



PROMISING PRACTICE: DELIVERING GENDER-SEGREGATED CULTURAL ORIENTATION SESSIONS

OVERVIEW

Cultural Orientation (CO) is required for all refugee adults. However, CO providers report that multiple factors contribute to lower levels of participation and engagement in CO by women. These factors include language barriers and cultural norms, issues around childcare and transportation, as well as safety and protection concerns. Therefore, in order for CO providers to effectively implement and deliver CO, they must balance these challenges and needs with available resources and time.

One strategy CO providers have used to engage women is gender-segregated CO sessions. The practice of gender-segregated sessions allows CO providers to address common barriers that prevent women from attending or participating in CO. Additionally, gender-segregated sessions promote positive learning environments where women can obtain the same CO content customized to their needs. Gender-segregated CO sessions usually address one or more of the following CO topics: health, U.S. laws, budgeting and personal finance, and education. One documented benefit of segregated sessions is that they promote a sense of community for the attending women.

Gender-segregated education is not a new phenomenon, and can be found in K-12 education around the world. Yet, separating learners by gender has demonstrated mixed results in achieving higher levels of learning. Despite such debate, evidence does show that gender impacts learning. Therefore, while gender-segregated CO sessions potentially offer opportunities to engage women, CO providers will need to assess when it may be most beneficial.

APPLICATION

GOAL OF PROMISING PRACTICE

By conducting gender-segregated CO sessions you will be able to:

- Improve attendance of women in CO, thereby ensuring all adult refugees receive CO
- Enhance learning and engagement by customizing CO delivery to participant needs and promising student-centered learning principles
- Create a positive learning environment to facilitate participation and establish a stronger sense of community

WHAT TO CONSIDER BEFORE YOU BEGIN



WHO IS INVOLVED

In the course of planning and delivering gender-segregated CO, you will want to engage various staff in your organization starting with **directors and/or supervisors** to ensure support and to establish a realistic picture of resources available for implementation. Additionally, CO providers will engage with **staff and volunteers**, potentially including individuals that come from the same community as the target populations. Working with staff and volunteers can help CO providers better understand client needs and motivations, assist with logistics, and provide guidance on how to best message and communicate with participants. In developing gender-segregated CO sessions, as with all CO sessions, you need to utilize properly trained and skilled **interpreters**. For some topics it may be appropriate to engage **community guests** with specific expertise.



MATERIALS AND RESOURCES NEEDED

In conducting gender-segregated CO sessions, you will want to reassess existing CO materials and resources. Part of updating these resources is considering how gender equality is reflected in materials. For example, you may want to ensure that there is a balance of images that feature both males and females. Updates to CO materials may also include modifying activities to better meet the needs of the individuals in the CO session.

PRACTICE IN ACTION

Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services in New Haven, Connecticut delivers CO sessions where both males and females are together, but separate by gender for specific activities that may be more sensitive, especially in the areas of U.S. laws and health. They report strong attendance of both males and females in CO, which is partially attributed to ensuring available resources for transportation and childcare for all participants.



TIMING

In terms of preparing and implementing this promising practice, you will want to consider the time involved in engaging the various staff members; recruiting and training volunteers, interns, and interpreters; and updating CO materials and resources. Depending on the structure of the gender-segregated CO sessions, additional time may be needed for coordination and logistics. For example, providing transportation for participants will require more time to organize than if participants arrive to the CO sessions independently. Moreover, engaging community guests may also require additional time.

For more details on how to engage community guests, see **CORE's Promising Practice: Including Guests from the Community**.

STEP BY STEP GUIDE

1

ASSESS NEED

Identify the current issues with engagement, retention, and/or participation among women during your CO sessions. Do you need to offer gender-segregated CO sessions for a specific population or a specific topic such as health or U.S. laws? In some cases, providing gender-segregated CO sessions may not be appropriate for your context. However, you may still want to consider other techniques to ensure gender equality.

If you are considering gender-segregated CO sessions for a specific population, conduct a needs assessment with the group directly. This can be achieved through questionnaires, interviews, or focus group discussions. This will help identify barriers that are preventing participation in CO as well as specific topics of interest, which can be used to inform the structure of the CO sessions and materials. You may also discover needs that are outside the scope of CO, and in these instances, engaging with organizational leadership is important to ensure these needs are conveyed.

If providing gender-segregated CO sessions by topic, you should determine how the sessions will be different for men and women, while ensuring that all participants receive the necessary information in accordance with CO Objectives and Indicators.

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ESTABLISH GOALS

Based on the needs assessment and working with leadership and other relevant staff members, you will want to clearly identify the goals of the gender-segregated CO sessions. For example, will the gender-segregated CO sessions aim to increase attendance of a specific population? Some organizations have also identified gender-segregated CO sessions as an opportunity to address issues around community integration and accessing services. These goals can help inform the additional steps identified below, including determining structure, updating materials, and conducting monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of the gender-segregated CO sessions.

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DETERMINE STRUCTURE

The structure of a gender-segregated CO session refers to the schedule and length of the session, as well as how the content will be covered. CO programs should be aligned with the CO Objectives & Indicators. However, the content may be delivered in various ways. Organizations may elect to change the schedule or hours needed to deliver CO in order to accommodate a gender-segregated session. You may also need to consider available resources and time needed to coordinate logistics. You may determine that attendance would improve if transportation is provided to and from the session, but this may not be feasible.



PRACTICE IN ACTION

Kentucky Refugee Ministries in Louisville provides different CO programs to meet the diverse needs of the refugees they serve. Through a family center, they are able to provide childcare for parents with small children so that all parents can participate in ESL and CO classes. ESL and CO classes meet in mixed-gender groups, with gender-segregated sessions on sensitive health topics allowing both men and women access to specialized information.

World Relief in Seattle, Washington and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Oakland, California both deliver gender-segregated CO for Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders. Drawing on needs assessments, they both determined it would be necessary to coordinate transportation to and from a single-day CO session. These women-only classes are generally smaller in size (fewer than 10 participants), and include provision of lunch or tea and snacks. Smaller class sizes make coordination of transportation more manageable; and when combined with hospitality, it helps promote a safe and positive learning environment, contributing to improved learning during CO.

STEP BY STEP GUIDE CONTINUED

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DEVELOP WHOLE COMMUNITY SUPPORT

In order for the implementation of gender-segregated CO sessions to be successful, you may need to cultivate community support. This may include engaging with representatives from the populations receiving CO, or conducting outreach with community members that can serve as guests in the classroom. The manner in which you develop community support will be driven by the needs assessment, the goals, and the structure you have put in place during the first three steps. For example, if your organization is going to provide gender-segregated CO sessions for a specific population, you may need to speak to leaders in that community and follow particular cultural norms. When speaking with community leaders you will need to be mindful of speaking to both males and females. Developing community support can help establish more credibility and better understand the needs of the target populations served.

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UPDATE MATERIALS

As referenced in the Materials and Resources section, you will need to assess and update CO materials and resources as necessary. These updates should draw on information collected during the needs assessment, be grounded in the goals and structure of CO, and include insights based on community engagement. Updates to materials may include revising documents to include more images with less text, translating new materials, or identifying community guests and coaching them on how to best engage with participants. It may also require reviewing existing lesson plans and adapting activities. For example, if you are delivering gender-segregated CO sessions on health, you may identify a community guest that has specific expertise and work with them to ensure an interactive session that establishes a comfortable environment.

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DELIVER CO

As with any CO session, you must be observant and adapt to the needs of the participants. Promote student-centered learning, requiring active participation and engagement through activities and discussion. During the CO session, an interpreter may be necessary. The use of a skilled and adequately prepared interpreter can positively influence the outcomes of the session. For example, if there is technical vocabulary and/or cultural sensitivity concerns, ensure that the interpreter is comfortable interpreting as required.

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REFLECT AND ADJUST

Monitoring and evaluating CO sessions, including looking at attendance and results of assessments provided to participants, should be a standard practice of CO providers to ensure successful delivery of CO. After implementing gender-segregated CO session(s), build in time to reflect on the outcomes, collect feedback from the participants, and determine any steps that may be necessary to improve future sessions or ensure that the goals of the gender-segregated sessions are met. Reflection may result in developing additional gender-segregated sessions on relevant topics, or it may require further engagement with organizational leadership around long-term support of initiatives that address ongoing barriers

For more information on working with an interpreter, complete the “Working Effectively with Interpreters” lesson through **CORE’s Online CO Certification Course**.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

The following are a list of tips and recommendations based on feedback collected from CO leaders as well as research on the impact of gender on education and learning.

- All CO should **meet learner needs and not be based on gender stereotypes or assumptions.**
- Consider steps that can be taken to **establish trust and a positive learning environment** for all participants.
- **Encourage attendance** by addressing barriers when possible.
- **Promote retention** of information being taught in the CO session by drawing on adult learning principles.
- **Identify appropriate interpreters** to ensure messages are clearly and professionally communicated no matter the CO topic or make-up of participants in the CO session.

Cultural Orientation Resource Exchange

8719 Colesville Road, 3rd Floor ● Silver Spring, MD 20910

www.coresourceexchange.org



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