy decisions that greatly affect their lives, offering them a platform to give feedback on the resettlement programs that exist today and offer suggestions for improvement. I will begin by providing an analysis of the relevant literature that is available on this topic and an explanation of the methodology that I used to conduct this study. These two chapters will be followed by a qualitative analysis of the data collected from participant interviews. The study will conclude by offering a model for private sector engagement based on the results of the data analysis. Any recommendations or policy alternatives will be evaluated based on whether they address the primary concerns of refugees themselves and whether they improve the service provider’s ability to address these concerns.
Chapter 2: Background and Literature Review

In this chapter I will provide a brief history of the refugee resettlement program in the United States followed by a description of the current resettlement policy as of the beginning of 2018. I will then explore the existing literature about various aspects of private sector engagement in refugee resettlement, specifically corporate sector engagement and civic engagement. While many scholars have provided useful insights, there is very little research about corporate sector engagement in refugee issues specifically or civic engagement with refugees resettled in the United States. The existing body of research, therefore, provides a limited but compelling rationale for addressing the questions raised in this study.

Historical Context

The first piece of legislation about refugees in the United States was the Displaced Persons Act of 1948, which allowed almost 650,000 Europeans into the country after WWII (Eby, et al., 2011). Faith based groups such as Church World Service and the United Conference of Catholic Bishops lobbied the Truman Administration to admit survivors of the war. The United States later admitted waves of refugees fleeing communist regimes in Eastern Europe, Cuba and Indochina. From 1946 until 1980, congregations and communities wishing to sponsor refugees were expected to fully fund the costs of resettlement with no assistance from the federal government (ibid). The federal government only provided funding for resettlement sporadically in the form of travel loans or small grants of five hundred dollars (ibid). The Refugee Act of 1980 created a system for determining which refugees were admitted into the United States and standardized the services that all resettled refugees received (Singer, et al., 2006). The act also
created the Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) within the State Department to oversee the resettlement program and manage refugee admissions.

The shifting origins of refugees to the U.S. over time

Number of refugees admitted to the U.S., by region of origin of principal applicant and fiscal year

1975 Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act results in increased refugees from Vietnam


1989 U.S. raises quotas on Soviet refugees

2004 50% of overall admitted refugees in 2004 were from Somalia, Cuba and Laos

2008 Burmese and Bhutanese were granted refugee status

Note: Data do not include special immigrant visas and certain humanitarian parole entrants. Does not include refugees admitted under the Private Sector Initiative. Europe includes former Soviet Union states. Asia includes Middle Eastern and North African countries. Africa includes sub-Saharan Africa, but also Sudan and South Sudan. Latin America includes Caribbean. Data for fiscal 2017 are through Dec. 31, 2016. Fiscal 2017 began Oct. 1, 2016.
either NGOs or the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and they work closely with PRM and the Department of Homeland Security to conduct background checks, interviews, and reviews of each resettlement applicant (ibid). The application process alone often takes up to two years or more.

In the United States, refugee policy is made at the federal level and the President decides how many refugees to allow into the country each year and which refugees will be given priority. Once the Department of Homeland Security has accepted refugees’ resettlement applications, the State Department is responsible for ensuring that refugees receive resettlement services such as medical exams, housing, education, jobs, and cultural orientation. PRM, the policy making body within the State Department that determines what services should be required, is funded by Congress as a government agency. Rather than have direct government offices around the country to provide initial resettlement services, PRM contracts out the responsibilities of resettlement to non-profit, non-governmental organizations. PRM retains responsibility for dictating and funding the initial phase of resettlement, called the Reception and Placement (R&P) Program, which this paper will explain in greater detail below. After the three-month R&P program ends, the Office of Refugee Resettlement in the Department of Health and Human Services manages and funds the provision of long-term services such as employment, housing and language for four to eight months after refugees arrive. Each state has a refugee resettlement coordinator, except for Wyoming, which does not accept refugees (ibid). The state coordinator oversees the resettlement program at the state level, serves as a liaison between local agencies and the government, and writes an annual report that is used by policy makers at PRM and the Office of Refugee Resettlement in the Department of Health and Human Services to allocate funding for the program (ibid).
**Reception and Placement Program**

If an applicant is approved for resettlement in the United States, PRM sends their case file to a weekly allocations meeting where the nine national resettlement agencies decide which agency is going to take on the case and where the refugee family will be resettled. This decision is made based on the capacity of the agency, the specific needs of the case and whether they have any family already living in the United States, known as a ‘US Tie’ (Eby, et al., 2011).

Resettlement agencies are non-profit, non-governmental organizations that take on the responsibility of resettling refugees across the country using federal funding. The nine national resettlement agencies are the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Church World Service (CWS), World Relief, the Episcopal Migration Ministries, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS), the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, the Ethiopian Community Development Council, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), and the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI). The first six agencies listed are faith-based while the final three are secular; however none of the agencies are allowed to proselytize. The largest agency is USCCB and they resettle approximately 30% of the refugees resettled in the United States (“resettlement services”, n.d). Once the resettlement agencies have decided where the refugee will settle, IOM arranges their travel and gives them a travel loan, which the refugee is expected to begin repaying six months after arrival.

As mentioned above, PRM contracts with these nine agencies and their many local affiliate organizations across the country to ensure that refugees are provided the same basic services wherever they are resettled. The Reception and Placement program (R&P) contract requires that agencies meet the refugee at the airport and provide them with a furnished apartment, climate sensitive clothing, and a culturally appropriate meal when they first arrive. Agencies then have to assist the new arrivals to enroll their children in school, apply for a Social
Security Card, arrange medical appointments, teach them how to shop for groceries and other needs, and connect refugees to any necessary services. Agencies also assist refugees with enrolling in English classes and help them access employment services ("The Reception and Placement Program," n.d.). The agencies are given roughly $1800 dollars per refugee, half of which is for the refugee to pay for rent, food, utilities, and living expenses and half of which is for the agency to pay its staff and cover the cost of the R&P Program. This program lasts for three months, at which point the refugee is expected to find work and be largely self-sufficient. The Office of Refugee Resettlement provides some refugees with Refugee Cash Assistance and Refugee Medical Assistance for up to eight months after they arrive if they do not qualify for other types of social services and/or Medicaid.

The Drawbacks of Traditional Non-Profits

The United States has a robust culture of charitable giving and a plethora of NGOs in contrast to other developed nations with stronger social welfare states. The nine refugee agencies are unusual in that they are given a clear mandate and are contracted to carry out a specific task on behalf of the government. However, are limited in their ability to address the underlying causes of their suffering or change the system itself because they respond to policy decisions made at the federal level. William P Ryan’s chapter titled The New Landscape for Non-Profits explains that after President Johnson’s Great Society there has been a shift in how the government provides for the social good (Ryan, 2002). The government has increasingly prioritized the discipline, performance and organizational capacity of for-profits over the reputation and social commitment of nonprofit organizations. As a result, there is a public perception that nonprofits are less effective and well managed than for-profits. This perception has led many nonprofits to develop partnerships with the private sector in order to improve their reputation with donors and the public. The growing field of social entrepreneurship explores how
for-profit values are increasingly being applied to addressing social issues, as we are seeing currently with the refugee crisis. For example, in his book *Uncharitable*, Dan Pallotta questions the Puritan norms that charitable giving cannot bring any personal gain while we accept that for-profit companies will spend money on advertising and attracting qualified people with high salaries (Pallotta, 2008). He argues that in order to foster innovative problem solving, nonprofits should be unencumbered by regulations about how they should use their funds and that people should be allowed to invest in their efforts. This study examines how the debate about the role of the private sector in addressing issues that relate to the social good plays out specifically in the field of refugee resettlement. Traditionally, the field has been dominated by non-profits, so the question is whether this is another area where for-profit models should be applied.

**What is the private sector?**

In order to examine the role the private sector should play in refugee resettlement, it is important to clarify what I mean by private sector engagement in this context. The refugee resettlement system in the United States has always been run as a private public partnership between PRM and the nine national resettlement agencies, all non-profit NGOs. Non-profit NGOs are in fact the cornerstone of the resettlement program because they provide all of the core services. This paper will focus on the more recent discussions about whether for-profit entities and private citizens have a role to play in increasing the capacity of the United States to accept more refugees and provide better services to the people that are resettled here, outside of the non-profit organizations that have historically been integral to the resettlement program.

There is limited scholarly research about either for-profit entity or private citizen engagement in refugee resettlement in the United States, as it has only recently become a salient topic. There is a large body of research about corporate social responsibly and social entrepreneurship, but very little that applies this framework to the issue of refugee resettlement.
specifically. In terms of private citizen engagement, the United States does not have a centralized way of managing volunteers and religious organizations that sponsor refugees so there are no evaluations of the effect of volunteers and sponsors. Most of the research about civic engagement that is available has been done in Canada and Europe because they have systematically incorporated private citizens into their resettlement programs. While these two existing bodies of research can help inform this study, there is virtually no existing research on private sector engagement in the refugee resettlement system in the United States. This study will seek to build on the existing research on corporate social responsibility and civic engagement by applying it to the refugee resettlement system in the United States.

**Corporate Social Responsibility**

The United States makes up 25% of the world’s GDP and is home to the world’s largest corporations (IMF, 2017). With such a significant amount of available private capital, there are widespread debates about whether the corporate sector can be a force for positive social change within the capitalist economy. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is difficult to define because it can mean different things in different contexts. One working definition from David Vogel encompasses “practices that improve the workplace and benefit society in ways that go above and beyond what companies are legally required to do” (Vogel, 2007). Milton Friedman argued that private companies should only be accountable to their shareholders and that any type of moral social good will be carried out through the invisible hand of the free market (Friedman, 2007). This stems from the belief that the common good is realized when individuals compete to promote their own self-interest. John Galbraith maintains that private companies should pursue purely economic objectives but differs from Friedman in that he believes government regulations and laws should mold these economic objectives into the common good (Galbraith, 1973).
These authors both represent the school of thought that believes corporations should not be held morally accountable, but there has been a shift towards the belief that it is possible for for-profit entities to also provide for the public good. Kenneth Goodpaster points out that if individuals are held morally responsible for their actions then corporations can and should be held morally responsible in the same way (Goodpaster, et al., 1982). Porter and Kramer’s article *Creating Shared Value* contends that it is possible for corporations to redesign their business models in such a way that creates value for the company and also improves social or environmental welfare (Porter, et al., 2011). They argue that private corporations are best equipped to deal with the many problems facing society today because they are efficient and have the capacity to offer solutions that are scalable to address the magnitude of the issues facing the world. The refugee crisis certainly merits scalable solutions that can be implemented quickly, particularly to help resettle the millions of people who have fled their homes.

While it may be possible for corporations to provide shared value, the question remains as to whether it is advisable. David Vogel’s book *The Market for Virtue* explains that corporate social responsibility is often only sustainable as long as it makes business sense for the corporation (Vogel, 2007). He exposes the hypocrisy that many corporations start socially responsible initiatives but fail to recognize the important role that policy and government regulations play in making their changes more impactful. Vogel offers an illuminating example of how CSR can become problematic and ineffective by describing how Ford Motor Company reduced their environmental impact internally even as their lobbyists were busy fighting federal fuel efficiency standards. Vogel recognizes the potential benefits of encouraging firms to innovate in socially responsible ways which could lower costs and open up new markets, but argues that it is only beneficial if there is a market associated with the social issue, which is not
universally the case. This research will seek to discover if there is a potential untapped market that exists within the refugee settlement sector the same way that the renewable energy market has grown to address climate change concerns. Additionally, if refugee resettlement does become part of a larger for-profit market, what will happen to the refugees who will inevitably be left out?

Given that both non-profits and CSR can be problematic, Gregory Dees argues that the two can be most effective when they partner with one another (Dees, 2012). Most corporate social ventures rely on charity in the early stages before their initiatives become self-sufficient. The dominant literature about tri-sector partnerships between the government, private, and civic entities suggests that these partnerships grow out of a public desire to solve complex global issues using organizations from all sectors (Selskey, et al., 2005). These partnerships are therefore driven by the social problem itself, but can be fraught with tension as organizations negotiate roles. Although cross-sector partnerships have become more common, Selsky and Parker note that they are a “poorly understood phenomenon” (ibid). Because no research has been done on CSR or cross-sector partnerships in the refugee resettlement field in the United States, it remains unclear how the refugee sector could most effectively encourage innovative partnerships that complement the existing private-public partnership between the government and Resettlement Agencies.

Civic Engagement

While there is little research about CSR in the refugee field in the United States, there is a sizable body of research about other types of private sector engagement internationally. The largest form of private sector engagement seeks to involve private citizens themselves in the refugee resettlement system. One of the strongest examples of this civic engagement is the Canadian model, which allows groups of private citizens to sponsor refugee families. Because
this model has been in place since the 1980s, the Canadian government has been able to evaluate the effects of the program and compare the outcomes of refugees who are resettled by the government and refugees resettled by private individuals.

There are three main resettlement tracks in Canada. The largest is government-assisted refugees (GARs). These are refugees who are referred by the UNHCR and then the Canadian Government provides initial services and financial support for up to one year. Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs) are sponsored by either an organization similar to the resettlement organizations in the United States, a group of five or more private Canadian citizens, or a community sponsor which usually only sponsors one or two groups of refugees. These groups of private citizens provide financial support and initial resettlement services to refugees for the first twelve months, so the government does not provide these refugees with financial support. The final resettlement track in Canada is a public private-partnership called the Blended Visa Office Referred program (BVOR). Profiles of refugees are posted on the BVOR website and community sponsors can pick which cases they want to support. The government provides these refugees with six months of financial support and the community sponsor provides the second six months of support as well as emotional and social support.

These three tracks are different from the resettlement system in the United States because the US government does not actually provide any resettlement services. Instead the US government provides financial support and oversees the quality of service by stipulating specific obligations and ensuring compliance through a network of state coordinators. Unlike in Canada, private organizations and resettlement agencies in the United States are not responsible for securing financial support for the refugees that they resettle. As discussed earlier in this chapter, community groups and congregations in the United States were historically responsible for
providing financial support to refugees, but today they provide additional financial support as they can and it is not integrated into the resettlement strategy. Some refugees in the United States are still sponsored by community groups and congregations in addition to the services that they receive through the resettlement agencies, but this occurs on an ad hoc basis and the resettlement agency is still primarily responsible for them. As I discuss the outcomes from the resettlement program in Canada, it is important to keep in mind the many differences between Canada and the United States. It cannot be assumed that these outcomes would be possible in a country with a weak social welfare system, no national healthcare, and less political support for refugee resettlement.

The July 2016 evaluations report from the Canadian Department of Immigration, Citizenship and Refugees compared the outcomes of refugees resettled by the government and refugees resettled through private sponsors. Privately sponsored refugees had higher employment and earnings rates than refugees who were resettled by the government (Evaluation of Resettlement Programs, 2016). As a result 93% of GARs relied on social assistance compared to only 9% of PSRs. Another positive sign was that only 29% of PSRs relied on food banks, while 65% of GARs had to rely on food banks to feed themselves and their families. GARS are partially worse off because refugees resettled by the government are often more complex and challenging cases, but these outcomes also point to a lack of resources devoted to GARs both in terms of financial support and in-kind support. Private sponsors devote more financial support and time to connecting refugees with job opportunities and other types of services, leading to lower poverty rates and higher outcomes. The report found that one major problem with the PSR program is that it takes 36-54 months for PSR applications to be processed as opposed to 14-24 months for GAR applications to be processed. The increase in processing time is because private
citizens can identify refugees for resettlement independently and then apply for government approval rather than the government only considering resettlement applications from refugees referred by the UNHCR or other international agencies. In addition to long application times, the report identified a need for more monitoring and training of PSRs to ensure that private sponsors are held accountable for the services that they are expected to provide. While there are improvements that can be made in the Canadian system, especially in terms of training, efficiency, and monitoring, their report clearly shows that the private sponsorship program increases the country’s capacity to take in refugees and provide them with a safe life.

Various European countries have also developed private sponsorship models in response to the refugee crisis. Susan Fratzke from the Migration Policy Institute conducted a study of these private sponsorship programs and found that they allow more legal pathways to protection for refugees, improve labor market integration and self-sufficiency as we saw in Canada, and foster relationships between community members and refugees (Fratzke, 2017). However she notes that not all communities are supportive of refugees, especially in Eastern Europe, so the German government allows local governments to facilitate their own admissions programs. Fratzke also notes some lessons to be learned from civic engagement initiatives that have been less successful. First, one should not garner public support for a program without government commitment because if the public is prepared and eager to sponsor a family and the government takes too long to process the applications or is not committed to facilitating the process, it alienates potential sponsors and they lose interest. Secondly, private sponsorship programs should be implemented in a thorough manner, not as a rapid crisis management technique. Programs that are set up too quickly risk skipping important steps and leading to unsure legal status and complications with delivering services down the line. Lastly, the government should
provide the right amount of oversight to the program to ensure that there are criteria about who can sponsor and that sponsors receive adequate training and guidance throughout the process. Too much government oversight, on the other hand, can impede the system by creating unnecessary red tape. These lessons are useful in that they can be applied generally to any country wishing to implement private sponsorship programs, rather than being specific to the European context.

As interesting and promising as the private sponsorship system may appear in both Canada and Europe, these studies have limited value for the United States context because a sponsorship system in this country would inherently look very different from any of the models that have been studied internationally. Both Canada and Europe have strong social welfare systems as well as national healthcare programs that help sponsors to support refugee families. In the United States, private sponsors would be responsible for a greater number of expenses and would have less support from existing government programs designed to support low income and disadvantaged individuals. Given that the United States has unique immigration policies, social policies, and a distinct political environment from both Canada and Europe, a private sponsorship system would have to be tailored specifically to the US context in order to be successful. This research project will also assess whether a private sponsorship system would improve the resettlement program in the United States and what form this program should take.

Even though private sector engagement has become a popular buzzword in the world of refugee resettlement ever since the White House initiative in 2016, to date there has been insufficient research and data available about the subject to inform useful policy initiatives or long-term strategies. This research is designed to begin addressing this gap by analyzing the preliminary effects of corporate sector engagement on refugee resettlement and whether
corporate social responsibility can address this particular social issue. In addition, this research will examine the role of civic engagement in the United States to determine whether the private sponsorship models that have been implemented successfully internationally could achieve similar outcomes in the US context if carefully designed.
Chapter 3: Methods

As outlined in the first chapter, this research project seeks to determine what the role of the private sector should be in resettling refugees in the United States. I hypothesize that private companies can use their unique expertise to develop innovative strategies that efficiently help address the growing refugee crisis, including the overwhelming number of refugees seeking resettlement. Because this form of corporate private sector engagement is such a new topic in the field of refugee resettlement, there is very little research or data collection about the impact of private sector initiatives. The Obama administration pushed for private sector engagement in the summer of 2016 as the number of refugees fleeing from Syria continued to grow. However, since Donald Trump took office in January of 2017 there has been very little leadership or direction on this issue. In light of this, I decided to do a qualitative study to gain insights on this issue from a variety of different stakeholders in order to determine whether the private sector could contribute meaningfully to more effective and efficient refugee resettlement and if so, what this should look like. While there are some exciting possibilities for improvements with greater private sector involvement, without this type of foundational research and strategic planning, it is possible that the role of the private sector in the refugee field could fall short of expectations. Once policies about private sector engagement have been put in place, it will be necessary to evaluate these programs, but at this point it is still too soon to conduct any type of conclusive quantitative analysis.

The population of my study is broad because it was important to interview people with a variety of perspectives on the issue. The subjects of this study can be broken down into four
categories: refugees who have been resettled in the United States, people who work for refugee resettlement agencies, representatives of the state department, and representatives from the private sector. In this way, people from all sides of the issue are represented. In total, this study is based on data collected from 25 interviews. Because each of these stakeholders provided a unique perspective on the issue and has a different role in the process, I conducted semi-structured interviews in which each person was interviewed about similar themes but there was not a standard interview questionnaire. Appendix C lists the questions that were asked, but not every person was asked each question. For example, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) has worked with Airbnb on a specific partnership, so their interview focused on that partnership, while an organization in Connecticut called IRIS runs a private citizen co-sponsorship program, so that interview focused on the co-sponsorship model. Tailoring each of my interviews for specific organizations and people allowed me to gain insights into the different sides of the issue that is highlighted in chapter two, namely the potential effectiveness of corporate sector engagement and civic engagement.

I conducted interviews from June 2017 to January 2018 and they occurred both in person and over the phone. In-person interviews took place in a variety of locations, including Florence, Italy, New York City, and Chicago. I initially interviewed people in Italy because they have been central to the migrant crisis in Europe but ended up not including these interview in the analysis for this study because it introduced a new context that was beyond the scope of this project. Respondents from other parts of the United States were interviewed over the phone for logistical reasons. See Appendix A for more information on each interview, including location, time, length and setting.
This study was granted IRB approval from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, study number 17-0768. All refugees were required to sign a consent form and have been given pseudonyms to protect their privacy. Representatives from different NGOs and the State Department were not required to do so because they were interviewed in a professional capacity, not as individuals. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed for analysis.

I analyzed the data from all interviews using the qualitative software analysis tool Dedoose. The codebook can be found in Appendix B. Each interview was also tagged with a descriptor in order to categorize them by different types of interviews. The table below shows how many interviews falls into each of the categories of descriptors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Refugees</th>
<th>NGOs/Affiliate Resettlement Agencies</th>
<th>National Resettlement Agencies</th>
<th>Academic</th>
<th>Government</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the challenges during the analysis phase was not all of the participants neatly fit into just one of the descriptor categories. For example, an employee from the government agency PRM was previously employed at the International Red Cross and during the interview she explicitly cited that experience when answering some of the questions. In this way she was both a representative of an NGO and of the Government. In my results, I analyzed each statement based on what experience the participant was drawing on when they made that statement and grouped their responses according to that measure. Another challenge was that I was not able to interview anyone from a private company who has engaged in refugee resettlement services because they did not answer my requests for an interview. Instead I interviewed a person from the International Rescue Committee (IRC) who has worked very closely with Airbnb, one of the private companies that started a refugee program.
Throughout the interview process, I assessed the data by looking for areas where participants from different groups expressed similar ideas and more importantly where they diverged. By analyzing my data and looking for patterns and areas of disagreement while I was still in the interview phase, I was able to adjust my questions and even the participants that I approached based on the new information that I was learning. Because of the semi-structured nature of my interviews, I was able to make these adjustments and thus learn more about specific questions and themes that emerged during the process.
Chapter 4: Results

An unexpected trend emerged during the interview process: co-sponsorship programs that pair volunteers with newly arrived refugees was more impactful and sustainable for both the refugee program and refugees themselves than corporate sector engagement. The literature indicates that there are two sides to the debate on corporate social responsibility, but my hypothesis and the dominant feeling among many people in the refugee resettlement field was that the corporate sector was going to bring innovative solutions to some of the challenges of the refugee crisis. While my interview data suggests that the corporate sector still has the ability to meaningfully engage with refugee issues and support the work that the humanitarian field is doing, the findings of this study show that the most promising form of private sector engagement is utilizing the resources and political advocacy power of private citizens. This chapter will explain these findings by discussing the primary themes that emerged from participant interviews, beginning with a discussion of the state of the resettlement program overall and then explaining the positive and negative aspects of corporate sector engagement and the co-sponsorship model. Within each theme, I will compare the responses of refugees, NGOs and smaller affiliate resettlement agencies, the national resettlement agencies, the government, and academics.

Benefits of the Refugee Resettlement Program

Refugees: The most common form of praise refugees expressed about the resettlement program was that it has allowed them to find safety and security in the United States. While this may seem simplistic or obvious, it demands recognition because this is the primary reason that
refugees seek resettlement in the first place. Their lives and those of their children and families were often in imminent danger for many years prior to finally arriving in the United States, so they do not trivialize the value of finding a safe place to live. For Naw Moo Eh Wah, coming to the United States meant that her three children could enroll in school and receive a formal education. This would not have been possible in the refugee camp in Thailand. She and her husband have also been able to find work here, which they were not allowed to do legally in Thailand either. In addition to security, refugees cited education and jobs as the next most significant benefits that they have received since being resettled here.

**NGOs:** When discussing the positive aspects of the resettlement program, an employee from Refugepoint noted that the United States has the most robust refugee resettlement program in the world. While there are flaws in the system, which are addressed below, this person explained that the fact that this program exists at all and that it has been able to resettle so many people over many decades makes this program beneficial overall.

**Challenges of the Refugee Resettlement Program**

**Refugees:** By far the most significant challenge for all of the refugees that I interviewed was the limited amount of financial support that they receive. Nour, a woman from Syria who moved to Chicago with her husband and three children in 2016, said that before they moved here, they were told that they would receive financial support from the government for six to eight months until they could find a job. She was shocked when she realized that they would only be receiving $925 dollars each and that much of that had already gone to pay the security deposit and furnish their new apartment. Misinformed expectations, combined with the very limited period of support, create a great deal of stress and trauma upon arrival. Nour explained that:

> The first period when we came here you can't do anything. The first month I spent it sleeping at home. I didn't want to see anyone. I didn't want to meet anyone. I just want to
stay at home, even I hate myself, my family, my husband. It is difficult. It is too difficult to move, to leave your country, your family and to come here, you know no one. It's difficult, really you feel pessimistic.

Refugees consistently expressed concern that they were required to start working so quickly in order to pay their rent. As Nour explained above, they are often not physically or emotionally able to join the labor market within the first couple months of living here. Another common challenge they face is learning English and adjusting to the culture in the United States. For Nour, going to the beach and seeing American men and women dressed in bathing suits was one of the many culture shocks that she experienced. She also missed the familiar comfort of hearing the call to prayer ring out from the local mosque five times a day.

**NGOs:** Caseworkers and advocates at various NGOs expressed similar concerns about the lack of resources allotted to refugees and the agencies. One of the primary consequences of this lack of funding is housing because it is challenging to find landlords who are willing to rent affordable apartments to refugees when they are only guaranteed an income from the government for a couple of months. A housing coordinator in Chicago said that many of their clients work low-wage jobs and have large families, so they spend eighty or ninety percent of their income on rent. Caseworkers are frustrated by the emphasis on early employment because it means that refugees have to take the first job that they can get and then get trapped in a cycle of poverty because they no longer have time to go back to school or learn English in order to move up in the labor market.

Another challenge of the program from the perspective of caseworkers is that many refugees are so shocked by the lack of funding that they receive that they can sometimes suspect the agency of withholding some of their money. One translator explained that clients often come from situations where officials are corrupt and they have learned to be distrustful. It can take lots
of energy on the part of the agency to ensure that clients understand the system here and what their money is being used for, especially given the language barriers.

Finally, one of the challenges that agencies around the country have faced over the past year has been that the president’s decision to admit far fewer refugees for resettlement. Because resettlement agencies are funded based on the number of refugees they resettle, agencies have had to lay off employees as a result of drastic budget cuts. Agencies also have a hard time planning for the future because they cannot predict how many refugees they will resettle and what their funding capacity will be going forward.

**National agencies:** In light of the recent shift in popular opinion of refugees in this country, a staff member from the USCCB, the largest national resettlement agency, commented that:

> Lots of communities are homogenous and ignorant about refugees. We have to normalize it and create a connection so that the community won’t push back as much. Focusing on community engagement and doing it in a different way than we have in the past.

**Government:** Concern about the lack of funding is present even at the government level. An employee at PRM stated that the United States has the least comprehensive support for refugees because they are entitled to what other poor people in this country are entitled to, which is not substantial. Even though the push for self-sufficiency and the emphasis on early employment has been a pillar of the government program, this participant acknowledged that, “I think the data would show that we kind of write off that group [adults] and figure that their kids will do well, which they don’t expect. They think they are going to get the American Dream.”
Benefits of Corporate Sector Engagement

**Refugees:** Given the fact the refugees were primarily concerned with the lack of financial resources given to new arrivals, they were very interested in receiving more resources from private companies. None of them had knowingly benefited from a corporate company initiative or had heard of corporate sector engagement with refugee issues. A woman who resettled to the United States in 2013 and became a translator at the agency that resettled her was excited about the potential of securing more resources for refugees, but warned that she felt like resettlement should ultimately be the government’s responsibility.

**NGOs:** Agencies around the country cited the Open Homes partnership between Airbnb and the IRC as the best example of corporate engagement. The Open Homes program allows Airbnb hosts to open their homes and allow refugees to stay there temporarily if there is no housing available for them when they arrive. According to the IRC, Airbnb came to them with a truly open mind and they invested significant amounts of time and resources into making sure the program would be useful. Another important thing that has made the program successful is that “It felt like to the caseworker there was no strings attached and it was not a marketing ploy or deliverable for advertising.”

**National Agency:** While corporations looking for marketing opportunities or other benefits may not be as useful or beneficial from the perspective of NGOs, a former employee of a national resettlement agency explained that these relationships can be mutually beneficial for larger organizations. For example, when a major consulting firm provided pro-bono services to her organization, the firm boosted their public relations and benefited through tax cuts and in turn the NGO earned attention from donors because they were significant enough to garner attention from these big corporate firms. Finally, corporations, especially in the tech field, can provide
humanitarian agencies with technical expertise and technology that they do not have the resources to cultivate on their own.

**Academic:** A professor who studies corporate sector engagement in refugee resettlement said she believes that it has potential because companies can help address the refugee crisis and boost their double bottom line. The double bottom line, as explained in the literature review, is the concept that companies should provide for the social good in addition to growing their profits. This professor sees lots of potential for growth in this area based on the literature on social innovation, but at this point her optimism does not stem from strong evidence of good examples.

**Private:** An IRC employee in Oakland, California who worked closely with Airbnb on the Open Homes program explained that one of the things that made the partnership successful was that one of the founders of Airbnb, Joe Gebbia, was personally invested and made the initiative a priority. Similarly, another interviewee who works for an international NGO explained that Chobani pledged to hire refugees because the founder, Hamdi Ulukaya, is a refugee himself. Many successful corporate initiatives are launched because they align with the ideals of the company. This employee at the IRC explained that another benefit of working with a corporation was that the Open Homes initiative moved very quickly and is scalable.

**Government:** A former intern at PRM emphasized that corporate engagement will be most impactful at enhancing solutions when the corporation contributes resources and specific skills. He did not envision that private companies would be the best vehicle for solving the many problems associated with the refugee crisis, but they have the potential to contribute in meaningful ways.
Challenges of Corporate Engagement:

**NGO:** The most common complaint from resettlement agencies and other refugee non-profits is that corporate partners often do not consult them about what their biggest needs are before deciding how they want to be involved. One caseworker explained that:

> It just seems that the people who are actually providing those services are never in the room where they're having those conversations, and then by the time their resources reach the ground floor it's like, it's just not exactly what people need, it almost never is.

A good example of this is that Starbucks has made an effort to hire refugees, but a state director of USCRI said the company ended up only hiring one of their clients because they were only looking for refugees who spoke English. In theory it is great to hire refugees, but in practice the initiative was not as effective as it could have been if they had been more realistic and knowledgeable about refugee’s language abilities. Another concern was that corporations and humanitarians come from vastly different points of view and this can either foster innovation or make it challenging to communicate. Many of the NGOs that I spoke with believed that corporations should not provide direct service to clients. For example, a former employee at an international refugee agency explained that they had to invest lots of resources to train Google employees to travel to a refugee camp in Jordan when it would have been more efficient to use those resources to provide effective service themselves. On a similar note, companies frequently reach out to NGOs looking for one-time volunteer opportunities for their staff. All the agencies expressed frustration with this type of engagement because refugee resettlement requires long-term relationship building with clients and it is impractical to plan a meaningful one-day event that adds value to their program.

Sustainability was a major concern for various agencies when it comes to in-kind donations from companies as well. Ikea has donated beds to the IRC, Heartland Alliance and
many other agencies to help furnish refugee’s apartments, but these are usually one-time donations. While caseworkers expressed appreciation for the donations, they lamented the fact that beds are ultimately a Band-Aid solution because that donation will have a limited long-term impact on the organization’s programing. Finally, one person I interviewed expressed concern about the private sector’s investment in technology for refugees because that is such a rapidly evolving field. Technological solutions may quickly become outdated and this participant was concerned that the companies would not invest in keeping the technology updated once they create a program or app for refugees to use.

**National Agencies:** Some of the nine national resettlement agencies are large international agencies that have a long history of building relationships with corporate donors. A former employee of the International Red Cross explained that cultivating these relationships and soliciting sizable contributions from corporate donors requires a team of full time staff. Smaller refugee agencies and NGOs around the country do not have the bandwidth or resources to invest in that type of fundraising. When these small organizations became interested in soliciting corporate donations, she found herself explaining that:

> Corporations have never just opened up their checkbook and agreed to fund ideas like that. That is very unrealistic. They are never going to do what you want. You have to find out what they are doing and you do little things together and there will be some overlap but it is not like a budget.

A state director of USCRI explained that his office had not had any luck working with corporate partners because the types of supports that they offered have not been needed or feasible. He conceded that the burden of finding corporate donors had fallen on his shoulders and he had not had time to invest in that yet. Multiple agencies that do have experience working with corporate
partners warned that the outcomes often do not provide the type of substantive support that makes a real impact.

Faith-based agencies and secular agencies are also in very different positions according to an employee at USCCB, a Catholic resettlement agency. He explained that because the Catholic Church is such a powerful entity, they were able to raise two million dollars when President Trump’s executive order halted refugee resettlement in March of 2017. This money ensured that they were able to keep their affiliate agencies staffed and were not as affected as other agencies by the massive budget cuts. Because of this, he explained that faith-based agencies do not see as great a need to work with corporate donors even if it would be beneficial for them to do so in the long term.

**Government:** A PRM employee reiterated a concern that many respondents expressed, which is that increased corporate engagement could replace government support. Policy makers may cut government funding for the resettlement program if they feel that the private sector is taking on that responsibility. Everyone that I interviewed, including a government employee, believes that the government should remain responsible for funding this program because they are bringing refugees to this country as a humanitarian gesture.

**Academic:** After studying the resettlement program over time, a professor concluded that:

> To me that is about creating long-term consistent and reliable commitments. In all of my work, the theme throughout has been resource deprivation. In many ways this is rooted in the unreliability and inconsistency of resettlement. Because our system is designed in such a way that grants are tied to the number of people who come….Everything that is solution oriented must be about creating reliability and consistency. If corporate interests don’t also add reliability and consistency then it is another burden for the agency.

This question of sustainability was another major concern among all groups of respondents with regard to corporate sector engagement.
While some corporate engagement partnerships have been successful, like the Open Homes program, respondents were generally skeptical about whether corporate sector engagement would provide sustainable and effective support for the Refugee Resettlement Program. Because many companies only recently turned their attention to the international refugee crisis after reading press coverage of President Trump’s decision to weaken the domestic resettlement program, most refugees and agencies in the United States have not yet felt the impact of corporate interest. If this interest translates into increased engagement, it will be important to monitor the effectiveness of these efforts to inform future policy making.

Co-sponsorship Program

The second type of private sector engagement that participants repeatedly referred to was the co-sponsorship model, in which newly arrived refugees are sponsored by both a resettlement agency and volunteers. For most participants, this option seemed to have more potential to improve the services that refugees receive and strengthen the resettlement program overall than corporate sector engagement. Private volunteers and sponsors have been an integral part of the refugee resettlement system in the United States since the beginning of the program after WWII, but there have not been federal policy guidelines about how volunteers should be utilized. The Canadian resettlement model, on the other hand, is renowned for integrating private citizen sponsorship into their government policy as a way to supplement traditional government sponsorship. As one respondent put it “in Canada they dedicate a lot of resources to volunteer trainings and people to do private sponsorship. Here [in the United States] it is very entrepreneurial where each agency comes up with their own guidelines and their own programs.”

While many respondents who work for NGOs and resettlement agencies praised the Canadian
model, none of the respondents in this study anticipated that the United States would implement an exact replica of the full sponsorship Canadian model in the U.S. Interviewees cited national security as one reason this would be unlikely, explaining that in their view, the US government would probably want to maintain strict control over determining who is admitted as a refugee. They also mentioned that private sponsors in this country would be saddled with a greater financial burden because of our weak welfare state. Instead of implementing a full sponsorship model, some agencies across the United States have developed co-sponsorship programs that they argue are more suited for the U.S. context.

**Co-Sponsorship Model Logistics**

There is no federal policy that outlines guidelines for co-sponsorship programs so each of the three different agencies that I interviewed who have taken the initiative to start a co-sponsorship program do so slightly differently. Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services (IRIS) is quickly becoming the national leader on co-sponsorship because their program has spread across Connecticut since it began in New Haven in 2005. An employee at IRIS explained that when donations and interest came pouring in during the height of the refugee crisis in 2015, they had many people express interest in volunteering. They decided to harness that interest and give them the opportunity to help the agency sponsor a family. Since then they have developed training manuals for volunteers and hired a full time staff person to manage the co-sponsorship program. At this point, 40% of new arrivals at their agency are placed with a co-sponsor, which is the maximum percentage that he recommends because it creates a balanced division of cases between the agency and co-sponsors. This employee explained that co-sponsors are expected to complete a wide range of the resettlement tasks including securing housing and paying the first month’s rent and a security deposit, raising money to support the family for six months or more,
enrolling the children in school, taking them to medical appointments, and helping the adults to find employment. At the IRC, co-sponsors are expected to help with integration, but the caseworkers still provide all of the core resettlement services. The Hearts and Homes Program developed in Westchester New York due to a similar outpouring of public interest in addressing the refugee crisis. Co-sponsors there work with Catholic Charities and are expected to provide community engagement support as well as financial support for the family, but they do not perform core services. It is unclear exactly how many resettlement agencies around the country have implemented some version of this model because they have largely done so independently of one another without formal oversight.

**Benefits of the Co-Sponsorship Program**

**Refugees:** While Naw Moo Eh Wah and her family were still in a refugee camp in Thailand, they learned that they were going to be resettled in California even though her parents and siblings were already living in North Carolina. It was her parent’s co-sponsor who ultimately contacted the resettlement office and requested that they be resettled close to their family. After a frightening flight across the ocean with three children under the age of five, their co-sponsor greeted them at the airport and brought them to their apartment, which was completely decorated for Christmas. Upon seeing their new home her husband exclaimed that they had found heaven. When Naw Moo’s husband had a car accident after three months of being in the United States, their sponsor helped them pay their rent until she found a job and he recovered because the reception and placement program support from their resettlement agency had expired. Having a sponsor made all the difference to her because, “When I need everything I call my sponsor directly and they help me directly. If I need help in nighttime, daytime, anytime they help me.” They maintained a less dependent relationship with their sponsor for four years. Most refugee
families that Naw Moo knows do not have sponsors and she said, “I saw many Karen families and they came and they don’t have sponsor and they have many problems. It was very hard for them…we don’t have food, we don’t have car, we don’t speak English and we need to go to the hospital to check the health. Everything is difficult.” She said there has not been any conflict between families that have co-sponsors and families who do not because she helped convince her co-sponsor to help sponsor other families. In Chicago, a local translator reported that refugees who are resettled at the agency with a co-sponsorship program are also much more satisfied than those resettled solely by the agency because they receive more financial support for a longer period of time.

**NGOs:** IRIS resettled 240 people in 2015, but they asked the government to double that number in 2016 because they had so many groups interested in co-sponsoring. Agencies that use co-sponsorship reported that they have been able to resettle more people because they have more support. An employee who works with the co-sponsorship program explained that refugees who were resettled by co-sponsors had higher employment rates than their clients resettled by caseworkers in New Haven and received efficient medical services just as quickly as they would have if they were resettled by the agency alone. This employee commented, “Our clients are almost overwhelmingly pleased with being with co-sponsors.” The three agencies that I spoke with have yet to conduct large-scale evaluations of the co-sponsorship programs because they have been implemented relatively recently, but they are in the process of collecting data. In addition to providing more comprehensive client services, the co-sponsorship model has helped all three programs expand their advocacy networks and improve community education about refugees. Interviewees from NGOS, national agencies, government affiliates, and academia all
commented that improving volunteer networks would strengthen the national resettlement program overall by creating strong advocates for refugee resettlement.

**National Agencies:** The USCRI office that I spoke with does not have a co-sponsorship program, but like most agencies, they rely on volunteers and partnerships with employers to help integrate new arrivals. The state director at this office explained the value of these partnerships by saying:

85%-95% of our job is direct service but the other part is awareness building and public education. I can't send people to talk to everyone in North Carolina but we give employers and people the opportunity to learn and then they become our advocates. When so much of an agency’s time is spent providing direct service, it can be difficult to build strong community networks. Volunteers can take on some of the advocacy responsibilities that agencies do not have the bandwidth for.

**Challenges of Co-Sponsorship Program**

**Refugees:** While Naw Moo said that there had not been any conflict between refugees who have co-sponsors and those who do not in Chapel Hill, a translator explained that in Chicago refugee population differential treatment had sometimes led to complaints about fairness. Families who do not have a co-sponsor have felt confused or resentful of other families or agencies that provide co-sponsors.

**NGOs:** Resettlement agencies were primarily concerned about the amount of resources, time and training that it would take to set up a co-sponsorship program. The housing coordinator explained simply, “you need to have money to make money.” IRIS was able to establish a full time position because they received so many private donations, but this is not a luxury that other agencies have. While Heartland Alliance would be interested in starting a co-sponsorship program, they do not currently have the staff or resources necessary to hire staff members for this project. Agencies that have co-sponsorship programs stressed that the program must be closely and expertly managed in order to be successful. An employee from IRIS explained:
We learned the hard way that we have to have much more oversight and more contact with these groups with refugees then we thought we would. So, we made that adjustment. Our case managers are visiting more often and they're visiting not just the refugees but also they're also visiting with the group. We have also learned that we can't just assume a group knows how to function.

An IRIS employee also explained that they learned that refugees need to be placed in what they call ‘sustainable communities,’ meaning that the refugees can afford to live in those communities after they stop receiving financial support from their co-sponsors. Employees from Catholic Charities and the Hearts and Homes program agreed that this program may not be successful in all places and that volunteers may be well meaning but require lots of training. The biggest difficulty for co-sponsors at IRIS, the IRC, and Hearts and Homes is learning to form boundaries and help the family to become self-sufficient. An employee at the IRC office in Oakland has observed that:

No matter how long you provide someone with financial support, the end of the financial support will lead to a shock. That shock is very difficult to clients so some people argue that it is better to not lead them to that dependency because then they can experience the shock really quickly rather than delaying it for 6 months or a year.

_Nationals:_ National agencies have more experience working with different communities across the country and an employee from USCCB explained that not all communities are going to get behind a program like this. However, he noted that the State Department has all of the power in the resettlement program, so if they decided that co-sponsorship programs were going to be a priority, agencies would fall in line. Not only that but, “you would see those changes manifest much more quickly than it would if it happened organically.” Without a mandate from the State Department, this USCCB employee does not believe that co-sponsorship programs will become common place because national agencies “work together in the Resettlement Council USA but it is mostly just us reacting to PRM, not coming up with innovative programing. That is not the way this program works.” While some agencies, like the IRC, may be interested in piloting this
model and have the funding to do that, not all the national agencies are likely to follow suit. According to an employee at IRIS, some national agencies have also pushed back on this model because they believe that incorporating private co-sponsors will weaken the role of national resettlement agencies.

**Government:** Although a PRM employee expressed support for co-sponsorship programs, she explained that PRM is not likely to mandate that all agencies institute a co-sponsorship program. In fact, she believes that allowing different agencies to implement policies differently and take control over some aspects of their service provision strengthens the program overall. She believes that because communities across the United States are not homogenous, it is important to allow programs to adapt to their unique environments. Additionally, a former PRM intern explained that new policy implementation is an arduous process and that PRM is a relatively small agency that is already highly strained in the current political atmosphere.

**Funding**

All of the interviewees believed that some version of the co-sponsorship program would improve resettlement for refugees themselves and for the program as a whole. The major source of disagreement was about who should be responsible for starting co-sponsorship programs and how the volunteer coordinator positions should be funded. This section will show how different categories of participants would like to shift the responsibility of funding the program onto another entity, leaving little room for consensus.

**NGOs:** The co-sponsorship program at IRIS was started because they received lots of publicity and donations after they accepted a family of Syrian refugees that Mike Pence turned away when he was the governor of Indiana. While not all agencies have received such a strong publicity boost, an IRIS employee believes that other agencies could use the donations that they have
received in response to the anti-refugee actions of the Trump Administration as seed money for this program. He also added, “I don’t necessarily see a problem with the RAs [National Refugee Agencies] promoting the program because they already have a network of affiliates. They would know how best to implement a co-sponsorship program. I can only speak for CWS and EMM, there haven’t been any issues.” He argued that the national agencies would benefit from being able to showcase that they have a program to pair some of their clients with groups of co-sponsors.

**National Agencies:** National agencies, on the other hand, strongly believed that the federal government should fund co-sponsorship programs. An employee at the IRC resettlement office explained that:

> I'm always going to say that there should be more support for the federal government to increase staffing for volunteer training. There is an unwritten expectation that you're going to use volunteers. I don't know a single agency that doesn't use volunteers to support them, but the federal government doesn't acknowledge that you're going to get x amount of dollars to support volunteer training. I think that could be something that would be really beneficial.

Another reason that national agencies argued that the policy should be directed and funded by the State Department is because some agencies are also more centralized than others. USCCB is very decentralized because it is comprised of different archdioceses of the Catholic Church around the country, and an independent bishop controls each diocese. An employee who works at the national office of USCCB explained that it would be more challenging for their national office to implement a co-sponsorship program because they do not directly control their affiliates the way that the IRC or other centralized resettlement agencies do. If the policy was implemented at the federal level, all of the affiliates would be required to abide by the policy.

**Government:** According to an employee at PRM, it is highly unlikely that the government will provide any additional funding for agencies to start co-sponsorship programs in the current
political climate. Instead, she argued that national agencies should use their resources to support their affiliates saying, “a local affiliate might not be able to gather resources, but that is what the national agencies are there for.”

**Academic:** The professor who participated in this study was not surprised to hear that there was great debate over funding and responsibility because she has encountered this in her own research as well:

> I came away from my dissertation asking what makes one agency more capable of capacity building than another. I haven’t found explanations for why one agency might be better equipped for capacity building than another other than the obvious resource story.

Even though the State Department argues that it would not be beneficial for them to mandate co-sponsorship programs or offer funding to implement them systemically, this researcher says this is up for debate because they are willing to mandate many other aspects of the resettlement program.

**Summary**

When I asked participants to evaluate the resettlement program overall, all of them expressed a variety of challenges that they face either as people trying to start their lives over in the U.S. or as people charged with facilitating that rocky transition. The main problems that need to be addressed are the lack of funding provided for newly arrived refugees and resettlement agencies and improving refugees’ integration experience. While some corporate sponsors, like Airbnb, have been able to form impactful partnerships with refugee agencies that address an identified need, interviews revealed that corporate resources are often misguided or difficult for smaller agencies to access. Corporate donations and in-kind support can often be one-time engagements rather than sustainable contributions that improve the quality of service that agencies can provide over time.
As a result, many agencies have taken advantage of the recent outpouring of public support for refugees and engaged private volunteers through co-sponsorship programs. These programs provide refugees with more resources upon arrival, support for a longer period of time, and improve community integration, but they also strengthen the refugee program by building up a network of political advocates who support resettlement. Co-sponsorship programs are widely accepted as beneficial, but many agencies do not have the funding to hire a volunteer coordinator to train and manage groups of co-sponsors. One of the main challenges of implementing co-sponsorship programs on a systemic level is determining whether the national resettlement agencies or the federal government should be responsible for funding and promoting these programs. The final chapter will conclude by presenting policy recommendations for how to address these challenges and create a resettlement program that is prepared to accept growing numbers of refugees as the political climate changes and the need for resettlement becomes even more pressing.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

The Trump Administration: A Changing Environment

Private sector engagement is part of a much larger debate about the refugee resettlement program in the United States and the refugee crisis internationally. This has had a profound impact on the research and the conclusions that I have drawn because many of the programs and solutions that participants discussed are no longer politically feasible. Until the refugee crisis in Syria began in 2015, the resettlement program in the United States intentionally kept a low profile and therefore remained relatively uncontroversial. The 2016 presidential election changed the political climate and made refugee resettlement a salient policy issue. A professor who studies refugee resettlement explained that shift saying, “This is not a project that has been threatened. It has been a bipartisan initiative that people feel strongly about and that is being called into question, the entire project.” President Trump framed refugees as a threat to the nation and has gone as far as to ban refugees from seven Arab and Muslim countries for portions of 2017. Participants from every interview category explained how the attack on resettlement has impacted their lives and their work. Refugees who have been waiting for years come to the United States are having to postpone their resettlement even further, agencies have had to lay off many employees because of budget cuts, and PRM is not able to plan ahead because they do not know how the political atmosphere will evolve.

Private sector engagement, specifically corporate engagement and co-sponsorship models, is a continually evolving field that will need strong leadership to direct the momentum and energy in a productive way. However, this type of leadership is not likely to occur under the current administration. It will be challenging to build new programs, form new partnerships and
grow existing ones in an unpredictable environment. Leaders at various resettlement agencies reported that they had not had a chance to think about new programing in the past year because they were trying to adapt to the chaotic and seemingly daily changes to the program. Also, there are now so few refugees arriving that a PRM employee was skeptical of whether any new pilot initiatives or programs would be feasible. In short, the immediate future of refugee resettlement is very unclear, but this research has shown that there are many things that can be done to improve the program in preparation for a future where refugees are once again welcome in the United States.

Policy Implications

The results of this study suggest that the co-sponsorship model is the most effective form of private sector engagement because it offers refugees more services for longer periods of time and helps to strengthen the program in the long term through engaging communities. In a different political environment, I believe that the model would be most successful if the State Department and PRM offered funding to agencies that want to implement this model. In addition to funding co-sponsorship coordinator positions, PRM should provide volunteer training manuals, orientation sessions, and workshops for agencies and community members to aid them in building these partnerships. National agencies should play a role by encouraging their affiliates to apply for this funding and facilitate the application process because it is in their best interest for their agencies to receive more government support. Based on the results of this study, it seems that allowing local agencies to opt into this program with support from both national resettlement agencies and the government is preferable to mandating that all agencies implement this model because not every agency or community is equally prepared to successfully support a co-sponsorship program. However, I learned that many agencies are interested in this model and
would be willing to implement it if they had additional funding to hire a co-sponsorship program coordinator and support building up the program.

There has not been a large scale evaluation of the various co-sponsorship models that exist; however, preliminary results from this study suggest that co-sponsors should be expected to support a family for at least a twelve-month period and they should be required to raise money before the family arrives to provide them with additional financial support based on the cost of living in their area. The model that I recommend would require co-sponsors to provide many of the core services such as taking clients to their doctor’s appointments, securing a social security card and form of ID for them, enrolling children in school, and helping the adults to find employment. This ensures that the co-sponsors have all the information about their clients and that there is not an information gap between them and the agency. The program coordinator should be responsible for completing home visits with the refugee family and having regular meetings with the group of volunteers to ensure that all three parties communicate effectively and that both refugees and volunteers receive support from the agency.

While this type of co-sponsorship model is preferable, it is not politically feasible at this time because PRM is not likely to provide any additional funding to the resettlement program in this tumultuous political environment. However, this period should not simply be seen as an unfortunate lull in the program, but instead as an opportunity for agencies to strengthen the program and ensure that the services that the resettlement program provides to refugees are truly providing them the tools that they need to succeed in the United States. The results of this study show that the best way to do this is to devote resources towards building co-sponsorship programs at local resettlement agencies. In order to lobby PRM to fund co-sponsorship programs in the long-term, national and local resettlement agencies should devote this time to developing
pilot models for co-sponsorship programs and gathering more data on the effectiveness of the program, focusing in particular on laying the groundwork for longitudinal research on long-term outcomes related to financial self-sufficiency. For example, research showing that refugees who are resettled with the support of a private co-sponsor are less dependent on federal and state assistance would be a compelling finding.

It is important that agencies communicate with one another and learn from those who have already been working with co-sponsors to establish strong pilot programs. IRIS has worked with many other agencies and has also shared their volunteer training materials with those who are interested in starting their own co-sponsorship programs. This type of collaboration will be useful because each agency should not have to build a new program entirely from scratch. Collaboration will also be important to systematically evaluate the effects of the co-sponsorship program.

In terms of funding, many national and local resettlement agencies have received a surge of donations and interest since the issue became controversial, so they could use these resources to provide seed money to hire co-sponsorship program directors. Community fundraising campaigns to fund volunteer coordinator positions also have the potential for success because there is a tangible outcome - creating a new program that meets a pressing need for greater refugee support services that will enable community members to engage with refugees in a meaningful way. Additionally, although this research project has shown that corporate engagement often does not provide sustainable and effective impact, agencies that have relationships with corporate partners could work to leverage those resources to pilot co-sponsorship models.
This study has used qualitative evidence and personal narratives to narrow what types of private sector engagement are most beneficial, but future research should evaluate the outcomes of co-sponsorship programs quantitatively. Since different agencies have implemented the co-sponsorship model differently and given co-sponsors varying levels of responsibility, it is important to conduct standardized evaluations of the program to determine which models are the most effective. In order to argue that PRM should offer funding for agencies that want to implement co-sponsorship programs, it will be important to provide both qualitative and quantitative evidence.

While it may seem that the resettlement program has ground to a halt, this study has shown that there is actually lots of exciting work happening around the country and that this period could be used to implement innovative private partnerships that will help the program grow and evolve in the future. Seen from this angle, the next few years are a critical opportunity for all refugee support agencies to lay the groundwork for improving the experience of refugees who come to this country in search of safety and security for themselves and their families.
References


International Monetary Fund. (2017). World Economic Outlook Database. IMF.


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## Appendix A: Interview Information

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**Appendix B: Codebook**

- Funding
  - Replacing Government Support
- Comparing Different Agencies
- Positive aspects of the program
- Challenges of the program
- Co-sponsorship model
  - Co-sponsorship logistics
  - Co-sponsorship benefits
  - Co-sponsorship challenges
  - Canadian Model
- Corporate Sector Engagement
  - Corporate Challenges
  - Corporate Benefits
- Faith Groups
- Refugee Experience
  - Challenges
- Political Feasibility
  - Administration Change
- Sustainability
- Questions
Appendix C: Interview Questionnaire

What do you see as some of the biggest failures of the refugee resettlement system? What about the successes?

What are the main barriers to expanding the number of refugees that are currently resettled, aside from the political atmosphere?

What are the most successful private-public partnerships that you have seen and which partnerships have been less successful?

What do you think sets Airbnb apart from other corporate partners and makes the Open Homes program more successful?

Do refugees who are resettled with co-sponsors get more resources than those resettled by the agency and does this create any conflict or dissatisfaction among the refugee community?

In addition to sustainability concerns, are people in the NGO sector concerned about the morality of corporate engagement?

What is the motive of private companies to become involved in refugee resettlement?

In what capacity does (insert name or organization) engage with private sector partners? What are your hopes for future engagement?

Appendix D: Timeline

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