OVERVIEW: The Sponsor Circle Program for Afghans (SCP) is an emergency resettlement initiative made possible through a Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of State and the Community Sponsorship Hub (CSH), a project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, Inc. The program was established to augment the United States’ capacity to welcome and resettle Afghan newcomers through the use of community sponsorship, a model of resettlement where groups of individuals commit to directly providing resettlement services.

The SCP operates separately from and in parallel to the Afghan Placement and Assistance Program (APA) implemented through the State Department’s non-profit resettlement agency partners. The SCP enables groups of individuals in local communities to form certified sponsor circles to provide initial resettlement services to Afghans. CSH oversees the application process for sponsor circles through which sponsor circles are vetted, certified, and matched with Afghans who opt into the program through a process of informed consent. CSH works with a broad coalition to implement the program, including Airbnb.org, Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services (IRIS), International Rescue Committee (IRC), RefugePoint, and Welcome.US.

The application portal for sponsor circles launched on October 25, 2021, with applications being accepted and reviewed by CSH on a rolling basis. As of November 2021, the process of facilitating matches between certified sponsor circles and Afghan newcomers is being initially piloted at one Safe Haven with plans to make the program available to additional Safe Havens in the coming weeks as sponsor circles are certified and ready to be matched with cases.

For Additional Information:
- State Department Press Statement on Launch of Program (10/25/21)
- Sponsor Circle Program Website (www.sponsorcircles.org)

1) SPONSOR CIRCLES – APPLICATION AND CERTIFICATION PROCESS

Eligibility Criteria
CSH has established the following eligibility criteria for sponsor circles who are interested in supporting Afghans:

- Groups of at least five individuals over the age of 18 who reside in the same local community will be eligible to form a sponsor circle. All group members must complete a required background check.
- Sponsor circles must demonstrate that they have fundraised 60% of the financial requirement of $2,275 per Afghan newcomer that they will support. (Note that $2,275 mirrors the maximum amount of funding provided through APA.) These funds are to be spent on behalf of Afghans to provide for their initial housing and other basic needs.
Sponsor Circles

- Sponsor circles must pass knowledge assessments to demonstrate completion of a required online course which provides information on expected roles/responsibilities of sponsor circles, how to prepare/organize for supporting Afghan newcomers, key considerations for sponsorship (e.g., expectations, power, culture, religion, trauma, and privacy), and how to navigate challenges.
- Sponsor circles are required to submit a “welcome plan” through which they pledge and detail how they plan to provide core initial resettlement services to Afghan newcomers for at least the first 90 days after newcomers arrive in a local community. The welcome plan also requires sponsor circles to consider how they will facilitate cultural connections (e.g., connections to the Afghan diaspora and places of worship).

Application Process
Groups interested in serving as certified sponsor circles may submit applications at www.sponsorcircles.org. CSH (or its accredited umbrella organizations, see further information below) will review applications to vet and certify sponsor circles based on the above eligibility criteria. CSH estimates that it will take an average of approximately 1-2 weeks to review a sponsor circle application and certify the sponsor circle. However, this application review period will depend on the quality and number of applications received.

Sponsor Circle Responsibilities
Certified sponsor circles commit to providing core resettlement support services to Afghan newcomers for a minimum of 90 days after Afghans arrive in a local community, the maximum duration of the APA program. Sponsor circles are required to provide services mirroring those provided by resettlement agencies through the APA, including such things as:
- Securing of initial housing;
- Provision of furnishings and household items;
- Connection to legal assistance;
- Securing of available public benefits;
- Assistance with access to health services;
- Enrollment to English language training;
- Help in searching for jobs;
- Assistance in completing necessary paperwork; and
- Providing community orientation, friendship, and moral support

Option to be Matched with Identified Afghan Newcomer
As part of the application, sponsor circles have the option of identifying a specific Afghan family with whom they wish to be matched. This is intended to facilitate the ability of sponsor circles to provide support to families with whom they already have a connection. As part of the application process, sponsor circles identifying a specific family are asked if they would be willing to be matched with a different individual/family, if for some reason they cannot be matched with the family originally identified.
Partners at Safe Havens may recommend Afghan guests who might be appropriate for matching through the SCP. These guests might include those who have strong US ties who have indicated interest in reuniting with the guest and have communicated an ability to support them. Recommendations should be made to available RefugePoint staff at Safe Havens. As appropriate, outreach to the US tie or other potential sponsor will be made.

2) PROCESS AT SAFE HAVENS – INFORMED CONSENT AND ASSURANCE

**Informed Consent**
Afghan guests at Safe Havens have the opportunity to opt into the program through a process of informed consent, a process currently being piloted at one of the Safe Havens. This includes case counseling, during which time guests learn about the SCP and how it differs from APA. Afghan guests who opt into SCP sign an informed consent form, indicating their choice to receive initial resettlement services from the certified sponsor circle with which they have been matched and not to access APA services offered by resettlement agencies. As part of this process, they also consent to sharing information about themselves, members of their case, and their US tie(s) with SCP partner organizations and sponsor circles to support these organizations and circles in preparing for their arrival.

**Distinction between SCP and APA**
The key difference between SCP and APA is the actor providing initial resettlement services to Afghan newcomers. Afghan guests being served through SCP are choosing to receive initial resettlement services for their first 90 days in a local community from a certified sponsor circle, as opposed to a resettlement agency. Aside from this, Afghan newcomers served through the SCP remain eligible for all other federal, state, and local benefits and services to which they are entitled, including those offered by resettlement agencies.

**Assurance Process**
Cases of Afghan guests that are matched with certified sponsor circles will be marked in Hummingbird as assured to SCP (in place of a resettlement agency) as part of the standard assurance process.

**Travel**
Travel for Afghan guests who are assured to SCP will be handled by IOM in the same way as travel for Afghan guests who are assured to resettlement agencies.

3) SPONSORSHIP PERIOD – OVERSIGHT AND SUPPORT

**Sponsor Circle Oversight**
Each Afghan newcomer opting into SCP will be provided the contact information of an individual to whom they can report concerns during the period that they are supported by a sponsor circle. In addition to this, sponsor circles are required to submit 30- and 90-day reports to ensure they are delivering services as pledged. In the unlikely event of a sponsorship breakdown, CSH will
coordinate with the State Department to identify a resettlement agency willing to assume responsibility for service provision through APA.

**Sponsor Circle Resources**
Certified sponsor circles have access to several resources including Airbnb.org housing credits and ongoing guidance from CSH-accredited non-profit umbrella organizations. Umbrella organizations provide additional support to sponsor circles, including assisting sponsor circles in addressing specific questions (e.g., how to navigate public benefits) or challenges that arise during the sponsorship period.

**Coordination with State Refugee Coordinators and State Refugee Health Coordinators**
CSH continues to consult with State Refugee Coordinators and State Refugee Health Coordinators about how best to ensure that Afghan newcomers access the public benefits and services, inclusive of health services, for which they are eligible. As Afghans opting into the SCP are assured in Hummingbird, reports issued by the State Department regarding the destinations of Afghan newcomers will include those opting into SCP.

### 4) PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

**Program Coalition**
The SCP is made possible by a growing coalition of organizations including Airbnb.org, CSH IRC, IRIS, RefugePoint, and Welcome.US. It is also supported by accredited sponsor circle umbrella (SCU) organizations. These SCUs recruit, vet, certify, support, and oversee the sponsor circles assigned to them. Organizations interested in serving as accredited SCUs must complete a CSH-led training, submit an application, and enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with CSH and Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, Inc.

**Role of State Department**
The State Department has signed a Memorandum of Understanding to enter into a public-private partnership with CSH, as a sponsored project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, Inc., to collaborate on SCP and to provide guidance as needed.