

CITY OF BURLINGTON
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT - 2024 APPLICATION

Application must be no more than 12 total pages (including cover page) with 12-point font.

Refer to NOFA for required information for each question.

Project Name: Housing Assistance & Orientation Program for Refugee Families (HAOP)

Project Location / Address: Serving clients residing in Burlington /462 Hegeman Ave, Suite 101, Colchester, VT 05401

Applicant Organization / Agency: U.S. Committee for Refugees & Immigrants Vermont (USCRI Vermont)

Mailing Address: 462 Hegeman Ave, Suite 101, Colchester, VT 05541

Physical Address: 462 Hegeman Ave, Suite 101, Colchester, VT 05541

Contact: Amila Merdzanovic Title: Director Phone #:

Web Address: www.refugees.org/uscri-vermont/ E-mail:

EIN #: DUNS #:

CDBG Funding Request: \$30,000

Total Estimated Program/Project Cost: \$69,478

Choose one category from Development OR one category from Public Service:

Development: (choose one) Economic Development Affordable Housing
 Public Facilities/Improvements

Public Service: (choose one) Early Childhood Ed/Childcare Youth Services Health
 Economic Opportunity Housing and Homelessness

1. Type of Organization

Local Government

For-Profit Organization

Faith-Based Organization

Non-Profit Organization (please provide copy of your IRS 501(c)(3) tax exemption letter)

Institution of Higher Education

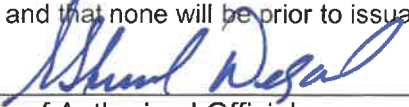
Certification

To the best of my knowledge and belief, data in this proposal are true and correct.

I have been duly authorized to apply for this funding on behalf of this agency.

I understand that this grant funding is conditioned upon compliance with federal CDBG regulations.

I further certify that no contracts have been awarded, funds committed or construction begun on the proposed program, and that none will be prior to issuance of a Release of Funds by the Program Administrator.



Signature of Authorized Official

Eskinder Negash

Name of Authorized Official

President & CEO

Title

1-12-23

Date

I. Demonstrated Need

1. What is the need/opportunity being addressed by this program/project and how does that contribute to CDBG's national objectives?

As housing vacancy rates in Burlington and surrounding communities continue to drop to historic lows, affordable housing has become nearly impossible to find for low-to-moderate income (LMI) refugee and Afghan arrivals and families in Burlington. With a vacancy rate hovering at only .4% in Chittenden County and median rent for a 2-bedroom unit starting at \$1,900 (*Overview of Housing Issues in Chittenden County, Vermont, CCRPC*), finding and securing safe, affordable housing for LMI and very low income refugee residents in the City of Burlington is incredibly challenging. The challenge is even more acute when factoring in the increased volume of refugee and Afghan families that arrived in the region over the last twelve months (250+) and the corresponding increase in housing need for them within the first year of their resettlement.

In addition to securing housing, new refugee and Afghan arrivals face a range of barriers that can adversely affect long-term housing retention and stability. One of the biggest challenges new arrivals face beyond securing an affordable apartment is orienting themselves to the complex new world of renting an apartment or a house, including how to understand lease agreements and deposits; coordinating utilities and paying bills; household safety and new appliances; and connecting with neighbors and the community as residents in their new neighborhood. Inability to communicate with landlords, unfamiliarity with U.S. housing laws, and financial instability can be significant barriers that add to housing challenges. Housing discrimination can also be barrier for foreign-born and people of color looking to rent, with 46% of those populations citing racial discrimination in housing a study by Vermont Legal Aid (*Rental Discrimination Report, Vermont Legal Aid*). Once new refugee arrivals secure housing, they still must gain the knowledge, skills, and tools they need to maintain housing stability, achieve self-sufficiency, and prevent displacement.

Adjusting to the immense changes and new cultural differences within just a few months can be overwhelming, and yet new arrivals must work to become quickly self-sufficient while striving to overcome numerous linguistic and cultural challenges that accompany adjustment to a new life. Refugee families typically arrive in Vermont with very little or no money or assets and are obligated to repay federal IOM travel loans (for their flight to the U.S.). Upon arrival, an overwhelming majority (90-95% - *USCRI Vermont*) meet the HUD definition of living at or below poverty level and yet are expected to find housing and achieve self-sufficiency within 3-8 months. Though some new arrivals may also be landlords and property owners in their home countries, the new system in the U.S. can prove challenging to navigate and understand, especially with language barriers. USCRI Vermont's expanded Housing Assistance and Orientation Program (HAOP) aligns with CDBG National Objectives by providing crucial housing services and customized, culturally and linguistically appropriate housing case management to LMI refugee arrivals and families living at or below a poverty-level to help them move out of poverty, prevent these populations from entering poverty, and meet basic housing needs of those we serve currently living in poverty.

II. Program/Project Design

1. Give us a short summary (2 sentences) that describe the program/project.

Offered as an extension of Reception and Placement case management services (which is limited to the first 30-90 upon arrival), USCRI Vermont's expanded HAOP supports the housing needs of Burlington's growing LMI refugee communities by providing better access to safe, quality affordable housing, and creating long term housing stability through housing literacy education and specialized support. The program provides a comprehensive set of culturally and linguistically appropriate information, guides, and resources to help LMI clients better understand basic housing related activities such as lease agreements, home maintenance and repair, general safety, cleaning and upkeep, how to operate appliances, recycling and waste management, paying bills, landlord relations, relevant housing regulations and laws, tenants' rights, and accessing the variety of rental and mortgage assistance programs available to those who qualify.

2. Explain why the program activities are the right strategies to use to achieve the intended outcomes. Why is the program designed the way it is?

As per federal mandate, USCRI Vermont is required to secure housing for new arrivals upon arrival, so educating and acclimating clients once they are in their new home requires intensive case management and specialized educational tools. Over its history of refugee resettlement in Burlington, surrounding towns and other parts of the state, USCRI Vermont housing staff have learned one of the most effective methods for helping new arrivals and refugee families navigate the complexities of securing affordable housing is by educating and preparing clients at the outset of the search and/or placement. Years of extensive housing placement and housing orientation experience have confirmed that transitioning into a new home is made easier with customized housing orientation materials in multiple languages and culturally appropriate content when used as a key part of housing case management. The specialized housing case management and enhanced housing orientations provided through our expanded HAOP are designed to equip every one of our client households with a better understanding of the housing search process, rental pricing, available subsidies, and how to best navigate the immense amount of information, regulations, and paperwork required as they overcome barriers to housing access and affordability. Case management may entail landlord mediation, application support for short-term financial assistance, community referrals for utility and heating assistance, monthly budgeting, recycling/composting laws, pest infestation/control, cleaning and maintenance, and black mold prevention. These are several of the common housing case management interventions and approaches that USCRI Vermont has found to help LMI refugee and Afghan clients find and retain their housing. Enhanced housing orientation also bolsters housing retention by providing additional knowledge on tenant rights and legal protections (illegal evictions, tenant lawsuits, etc), a stronger understanding of typical housing norms (quiet hours, regular cleaning, recycling and waste removal, etc.), and basic home safety. Orientations will also include conversations with clients about homebuying options and services when appropriate, giving clients a stronger understanding of sustainable housing stability.

3. How will this program/project contribute to the City's anti-poverty strategy? If this activity is to respond to COVID-19, please also describe how this activity prepares or responds to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In accordance with the City's anti-poverty strategy, the expanded HAOP will help LMI refugee and Afghan residents meet basic housing needs and stabilize their living situations by providing access to and retention of safe, decent, and healthy affordable housing. The HAOP will also help prevent vulnerable LMI residents from falling into long-term poverty by providing the necessary housing education, program assistance, and intensive case management supports that will help this

population escape poverty and/or avoid long-term poverty. The program also fills an important niche in regional homelessness prevention efforts by targeting limited English proficient populations with culturally responsive, linguistically accessible services. The HAOP aligns with a number of priorities highlighted in Burlington's *2018 Consolidated Plan*, including: Improving the quality of lives for low-and moderate-income residents; Assisting persons at risk of becoming homeless; increasing access to affordable, permanent housing in standard condition to low-income and moderate-income families, particularly to members of disadvantaged minorities; Empowerment and building self-sufficiency for low-income persons to reduce poverty; Increasing access to quality public and private facilities and services; and Promoting homeownership among income-qualified households.

4. How do you use community and/or participant input in planning the program design and activities?

The HAOP is being expanded and refined in response to discussions and input from clients, feedback from rental companies and property owners, and meetings with regional housing service agencies like Burlington Housing Authority, Chittenden Housing Corporation/Winooski Housing Authority, and the Champlain Housing Trust. We are looking to update multilingual learning resources used in the program like updated health and home safety guides, resource listings, updated tenant rights information, client progress and satisfaction surveys, and new housing assistance options that will better meet the housing resource needs of the clients we serve.

III. Proposed Outcomes

1. What are the intended outcomes for this project/program? How are people meant to be better off as a result of participating?

Positive outcomes for LMI refugee and Afghan clients and families seeking housing include: 1) securing appropriate and affordable housing within 30 days of arriving or after starting a housing search, 2) understanding and improving their knowledge of how to find and secure housing, 3) being able to maintain the unit, operate appliances, preserve safety and upkeep, and sustain a good relationship with the landlord/property manager. By providing housing support for these specific populations, our housing case management staff help clients to overcome cultural and community barriers to affordable housing, setting a strong foundation for refugee families to gain housing stability in the short term and paving the way for possible home ownership long term. The intensive housing case management will also help LMI refugee families at risk for homelessness and/or displacement to avoid homelessness, as well as address situations that place tenancy at-risk and ameliorating landlord-tenant conflicts. HAOP clients will gain access to the comprehensive support necessary to address other barriers to housing (such as employment), placing them on a track to achieve stability. USCRI Vermont believes that a multifaceted approach to housing will enable LMI refugee and Afghan clients to retain safe, sanitary, and affordable housing, make better informed housing related financial decisions, and access a wider range of housing options in the long-term. Programmatic successes will ultimately contribute toward greater economic stability and avoiding poverty in the long term.

2. List your goals/objectives, activities to implement and expected outcomes:

- Existing HAOP content will be revised, updated, and expanded to better serve clients and improve housing education and placement outcomes for clients receiving HAOP services.
- **96** clients (16 households) will receive HAOP services and assistance within their first 90 days of arrivals as a part of housing case management.
- **100%** of participants will receive intensive housing case management services, consequently increasing the number of clients who will increase housing literacy, secure appropriate housing placement, achieve housing stability, and develop realistic plans for long-term housing success.
- **100%** of participants will have access to housing resources beyond 90 days from their enrollment date.
- **90%** of participants will report an improvement in housing circumstances (e.g. housing representing a smaller share of their household budget, an improvement in housing conditions, better communication and positive relationships with the landlord) and better quality of life as a result of HAOP services.
- **100%** of participants eligible for community housing programs or require community housing support programs will be referred to the appropriate community resources through HAOP.
- Increase landlord/housing partner network by **10%**, increasing affordable and safe housing opportunities for HAOP clients.

IV. Impact / Evaluation

1. How do you assess how program participants are better off? Describe how you assess project/program outcomes; your description should include: what type of data, the method/tool for collecting the data, from whom you collect data, and when it is collected.

USCRI Vermont case managers will track HAOP outcomes to monitor overall program performance as well as incorporate program specific feedback to enhance its quality of service. As part of intake, case managers will collect the following data for all clients, including those receiving housing services: 1) client personal data; 2) clients' progress in meeting Family Self Sufficiency Plan and Individual Education Program goals (including housing need and status); 3) clients' economic self-sufficiency status; 4) Intensive Case Management notes. Each newly arriving refugee goes through several enrollment forms, including a Self-Sufficiency Plan that identifies housing needs and goals. This form will be expanded to create more detail about the short-term and long-term housing needs of each client, housing goals, potential barriers to achieving housing goals, and an action plan for obtaining housing goals. HAOP will use the Reception and Placement program's 90-day period report to document housing services and means of income within the first 90 days. This report is aggregated monthly and will help measure the number of clients successfully housed and obtaining income.

Overall, client pre-placement outcomes will be determined by assessing current housing status and progress in securing appropriate housing and housing resources offered through HAOP and/or referral services. Post-placement outcomes will be measured by evaluating household budgets (i.e. income sufficiently exceeds expenses in a budget that covers all required household expenses); tracking the rate at which families maintain their housing without emergency interventions; and the number and rate households report an increase in housing literacy. Case managers will conduct a housing safety checklist of each housing placement and will solicit periodic home assessments via phone, online video calls, or email which capture qualitative feedback from clients on any housing concerns, housing questions, and general levels of housing satisfaction. Additional tools such as the Household Budget Form and Orientation Assessments

are used to measure client progress and knowledge gained as a result of services. HAOP case managers will provide the Director with internal reports on client progress weekly and as needed. USCRI monitors program quality through weekly Direct Service meetings and makes program policy and procedural adjustments on an ongoing basis. Monthly and annual client outcome and status reports are assembled in keeping with city, state, and federal regulations and requirements. A culturally- and linguistically-appropriate survey assessment will allow clients to reflect on the goals and needs they originally identified and assess the quality and degree of services provided. The client satisfaction assessment will include both quantitative and qualitative questions and be available for self-reporting with the use of an interpreter when needed. Assessments are anonymized and will not include any personally identifying data (such as name or address of client) to ensure client confidentiality. In this way, clients may be more comfortable to respond transparently on the survey.

- 2. How successful has the project/program been during the most recent reporting year for your CDBG project? Report the number of beneficiaries you intended to serve with which activities (as noted in your last Attachment A) and your final outcomes (as noted on your Attachment C) from June 2023 (or June 2022). For non-CDBG participants – report on your achievements from the previous year.**

Amidst incredibly difficult housing availability and the end of the VRAP program in the state, USCRI Vermont still successfully placed 8 households (approximately 40 individuals) in apartments in 2023 in Burlington through its existing housing case management services. A large percentage of our success is due to the growing partnerships we have with landlords and property management companies and tapping USCRI Vermont's Family Friends and expanding volunteer networks.

V. Experience / Organizational Capacity

- 1. What is your agency's mission, and how do the activities fit with your mission?**

Founded in 1980, USCRI Vermont (formally the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program) brings hope and opportunity to the lives of refugees and immigrants through comprehensive, integrated, and linguistically and culturally appropriate services. Over the last 44 years, USCRI Vermont has helped thousands of newly arrived refugees, Afghans, and New Americans and other eligible populations from over 35 countries secure safe and affordable housing, adjust to new cultural and social norms, gain employment opportunities, learn English, and access other community services. Securing affordable housing for new arrivals within the first few weeks is one of our most critical services, and USCRI Vermont is well-positioned to enhance and expand housing services to more adequately support both the initial and long-term housing needs of refugees. Over the last decade, USCRI Vermont has helped over 3,700 refugee and immigrant families find housing and achieve economic and social self-sufficiency in Chittenden County and throughout the state.

- 2. Explain how your agency has the capacity to carry out the proposed activity:**

Through our comprehensive programs, USCRI Vermont has resettled and housed over 8,800 refugees from more than 35 countries of origin over the last 43 years in Burlington, Winooski, Chittenden, Franklin, Washington, and Rutland Counties, and throughout the state. USCRI housing staff (Housing Coordinator, Housing Case Manager) are comprised of former refugees from these same communities and share similar experiences that make them particularly attuned to

intercultural dynamics. In addition to municipal grants, USCRI has successfully managed dozens of federal and state grants awarded by the Department of State, Bureau for Populations Refugees and Migration, Agency for Children and Families, State Refugee Office, and VT Department of Health.

All case management staff are credentialed and have decades of professional experience providing customized, culturally, and linguistically appropriate services. Over the last decade, USCRI Vermont has established solid relationships with regional landlords and property management companies who work with staff to ensure affordable and accessible housing for individuals with special considerations or mobility issues.

3. What steps has your organization/board taken in the past year to address racial equity, inclusion, and belonging internally? What new commitments have been made to address racial equity, inclusion, and belonging internally in the year ahead?

USCRI Vermont adopted a DEI policy and actively applies it to all activities and work that provide the foundation of our programs and services. As a well-known and trusted community service provider for underserved communities, USCRI has demonstrated experience in the delivery of culturally and linguistically appropriate, and trauma informed services to vulnerable populations to promote their safety, security and healing. This includes program design that accounts for cultural sensitivities; ensures that clients' interpretation and translation needs are met through the provision of either in-person or telephonic interpretation; and cultivates a safe environment for all clients without regard to race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, domestic partnership status, marital status, physical or mental disability, AIDS/HIV status, age, political affiliation, genetic information, veteran status or any other characteristic protected by applicable law.

4. Have you received Federal or State grant funds in the past three years? Yes No

5. Were the activities funded by these sources successfully completed? Yes No
If No, please explain:

VI. Proposed Low & Moderate Income Beneficiaries

1. Will the program solely serve a specific group of people? If so, check ONE below:

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Abused Children | <input type="checkbox"/> Elderly (62 years +) | <input type="checkbox"/> People with AIDS |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Battered Spouses | <input type="checkbox"/> Homeless Persons | <input type="checkbox"/> Illiterate Adults |
| <input type="checkbox"/> People with Severe Disabilities | | |

If this activity/project is designed to serve the population experiencing homelessness through housing or supportive services, is your organization or entity partnered with the Chittenden County Continuum of Care and participating in the Coordinated Entry system for the project:

- Yes No Not applicable to activity/project

2. a. For your proposed project, please estimate how the Burlington residents will break out into the following income categories during the total grant period. Use the Income Table at <https://www.burlingtonvt.gov/CEDO/2023-HUD-Income-Limits>

Service / Activity	Unduplicated Total # of Burlington HH / Persons to be Served	# Extremely Low-Income (30% median)	# Very Low-Income (50% median)	# Low-Income (80% median)	# Above Income Limits (above 80% median)
HAOP Intensive Case Management; resource sharing; placement; referrals; inspections; on-site support	96	70	26	0	0

b. All CDBG grantees serving limited clientele will be required to use CEDO’s CDBG Beneficiary Self-Certification form to collect beneficiary data including race, ethnicity, annual income, and family size. Is your organization willing and prepared to add this documentation to the intake process for your CDBG funded program by July 1, 2024?

Yes NO Not Serving Limited Clientele

VII. Commitment to Equity, Inclusion and Belonging

1. Who is the project/program designed to benefit? Describe the project/program’s target population, citing (if relevant) specific age, gender, income, community/location, race or ethnicity, or other characteristic of the people this program is intended to serve. How do you select and reach your target population?

The program will serve up to 96 LMI and very low-income refugee and Afghan new arrivals and families resettling in Burlington from July 2024 to June 2025. Of the total client number receiving HAOP services, approximately 90% are very low income and at or below the poverty level. Based on our intake data, USCRI Vermont estimates approximately 90-95% of new refugee arrivals are very low income and at risk of falling into poverty within the first year of their residency. Nearly all arrive after having spent years living in refugee camps overseas. Approximately half of the families we serve through housing case management are larger, multigenerational families of five or more. With household income already at or below the federal poverty line, these trends put additional budgetary strain on household providers and increase the need for safe and affordable housing able to accommodate large, multigenerational families. Over the last seven years, new arrivals have come from Afghanistan, Bhutan, Burma, Burundi, Colombia, Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Haiti, Iraq, Nepal, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, Venezuela, and Yemen. 53% of the clients we serve are female and 47% are male.

Our target population is assigned to USCRI Vermont and arrives initially through the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. USCRI has a mandated 90-day window to help arrivals secure affordable housing, employment, educational opportunities, get enrolled in English Language Learning classes, open bank accounts, acclimate to their new home, and begin to achieve self-sufficiency over their first year of residency. USCRI Vermont works with new arrivals over the first year to access local, state, and federal resources and services and place refugee arrivals in education, language skills, and job training programs through its resettlement programs.

2. Describe the steps you take to ensure the project/program is accessible, inclusive, addressing racially equity, and culturally appropriate for the target population.

USCRI Vermont’s staff members, many of whom are former refugees and Afghans from the populations being served, have extensive experience providing linguistically accessible and culturally appropriate services to the target population. Staff members utilize interpretation and translation services and adapt services, educational materials, and other information to meet the needs of specific populations. USCRI Vermont also conducts periodic client surveys and focus groups to assess evolving client needs, receive feedback regarding services, and to ensure inclusion, equity, and accessibility of programs.

VIII. Budget / Financial Feasibility

1. Budget Narrative: Provide a clear description of what you will do with CDBG’s investment in the project/program. How will you spend the money? Give details.

CDBG funds will be utilized to meet partial salary for a HAOP Housing Case Manager to provide intensive case management from July 2024 to June 2025. This staff person will be responsible for coordinating and facilitating HAOP activities, including housing case management, enhanced housing orientation, housing ESP, landlord outreach, emergency and temporary outreach support, referrals, and housing placement. Additional expenses include interpretation, program supplies, printing, telephone, and travel.

2. If you plan to pay for staff with CDBG funding, describe what they do in relation to the specific service(s) / activity(ies) in your Project/Program Design.

a.

Specific Service / Activity	Position/Title	Work Related to CDBG-Funded Activity	# of Hours per Week spent on this Specific Service / Activity	% of Hours per Week spent on this Specific Service / Activity to be paid with CDBG
Intensive case management, resource sharing; placement; referrals; inspections; on-site support.	Housing Case Manager	Housing assistance	40	30%
Interpretation	Interpreter	Interpretation	5	100%

b. All CDBG grantees that use CDBG funds for salaries must submit timesheets that capture total time and effort of staff members funded with CDBG. These timesheets must record hours worked on CDBG-funded programs, hours worked on non-CDBG funded programs and the corresponding program name/funding source(s). Timecards must include a narrative for all CDBG and non-CDBG funded activities, and must be signed by the employee and supervisor. Does your organization have the ability to implement a timekeeping system for CDBG funded staff that meets these requirements by July 1, 2024? Yes No Not funding salaries

3. Program/Project Budget

Line Item	CDBG Funds	Other	Total
Housing Case Manager salary (.375 FTE)	\$15,000	\$25,000	\$40,000
Interpreters – On Call	\$3,642	\$0	\$3,642
Fringe Benefits (24.4%)	\$4,548	\$6,100	\$10,648

Travel	\$850	\$500	\$1,350
Printing	\$570	\$600	\$1,170
Supplies & Materials	\$780	\$1,200	\$1,980
Indirect (18.2%)	\$4,620	\$6,078	\$10,698
Total	\$30,000	\$39,478	\$69,478

4. Funding Sources

	Program/Project		Agency	
	Current	Projected	Current	Projected
CDBG	\$ 0	\$ 30,000	\$ N/A	\$ N/A
State (specify) VT AHS State Refugee Coordinator	30,000	0	N/A	N/A
Federal (specify)	0	0	N/A	N/A
United Way	0	0	N/A	N/A
Private (specify)	0	0	N/A	N/A
Program Income (USCRI HQ)	9,478	0	N/A	N/A
Other (specify)	0	0	N/A	N/A
Total	\$ 39,478	\$ 30,000	\$	\$

5. Of the total program/project cost, what percentage will be financed with CDBG?

$$\frac{\$30,000}{\$69,478} = 43\%$$

CDBG Funding Total Program/Project Costs Percentage

6. Of the total program/project cost, what would be the total cost per person?

$$\frac{\$69,478}{96} = \$723$$

Total Program/Project Cost # Total Proposed Beneficiaries Cost Per Person

$$\frac{\$30,000}{96} = \$312$$

Total Amount of CDBG Funding # Total Proposed CDBG Beneficiaries Cost Per Person CDBG Investment

7. Why should CDBG resources be used for this project?

USCRI Vermont will need funding beginning in summer 2024 to continue to expand the HAOP to respond to help our most vulnerable clients find and sustain affordable housing. Over the next 12 months we anticipate that approximately 96 new arrivals (16 households) will be looking to resettle in Burlington as USCRI Vermont continues to grow our HAOP and housing case management services and capacity. USCRI Vermont will need to secure salary support for a position that will be serving dozens of new clients over a condensed timeline, and partial salary support is a cost category that most traditional funding sources we partner with like private foundations, individual donors, and targeted federal funds are unable to accommodate in the immediate term.

8. Describe your use of community resources, including volunteers. Include any resources not listed in your budget. Will CDBG be used to leverage other resources?

USCRI Vermont actively partners with and shares resources with the Vermont Language Justice Project, Vermont Department of Health, Agency of Human Services/Office of the State Refugee Coordinator, Ethiopian Community Development Corporation, Association of Africans Living in Vermont (AALV), Vermont Afghan Alliance, Burlington Housing Authority (BHA), Champlain Housing Trust (CHT), Chittenden Housing Corporation, Winooski Housing Authority, and multiple faith-based organizations throughout the county for translated outreach, client supports, specialized referral services, information sharing, funding opportunities, and network resources. Under the umbrella of USCRI Vermont's larger Community Partnership Program, the expanded HAOP utilizes vetted and qualified USCRI Vermont volunteers to serve as host families and Family Friends to help conduct residential visits and provide guidance and informal training on home safety, how to operate and maintain household appliances, cleaning assistance, inspections, repairs, and general family support. CDBG grant support would be leveraged to find the balance of funding for salary costs of the position and HAOP administration and supplies beyond June 2025.

IX. Collaboration/Efficiency

1. Give 1 or 2 examples of key successful collaboration(s) between your program/project and another agency/program/group to address the needs of the people you serve.

The Vermont Housing Improvement Program (VHIP) is managed by CHT in our region and provides funding for landlords to refurbish units in return to renting to clients of Coordinated Entry Program (unhoused) and refugee resettlement clients. We are just beginning to see positive apartment placement results over the last few months. USCRI case managers work closely with BHA and CHT to assist newly-arriving refugees with applying for subsidized housing and other housing opportunities. These partnerships streamline housing support possible across community providers and increase client access to community resources. These partnerships are critical safety nets for clients requiring emergency shelter or transitional housing. Beyond housing, USCRI Vermont has an extensive history of partnering with a number of state agencies and regional nonprofits such as AALV, King Street Center, Howard Center, Spectrum Youth Services and others as well as the cities of Burlington, Winooski, Rutland, and Montpelier.

2. Do identical or similar community programs exist? How does this program complement or collaborate rather than duplicate services? Why is this program unique?

There are other housing assistance programs in Burlington and the surrounding region, but only USCRI Vermont offers culturally and linguistically appropriate intensive housing case management in-house to newly arriving LMI refugee families in Burlington. CVOEO's Community Action Housing Assistance Program provides information and referrals to help secure affordable housing. Vermont Legal Aid provides tenants' rights information and eviction/displacement legal assistance. CHT has Homebuyer Education and Homeowner Services. USCRI Vermont actively partners with these organizations to facilitate appropriate referrals and coordinate housing placement for LMI refugee and Afghan arrivals.

3. Provide 1 example of how your agency has become more efficient in achieving your outcomes or managing your project/program.

Like nearly all other service agencies and providers, the COVID pandemic forced USCRI to move many of our client interactions and formerly in-person case management services online from 2020-22, yet the change has also allowed us to streamline and increase efficiencies with most elements of our program delivery. The new reality accelerated the development of our new online case management tools and transformed our short term programming focus into one directed at expanding access to online resources for our clients and distributing laptops to interested clients.

X. Sustainability

1. How will this project have a long-term benefit to the City of Burlington? If this program/project ends, how will that benefit continue?

Combined with our existing case management services, the HAOP will help reduce the immediate and long term risk of homelessness, housing insecurity, and falling into poverty among some of the most vulnerable populations in Burlington. Services offered through the HAOP provide critical assistance and information that will help LMI refugee families secure affordable housing and maintain housing stability while working to achieve and sustain economic self-sufficiency. LMI beneficiaries will continue to benefit through continued use of the education, information, skills, and experience gained from the HAOP. LMI families will be better able to navigate the challenges of tenancy and maintaining economic and housing stability.

2. CDBG funding is intended for new or expanded services. If CDBG funding ends, will the project be able to continue?

Yes, USCRI will need to provide HAOP services to a growing number of clients over the next year and beyond. Longer term funding opportunities managed through the state and possibly new federal sources of funding to support housing access and placement for LMI refugee populations might be available to support HAOP into 2025.

3. How will you prioritize the proposed project activities if you do not receive the full amount requested?

If the full amount requested is not received, USCRI Vermont will need to scale back the housing case management staffing FTEs, leading to a reduction in the number of LMI families being served. The HAOP will prioritize only those families that are at the most risk of homelessness or with the greatest barriers to achieving housing stability.