

## Application to Serve on the Oversight Committee

Organization: Alliance for African Assistance  
Designated Representative: Barbara T. Hansen, M.Ed.  
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### 1. What is your organization's history working in City Heights?

Providing supportive services to culturally diverse individuals with multiple barriers to employment was the driving force behind the formation of the Alliance for African Assistance. In 1989, a small grass-roots group of refugees, recognizing a lack of community support for their fellow refugees resettling in San Diego, collected and distributed clothing and basic household items. They set up business, first in living rooms and garages until they acquired space in the famous "Quonset Hut" at 42<sup>nd</sup> and University Avenue in City Heights. In 2001, the agency was fortunate to purchase a larger and more accommodating facility at the corner of 59<sup>th</sup> and El Cajon Blvd.

The Alliance remained a relatively small non-profit until 1995 when it was awarded its first government contract, one that it continues to hold today, from the County of San Diego to provide employment and related services to refugees throughout the Central Region. In 1996, as an affiliate of the Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC), the Alliance became a voluntary resettlement agency (VOLAG) for the State Department, directly resettling refugees from around the globe in San Diego. To date, Alliance has resettled over 2,200 refugees in San Diego, and works with over 8,000 each year providing services through over 20 related programs. In 1999, the Alliance developed its Language and Cultural Solutions Department which today provides face-to-face interpretation and translation services in 85 languages to nearly 1,000 non-English speaking residents annually.

### 2. Does your organization have an established base of residents with whom it works?

During fiscal year 2008, 756 new Americans were resettled by the Alliance for African Assistance. Approximately sixty-five percent found new homes in City Heights' neighborhoods. Their characteristics reflect those of the refugee population as a whole:

- 49% are male; 51% are female
- 447 (59%) are adults; 309 (41%) are children under the age of 18
- 38% of adults have from 1 to 4 years of education; 53% have 4 to 8 years and 9% have over 8 years of formal education.
- At the time of arrival, 36% knew no English; 53% knew a little; 8% could converse in English and 3% were proficient.
- 26% had never worked; 47% had 1 to 5 years' work experience; 29% had worked for from 5 to 10 years and 8% had more than 10 years work history.

During the 8-month resettlement period, the Alliance assists refugees to register with social security, pass a health screening, be inoculated, enroll their children in school, improve their English language skills, attend school, and search for work. At the end of the resettlement period, they are expected to be self-sufficient. Refugee families with children may be eligible for CalWORKS support after their 8-month resettlement period. They transfer to the Alliance's Welfare-to-Work program where case managers help clients achieve a minimum of 32 hours per week of education, training or work effort in order maintain

welfare benefits as they work toward self-sufficiency. Like all welfare-to-work clients, refugees' benefits end after 60 months.

Alliance staff have maintained strong relationships with many of the refugees who have made great contributions to the fabric of Mid City San Diego. They have demonstrated a strong work ethic, often work long hours and their households have many wage earners. Combined with a strong priority placed on education, most have moved successfully toward the middle class. Cultures that would not normally know each other or might even clash in their own countries now dine in the same restaurants and shop in the same markets. They symbolize the diversity of which City Heights has grown proud.

3. What role does your organization envision fulfilling during the 9-month planning process? What expertise and resources will your organization offer and one which outcome areas will you focus?

The Alliance for African Assistance hopes to be one of eleven collaborative partners in the 9-month planning process for a healthier City Heights. The agency can serve as a strong voice for the diverse refugee populations that are both established in and new to the community. Alliance case managers and community organizers work hard every day to assess the needs of individuals, families and ethnic groups and provide support as refugees and other underserved and disadvantaged neighbors work together to help themselves. The agency has witnessed the courage and resolve of these people and believes that they have greatly enriched the culture of their adopted home.

The work of the Alliance for African Assistance best fits with the achievement of three outcomes:

2. Families have improved access to a health home that supports healthy behaviors.
3. Health and family-focused human services shift resources toward prevention.
8. Community health improvements are linked to economic development.

The Alliance for African Assistance can offer 8 hours per week in staff time devoted to the planning process. Our designated representative, Barbara Hansen, M.Ed., is an accomplished teacher, program manager, grant writer and facilitator who can offer skills in all phases of program development. Her office space, technical equipment and office supplies will be provided in-kind. In addition, the agency will provide meeting space for groups of up to 40 participants in community rooms and a classroom.

4. How is your organization representative of the diverse communities or people who live in City Heights?

The Alliance employs 32 experienced, multicultural, multilingual staff from 16 different countries. Combined with a dedicated staff of 50 volunteers and more than 250 contract interpreters, the Alliance communicates in 85 languages, including Amharic, Arabic, Burmese, Farsi, French, Kurdish, Russian, Spanish, Somali, Swahili, and Vietnamese. The majority of Alliance's staff and volunteers are refugees and immigrants who know first-hand the challenges that must be overcome when entering or re-entering the workforce and learning to become self-sufficient. Those who are not refugees themselves have a personal commitment to refugee issues and a determination to afford the refugee population with the opportunities that they enjoy. Many live in City Heights and all work in the community, support collaborative efforts and commit their life's work to the success of their clients and their city.