

DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL)
Current and Proposed Community Engagement on the Syrian Conflict
April 1, 2014

PURPOSE: The Syrian Outreach plan was created and implemented at the request of the DHS Counter-Terrorism Advisory Board (CTAB). While CRCL and DHS have current and ongoing engagement with diverse community groups, including the Syrian community, the purpose of the plan is to identify concrete short term and long term initiatives aimed at expanding Syria-specific engagement with communities demonstrating, or likely to have, strong equities in a variety of topics surrounding the conflict in Syria, or the region writ large.

CURRENT/ONGOING DHS-WIDE ENGAGEMENT WITH SYRIAN COMMUNITY: CRCL regularly engages with diverse community groups in fourteen cities across the United States, including the Syrian community. Over the past three months, at the request of leadership, CRCL has conducted additional enhanced engagement with key leaders and officials of Syrian-American organizations around the country. They have proven reliable stakeholders with a strong sense of commitment and understanding of the government goal of countering violent extremism domestically. Several have offered to partner with us and facilitate our community engagement work more formally should we wish to proceed.

DHS offices and components have also engaged with Syrian American Organizations in a number of ways. For example, USCIS held a number of public outreach sessions on Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for which Syrian nationals remain eligible. The USCIS website also features specific information on TPS for eligible Syrian nationals. USCIS as well as CBP, ICE, and TSA continue their ongoing regional leadership participation in the CRCL quarterly engagement roundtable meetings in fourteen cities. ICE has conducted Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) related outreach events. While SEVIS isn't specific to one specific community, such outreach directly impacts student populations with strong Syria-specific equities. In addition, ICE has extended employment authorization for Syrian F-1 students experiencing severe economic hardship. ICE ERO has also addressed one query specific to immigration enforcement of Syrian nationals.

CRCL ENHANCED ENGAGEMENT OF RELEVANCE: In light of the increased number of foreign fighters traveling to the Syrian war zone to engage in the conflict, and successful terrorist attacks in the US and overseas, CRCL has developed an enhanced engagement model, in an effort to counter violent extremism. CRCL conducted an assessment of engagement partners, to ensure the correct audience and stakeholders are included in CRCL engagement events, especially as the discussion relates to CVE. CRCL then developed and implemented enhanced engagement events throughout the US targeting non-traditional partners, community organizers, and religious leaders. Current and ongoing enhanced engagement events include:

- ***International Engagement:*** DHS focuses on developing an enhanced understanding of CVE through direct exchanges and coordination with international partners. DHS works with international partners both bilaterally and multilaterally in efforts that focus on community-based problem solving approaches and community oriented policing. CRCL has participated in dozens of international conferences and workshops, State Department sponsored speaker's

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tours, and International Leadership Visitors Programs (IVLP) throughout the UK, Europe, Scandinavia, and Southeast Asia. CRCL has hosted international delegations from around the world to discuss CVE related issues, and has participated in multilateral CVE efforts, such as the Five Country Ministerial. CRCL is a key component in the development of CVE best practices through community engagement – a program under the auspices of the Global Counter Terrorism Forum (GCTF), and the Hedayah Center, in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates- the first international center dedicated to countering violent extremism.

- ***CVE Tabletop Exercises:*** CRCL was charged with developing new innovative programs and initiatives designed to share CVE-related information with communities that may be targeted by violent extremists, to increase their resilience to counter the violent extremist narrative. One of these initiatives includes the CVE Tabletop Exercises (CVEX). CVEX consists of trust-building workshop with community members and local law enforcement, and uses an unfolding possible terrorism scenario with two threads: one thread disclosing what the police have learned and the other thread what the community experiences. Law enforcement explains their authorities and their limits to help community members improve their understanding of what police can and cannot do. Community members provide cultural and religious context on perspectives and likely reactions.
 - **Current CVEX Schedule:** Chicago, IL in December 2013 (completed); Durham, NC in March 2014 (Completed); Seattle, WA in April 2014 (Scheduled); and Columbus, OH in May 2014 (Scheduled). Other cities where CVEX will be scheduled: Houston, TX; Boston, MA; Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN; and Los Angeles, CA.

GOALS OF THE SYRIA OUTREACH PLAN: The plan outlines a number of concrete short term and long term initiatives aimed at expanding Syria-specific engagement across DHS. The goals of the plan are to:

1. Execute the activities described in this plan within the targeted timeframe.
2. Increase community involvement in countering violent extremism, specifically related to the Syrian and/ or regional conflict.
3. Create a protocol or mechanism to ensure harmonized efforts and messaging across related efforts aimed at the Syrian and/ or regional conflict.

TEMPORARY WORKING GROUP ON SYRIA RELATED ISSUES: CRCL will identify appropriate POCs and convene a working group to coordinate expanded engagement with communities that may be vulnerable to the draw of the Syrian conflict. The working group will allow DHS Offices and components to effectively collaborate on Syria related issues and help to ensure the goals and initiatives outlined in this plan are successfully implemented. The working group will be led by CRCL and report to the DHS Counterterrorism Advisory Board.

PROPOSED EXPANDED ENGAGEMENT: DHS Community Engagement with the Syrian-American and related community focuses on promoting and enabling the community's efforts to counter violent extremism (CVE), particularly among youth, by way of a participatory trust-

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building process already tested with other communities where CVE is a policy priority. This process also makes resolution of grievances and policy consultations with the community stakeholders as a priority. This process further empowers community opposition to violent extremism and does not alienate communities. As the situation in Syria warrants, expanded and enhanced engagement will position the Department to work with community partners to address key sensitive issues, including motivations for foreign fighter travel, implications for screening, countering terrorist messaging, and reactions to U.S. involvement in the region.

DHS will undertake the following short and long term initiatives outlined below to expand engagement with the Syrian-American community.

Short Term Initiatives: To be implemented between December 1, 2013 and February 28, 2014.

1. (CRCL) Activate community-specific Incident Community Coordination Team (ICCT) web-based conference calls. This conference call mechanism connects federal officials with key leaders in the event of a situation in which contact would be productive. DHS participant components and offices include TSA, ICE, CBP, USCIS, FEMA, the Office of Public Affairs, and the Office of Intelligence & Analysis. We are also joined when relevant by the White House Office of Public Engagement, the DOJ Civil Rights Division, the FBI, the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), the Department of Defense, USAID, and the Department of State, among others. Community participants include representatives of national organizations, community leaders from key cities, and religious and cultural scholars. Our ICCT has been used eleven times since we established it in 2006.
2. (b) (5)

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- On March 24, 2014, CRCL coordinated a DHS-wide leadership briefing to be held at the NAC at which the SSG will present to senior leadership detailed information on the threat of foreign fighters.
 - (b) (5)
3. (CRCL) Conduct threat briefings for key community stakeholders who have influence with regional and local constituencies and can serve as reliable echo-chambers for messaging purposes. These briefings can be conducted using the community engagement round table mechanisms coordinated by CRCL in fourteen cities across the country. It could be conducted in the form of community-specific town halls in partnership with one or more key community based groups or in a smaller round table format focusing on specific community leaders in a specific geographic area.
 4. (CRCL) Implement community-specific trust-building engagement exercises in priority cities with large or concentrated relevant populations including Los Angeles, Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, New York City, Houston, Washington, D.C., San Francisco, and Boston. These steps would include specific youth-focused consultations and briefings.
 - CRCL will be initiating these broader efforts with community-specific meetings in Chicago, IL in April 2014 (Scheduled) and a community town hall discussion in Los Angeles, CA in May 2014 (Scheduled).
 5. (USCIS) Hold public engagements on TPS with a variety of community groups, including Syrian nationals, in response to community interest.
 6. (USCIS) Explore interest in Arabic language public engagement for FY2014.
 7. (CBP) Include Syrian-American organizations in the general quarterly NGO meetings hosted by the Office of the Commissioner in Washington, DC
 8. (CBP) Coordinate information-sharing efforts with the CBP attaché' in Ankara, Turkey, as well as the TSA Frankfurt Regional Operations Center and create/forward community-provided information to the attachés.
 9. (I&A and CRCL) Work on creating federal, state, and local LEA training related to the threats of foreign fighters. Enhance exiting FLETC training with information regarding foreign fighter issues.

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10. (I&A and CRCL) Create a Community Awareness Briefing (CAB) to be implemented starting in November 2013 using the CRCL community engagement process and stakeholders.
11. (PLCY) Ensure topline goals including harmonizing of messaging, consistent terminology, coordination with other USG and partner nations' Syria-specific efforts, and identification of effectiveness measures.
12. (FEMA's DHS Center for Faithbased and Neighborhood Partnerships and CRCL) Facilitate faith-based engagement.
13. (TSA, ICE, and CRCL) SMEs to help provide any future presentations or briefings with equities related to Syria outreach as may be coordinated through CRCL's expanded community engagement efforts.

Long Term Initiatives: To be implemented between December 1, 2013 and December 31, 2014.

1. Collaborate with community and faith-based organizations, as well as local, state, and federal interagency partners to develop youth engagement initiatives throughout the country more broadly.
2. Promote informational programs and forums by local and federal law enforcement agencies to address community vulnerabilities, including internet-borne threats.
3. Conduct or participate in youth roundtables and forums to gather information about root causes of youth alienation and violent radicalization.
4. Promote unclassified threat briefings for community leaders in coordination with federal interagency partners on a longer-term strategic basis.
5. Explore and communicate funding opportunities for community-based organizations with relevant expertise.
6. Empower and encourage parents, religious leaders, and youth activists to co-develop alternative narratives to violent extremist ideology by including community and youth organizations in CRCL community engagement activities that help provide access to other communities addressing similar challenges and focusing efforts in constructive solutions to grievances.
7. Collaborate with partner countries (United Kingdom, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, Canada, Spain, and France) that have significant Syrian and/ or regional populations to develop best practices in community engagement endeavors that effectively counter violent extremism.

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