

PREPARING IMMIGRANT LEARNERS FOR CITIZENSHIP

This chapter presents five important topics concerning educational supports given to immigrants learning English and naturalization content to become U.S. citizens. The first topic describes immigrants with different levels of ability and preferred modes of educational interventions. The second topic presents standards of ESL/citizenship instruction to ensure learner success and best use of resources. The third topic describes the components of an ESL/citizenship program and how programs can be best managed given limited monetary and human resources. The fourth topic presents ideas about how ESL/citizenship curricula can be developed and instructed to increase learner confidence, citizenship test and interviewing skills, and knowledge of meaningful and functional aspects of citizenship. The fifth topic presents the current sources and levels of funding for ESL and citizenship instruction and organizations involved in preparing immigrant learners to become U.S. citizens. Each section offers recommendations in the area of ESL and citizenship instruction for a national citizenship program.

Different Learners, Different Services

By **Lynne Weintraub**

ESL/Citizenship Coordinator

Jones Library ESL Center

Independent Consultant for Curriculum Development and Immigrant Advocacy

Amherst, Massachusetts

From an educational standpoint, nearly every immigrant has the potential to become a U.S. citizen. Most are able to navigate the naturalization system without assistance. Some require minimal assistance, in terms of information and self-study materials. A great many immigrants hope to naturalize someday, but do not have access to the instruction and application support they require in order to succeed.

The national population of potential citizens falls along a broad spectrum of educational levels, from individuals with no formal education to those who come to the United States with advanced degrees. Similarly, their range of oral and written English language proficiency varies from individuals who can speak only a few words of English, to those with advanced fluency. The level of support each individual may need in order to naturalize depends on several factors: oral English proficiency; literacy level (in both the native language and in English); the degree of familiarity (in any language) with concepts of history and government; and potential limiting factors such as disabilities, advanced age, trauma, and test anxiety.

In order to provide the appropriate level of services, while conserving resources to provide for the broadest possible number of potential citizens, it is important for programs to understand learners' strengths and needs at the outset. Where one potential citizen may need only an application packet with study questions, another may need several months or years of classroom services or volunteer tutor instruction. By assessing learner needs, programs can tailor services accordingly.

Educational Characteristics of Today's Immigrant Population

In recent decades, the immigrant population has shifted in terms of countries of origin, educational levels, and geographic locations. Unlike earlier waves of primarily European immigrants, the current immigrant population is largely Latin American (51 percent) and Asian (25.5 percent).¹ According to the Center for Immigration Studies, today's immigrants are more likely to live in poverty than earlier groups, and the main reason for this is lower educational levels.² The limited English speakers in the population tend to be the newest immigrants with the lowest levels of education. Nearly 60 percent arrived in the last ten years, and 50 percent reported having nine years or less of education. Of special note, 75 percent of those speaking limited English are Spanish speakers, and more than half are Mexican.³ Of the immigrants now eligible to naturalize, 41 percent (2.4 million) have incomes under 200 percent of the poverty level, including 17 percent with income under the federal poverty level.⁴ Poor immigrants often face many challenges simultaneously: Earning enough income to pay for housing, childcare, food, transportation, and clothing may require all adult family members to work one or

several jobs. This need presents challenges to service providers in terms of scheduling and delivering instruction to adult family members.⁵

New trends in the 2000 census data show that the immigrant population is now spreading beyond a few large cities and is growing quickly in suburbs and small towns of the Northeast, Midwest, and South. While two-thirds of immigrants in the United States live in traditional gateway states such as California, Florida, New York, New Jersey, and Illinois, newer groups of immigrants are increasingly dispersed in areas that have relatively little experience in providing services to limited English speakers. In the 1990s, 22 states with formerly low numbers of immigrants saw their immigrant populations increase by more than 90 percent due both to direct immigration and secondary migration from traditional receiving states such as California.⁶ Almost 60 percent of the immigrants in the new growth states have arrived since 1990,⁷ and about 1 million (12 percent) of those eligible to naturalize live in these 22 states.⁸ These newer areas of resettlement have less experience with immigrant residents and often have fewer resources for needed services such as English language instruction or citizenship preparation courses.

A 2003 Urban Institute report indicated that more than 7.9 million legal immigrants were currently eligible to naturalize. Many of these immigrants faced barriers such as limited English skills, little formal education, and low incomes. The study found that among immigrants that were currently eligible to naturalize, about 60 percent (about 3.5 million) had limited English proficiency, including about 40 percent who speak English “not well” or “not at all.” The study looked at a cohort of immigrants who, in 2002, were “soon to be eligible” for naturalization, and found the trend accelerating: At least 1.5 million or 67 percent of the group (virtually all of whom will be eligible for citizenship by 2007) had limited English proficiency. The authors of the study conclude: “Many in this group could benefit from expanded language and civics instruction programs.”⁹

Data indicate that the most recent immigrants to arrive in the United States have less education than their predecessors. A study of educational levels of immigrants now in the workforce shows that of those who arrived in the 1980s, 30 percent lacked a high school diploma. Of those who arrived in the 1990s, 35 percent did not have a high school diploma.¹⁰ One quarter of the immigrants now eligible for citizenship (1.4 million) have less than a ninth grade education. Significantly, only 9 percent of those who have recently succeeded at naturalizing have similarly low levels of education.¹¹ This low percentage suggests several things: Immigrants with lower levels of education may be more wary of applying for citizenship, some are not succeeding in their attempts to naturalize, and an

increasing number of immigrants are likely to need language and literacy education in order for naturalization rates to remain stable, or to rise in the future.

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) recently commissioned a study of citizenship-test pass rates of various immigrant groups, which offers some clues about which groups are most vulnerable to failure. A random sample of applications, completed in fiscal years 2003 and 2004, showed that among those taking the citizenship test for the first time, the overall pass rate was 84 percent.¹² One group with significantly lower pass rates was the elderly, with only 46 percent of those 65 and older passing the test on their first try. Also of interest is the 50 to 64 age range with an initial pass rate of only 69 percent. Initial pass rates were significantly lower for refugees (77 percent) and asylees (74 percent) than for those with a different immigration status (86 percent).¹³ Pass rates also varied by region of origin. For example, only 78 percent of immigrants from Central America and the Caribbean passed the test on their first attempt. Among applicants from the top ten originating countries, the lowest pass rates were for immigrants from Dominican Republic (69.9 percent), Iran (71 percent), Mexico (76.9 percent), and Vietnam (75 percent).¹⁴ These statistics suggest that a national strategy for facilitating naturalization should, in particular, look for ways to lower the barriers faced by special groups like the elderly, refugees, and asylees, as well as those who arrive in the United States with limited formal education.

At Risk Population Groups and the Citizenship Test

Pass rates on the four components of the U.S. citizenship test provide some insights into the effects of current testing standards on vulnerable populations and point to areas where clarification of test content and standards might facilitate an improved pass rate for all applicants by providing clearer guidance on how to prepare. While 93 percent of overall applicants were able to pass the civics and history test, fewer of them (86 percent) were able to pass the English speaking, reading, and writing tests.¹⁵ The differences among pass rates on the individual components of the test are magnified for the more vulnerable segments of the immigrant population. For instance, elderly immigrants were able to achieve an 88 percent pass rate on the civics and history test, but only 48.5 percent on the English tests. This may be because the civics and history content is clearly defined (applicants are asked ten questions from an official list of 96 questions and answers),¹⁶ and passing standards are the same for every applicant (at least six questions answered correctly).

The same cannot be said for the English components of the test. For the reading and writing (dictation) tests, examiners may use a set of randomly generated sentences from an official list of sample sentences, or they may use sentences of their own devising. Some examiners use sections of the N-400 application to test reading and writing ability even though this document rises well above the statutory level of “simple words and phrases in the English language.” When applicants cannot easily predict which sentences they will be asked to read or write, they are left with few clues as to how to study for these sections of the test. And since examiners are given rather vague standards as to what constitutes a passing score on the reading and writing tests, it is difficult for teachers to assess whether an applicant is sufficiently prepared for these tests.

Content and standards for the English speaking test are even less defined, and this is the portion of the test that presents the most difficulty to applicants. Overall, only 89.9 percent initially passed the English speaking test, compared to 93.2 percent who were able to pass the civics and history test.¹⁷ This lower pass rate may be because an applicant’s speaking ability is assessed through the process of reviewing the N-400 application in the course of an interview. Since the vocabulary and the language structures employed in the N-400 are well above the level of “simple words and phrases,” it is difficult for applicants (and their instructors) to know how to prepare for such a test. Without clear guidelines as to what constitutes a passing score on the speaking test, examiners (who do not have training in the field of second language assessment) are left to use their own discretion in determining which applicants demonstrate sufficient oral proficiency to meet naturalization requirements. This lack of standards makes it difficult for language instructors to accurately gauge their students’ readiness for the speaking test or even to pinpoint and remediate the problem when some, inevitably, fail.

Assessing Potential Citizens for Appropriate Levels of Service

In order to determine which type of service is appropriate for each potential citizen, it is important for educational programs (or collaborative groups of programs) to have some type of assessment tool in place. In citizenship education, appropriate assessment includes a determination of a student’s literacy, oral English skills, and civics knowledge relative to the demands of the test.¹⁸ As a condition of funding, all federally funded English as a second language (ESL) programs are required to use “valid and reliable” assessments for measuring achievement of literacy and language skills for adult students.¹⁹ Since many programs are now using such formal assessment measures, relying on them for placement decisions in a supplemental citizenship component is a simple matter.

But community-based organizations that offer stand-alone citizenship courses generally use in-house skill assessments that are less formal, less costly, not as time-consuming, and have the benefit of being tailored specifically for citizenship preparation purposes. For example, these assessments often present learners with a range of simple to complex civics questions and dictation sentences from the USCIS study guide. An in-house assessment may also present a range of predictable background information questions examiners ask in naturalization interviews and short reading samples with comprehension questions.²⁰

Often at the same time, programs conduct an intake interview to gather information on the student’s age, level of formal education, native language literacy skills, degree of English language training received since arrival in the United States, any current participation in other ESL programs, and any previous attempts at taking the citizenship test.²¹ In conjunction with the interview, eligibility screening for naturalization may be done to determine whether and when a person is eligible to apply or which stage of the naturalization process the student has already completed. In addition, information on potential barriers to participation (such as mobility problems, childcare issues, transportation or scheduling limitations), chronic medical or psychological conditions, and medications may be pertinent, particularly for elderly students. Bilingual staff, family members, or other volunteers are often needed in order to gather this information from students with low levels of English proficiency.²²

With the information gathered through this intake and assessment process, programs can make informed decisions as to the appropriate level of service to offer. For example, if an individual is able to answer interview questions easily, has no difficulty writing dictated sentences, and can read and answer questions about a written paragraph, the individual is an excellent candidate for a self-study course. Or if the intake and assessment reveal very low literacy skills, coupled with memory or cognitive difficulties due to a medical condition, a program might suggest pursuing a disability waiver rather than classroom instruction. A volunteer tutor is often the best choice for learners who demonstrate unusual disparities between their oral and written English skills, individuals who are homebound, or those who have other barriers to participation in classroom programs.

In order to maximize funding resources, citizenship programs and collaboratives should reserve classroom slots for those learners who are most likely to benefit from the service. In other words, instructional programs should target those learners for whom classroom instruction is likely to make a critical difference between success and failure on the citizenship test. High quality citizenship preparation programs are not always able to offer the full

range of service delivery options listed here, but they work hard to identify, coordinate with, and make referrals to other area providers who do.²³

Learner Characteristics

Learners who fall between the high beginning and low advanced oral and written English proficiency levels are likely to benefit most from a national citizenship program. According to descriptors in the National Reporting System (NRS) for Adult Basic Education, these learners can, at a minimum, “understand common words, simple phrases, and sentences that contain familiar vocabulary.” They can “respond to simple questions about personal everyday activities, using simple learned phrases, and can express immediate needs, using simple learned phrases or short sentences.” In terms of literacy skills, high beginners can “read most sight words...familiar phrases, and simple sentences.” And they “can write some simple sentences with limited vocabulary.”²⁴ Also included in this category are learners who have had no secondary education (many of these are elderly immigrants and refugees), since they are likely to be unfamiliar with concepts and vocabulary related to history and government (even in the native language). Given appropriate instruction, these learners have high potential to succeed with less than a year of targeted instruction.

Appropriate curriculum for this group includes civics vocabulary and concepts, oral and written language skill development, test taking skills, and interview preparation. Many learners in this proficiency range exhibit a high level of anxiety in formal testing situations, and it is critical for them to receive extensive practice and repetition of new skills and content. They also need access to quality instructional materials at a suitable level. In addition, the strategic use of native-language reinforcement is likely to facilitate concept development for these learners.²⁵ Some programs have found that opportunities to repeat a class cycle or to take a quick review class just before the naturalization test can improve the success rate for these learners. In addition to targeted test preparation, many programs find that civic participation activities serve to make instruction more meaningful, and these activities are central to the missions of many community-based organizations.

Self-study is not a viable option for learners who are not yet able to reinforce emerging oral skills through text. With little formal education, most learners in the high beginning to low advanced NRS ranges have not yet developed strategies for independent learning. In some cases, individuals in this group may need assistance in removing barriers to instruction, such as difficulties with transportation, scheduling, or childcare, or visual and auditory problems. Classroom or volunteer instruction can make a tremendous difference for these learners, and with additional application support services, they have excellent

potential for success in naturalization. Furthermore, when these at risk learners eventually succeed, they often inspire more reluctant individuals in their classes, workplaces, and neighborhoods to give it a try.

Ideally, citizenship learners receive conventional English language instruction and targeted citizenship preparation concurrently. However, immigrants with very limited time availability may find it difficult to participate in conventional adult education ESL classes over a period of many months. Learners with very limited time availability should have access to a short (20 to 30 hour), highly focused citizenship course, with the option of repeating the course if necessary, continuing to study with a volunteer tutor, or attending a quick review session just before their naturalization interviews.

Other populations worthy of attention in a national citizenship program are the learners at the beginning stages of oral English proficiency and those who have not yet developed literacy skills in English. A high proportion of these pre-citizenship learners are likely to be elderly immigrants and refugees. Some of them may also need assistance in removing barriers to participation (such as childcare and transportation). Often these learners have had little or no formal education, or they are minimally literate in a language that uses a non-Roman script (such as Arabic, Chinese, Khmer, or Hindi). Appropriate pre-citizenship curriculum for this group includes basic personal information, simple vocabulary, following instructions, and letter or sight word recognition and formation. As a precursor to citizenship instruction in English, it may be helpful for beginning level learners to have access to native language instruction in the basic concepts of history and government.

Learners who already possess basic English literacy skills are likely to progress to the high beginning stage of oral proficiency within one year of instruction and thus become appropriate candidates for targeted citizenship instruction. However, those who lack basic literacy skills may need more time. And although conventional ESL classroom instruction is offered in many communities, basic ESL literacy (language instruction for students who are not yet literate) is harder to find. A national citizenship initiative will need to explore ways of expanding access to services for ESL literacy learners. It is important to note that many beginning level learners, strongly motivated to achieve citizenship, have eventually become citizens, and with the aid of appropriate, long-term English language and literacy instruction, many more will be able to succeed.

One population group, those learners with advanced oral and written English proficiency, has high short-term potential for naturalization with very little need for instructional support. Generally these learners have at least some secondary education and have already succeeded at acquiring a high level of competency in oral and written English.

As a result, they are good candidates for a self-study citizenship course. Such a course should include clear information on the content, format, and standards of the test, ample practice material, and additional information on the application process. It should be free and widely available at community-based organizations, libraries, adult education programs, and on the Internet. It might take the form of a booklet, a software program, or an on-line distance learning program. Funders should provide incentives for citizenship providers to distribute self-study packets and have staff available to self-study learners who have questions, need application support, or desire a practice test or interview. If resources can be stretched far enough, classroom instruction would enable advanced level learners to gain a deeper understanding of the civics concepts, particularly through civic engagement activities.

Finally, it should be noted that a small percentage of immigrants may never be able to learn civics concepts or acquire English proficiency. Although they may make many attempts, they are impeded by cognitive processing difficulties or impaired memory function. This may be the result of a chronic illness, a disability, the effects of strong medication, or the normal aging process. In the case of refugees, it is sometimes the result of previous long-term malnutrition, head injuries, or severe trauma. Unfortunately, these immigrants struggle to gain documentation by physicians, which is required by USCIS to qualify for a disability waiver. Too often, students and teachers are not aware that such a waiver exists, or how to apply for it. While the medical aspects of documenting a disability go beyond the mission of educational providers, it is recommended that citizenship assistance programs network with legal service providers, medical clinics, or caseworkers to provide assistance to immigrants who cannot navigate the health care and legal systems themselves.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1 Naturalization policymakers and test administrators should look for ways to lower the barriers to citizenship faced by special groups like the elderly, refugees and asylees, and those who arrive in the United States with limited formal education.
- 2 The Office of Citizenship should ensure that test content and evaluation standards are uniform and clear to all stakeholders—applicants, examiners, and instructional providers.
- 3 Instructional programs should have the capacity to provide information on the naturalization process to all learners, as part of the curriculum. Furthermore, instructional programs that lack the expertise to provide application assistance should strive to ensure that learners have easy access to partner organizations that do provide this service.

- 4 In order to maximize instructional resources across the spectrum of skill levels, citizenship preparation instructional providers (or provider networks) should make clear the levels of services they offer, according to the needs of various learner subgroups (such as self-study packets, classroom slots, volunteer tutors, or referrals to basic ESL literacy providers).
- 5 The Office of Citizenship or a contractor should develop and disseminate sample intakes, screening, and assessment devices for instructional programs. These materials should include guidance on the types of services appropriate for a variety of learner profiles.
- 6 Funders and provider networks should encourage programs that offer only one type of service to work in collaboration with other agencies to ensure that a broad range of instructional and scheduling options and application assistance is available (through mutual referral) within a given community.
- 7 In order to serve as many potential new citizens as possible, funders should implement measures to ensure that instructional providers target most of their resources on provision of services to learners who are most likely to benefit from intervention: those with high beginning to low advanced oral and written English language proficiency, those with less than six years of educational attainment, elderly and disabled learners, and those with anxiety issues. In other words, funders should avoid rewarding programs that selectively enroll learners with high levels of English language proficiency or high levels of educational attainment.
- 8 Funders, provider networks, and programs should work to ensure that classroom and volunteer services in basic ESL literacy are available to individuals who require more than one year of instruction to attain the necessary literacy and language proficiency levels for naturalization, and that an effective system is in place within the community to provide referrals for such students to qualified service providers.
- 9 Citizenship classroom instruction should strive to ensure that students with limited time availability have options for shorter term, highly focused citizenship test preparation instruction.
- 10 In order to maximize learners' chances of success at the USCIS interview, programs should design last minute instructional options for students who are within six weeks of a scheduled interview, such as the option to repeat an instructional cycle, attend special quick review courses, meet with a volunteer tutor, or participate in an individual practice interview.

Competencies for Citizenship Teachers

By **An McDowell**

Citizenship Teacher

Salinas Adult School

Director of Citizenship Resources

Citizenship Advocacy Project

Salinas, California

Citizenship teachers need critical competencies in order to be effective in citizenship preparation instruction. The citizenship teacher, whether a certified teacher, a community volunteer, or a tutor, needs to be adequately trained in best ESL teaching practices and primary literacy issues to serve each student on the path to citizenship. Teachers must be familiar with current naturalization law and USCIS policies. Teachers need to be linked with legal and social service support systems in the community. Finally, the teacher needs to integrate the 96 official history and government questions into a broader problem-posing context that is relevant to the students' lives and needs.

Job Description of a Citizenship Teacher

The role and scope of a citizenship teacher may vary according to the specific needs of the hiring agency. Each agency's ESL and citizenship program should clearly define the responsibilities of the citizenship teacher before selecting a candidate. Teachers are often called on to fill a number of duties beyond giving classroom instruction, including training, supervising, coordinating volunteers, developing programs, and recruiting community support services. However, teachers should never be put in the position of giving specific legal advice or completing legal immigration forms for students.²⁶ Most programs expect the citizenship teacher to: 1) develop daily lesson plans, 2) follow course outlines, 3) integrate ESL strategies for relevant language development, 4) conduct ongoing assessments of student progress, 5) identify students with learning disabilities, 6) attend ESL and citizenship trainings and networking meetings, and 7) make appropriate legal and support service referrals. The teacher may be asked to administer English assessment tests at registration and give pre- and post-tests to students to document their progress. The citizenship teacher may also be asked to administer a course evaluation or exit test. In some agencies, the citizenship teacher will work closely with social workers or legal representatives to help students prepare for their interview and obtain individual tutoring for low-literate or special needs learners.

Desirable Skills of Citizenship Teachers

Host agencies of citizenship programs determine the qualifications for their citizenship teachers. Minimal requirements should be in place at all agencies. These include speaking English fluently, having experience in teaching English as a second language to adults, and training in current effective strategies for second language acquisition among adult learners. Some agencies may require an M.A. degree, a degree in linguistics, or a certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Alternatively, agencies may minimize these requirements and supplement the teacher's skills with extensive in-service trainings and workshops.

Citizenship teachers are most effective when they are committed to their students' success and engaged in innovative ways of making the class student centered. The teacher needs to create a welcoming and supportive classroom environment and be dynamic, enthusiastic, patient, and attentive. Student-centered teaching facilitates student-led activities and encourages students to explore new topics. Whether the teacher is foreign- or native-born, bilingual or monolingual, establishing rapport is the most important overarching teacher quality desired. Such teachers celebrate the victories of the students who pass their interviews and continue to work with those who have failed. The teacher is constantly conducting needs assessments and identifying barriers to student success. The teacher is skilled in networking with community-based organizations, advocacy groups, and government agencies and in making appropriate referrals. Lack of childcare, work schedules, transportation or legal problems, or lack of finances for necessary fees are considerations a sensitive and trained teacher keeps in mind. Consequently, a teacher may engage in advocacy in collaboration with other community organizations. The teacher is also skilled in working in a variety of alternative settings including libraries, churches, community centers, small groups, or individual homes.

Teaching to the Student Population Being Served

Best teaching practices vary depending on the students' abilities and motivations to become a citizen. The teacher should know the educational level of each student and past efforts to learn English. A class of students may include people who are semiliterate in their first language. Other students may be challenged with undiagnosed learning disabilities or apparent limits in hearing, vision, or physical or mental ability. In some settings, a teacher may be able to further customize the curriculum and teaching strategies to serve these distinctive students. For example, teachers

working with the Deaf Adults Education Access Program (DAEAP), which includes instruction using American Sign Language, have been able to meet the special needs of deaf students, particularly those who are elderly.²⁷

Students may demonstrate a propensity to be visual- or audio-focused learners or learn better by engaging in kinesthetic activities. Typical citizenship classrooms will have students from different countries and cultures unless organized specifically for one language or ethnic group. In addition, students will likely be of diverse ages and educational and economic backgrounds. Each student will bring his or her own perceptions about life in the United States and what it means to be a citizen. The teacher should address these issues within the context of the curriculum.

The teacher should learn why each student wants to become a citizen. Reasons typically fall into two categories—practical and sentimental. For example, in 1996, welfare reform passed by Congress made citizenship mandatory for access to key federal benefits.²⁸ This change made thousands of immigrants desperate to learn English, U.S. history, and civics to pass the required naturalization test for citizenship. The right to vote is also a significant practical benefit for many. A third practical reason is the desire to have a spouse or other relative immigrate. Sentimental reasons to become a citizen include the desire to “be an American” and to express attachment to this country.

Teaching ESL for Citizenship

The citizenship teacher must be skilled in key ESL techniques and practices that are linked to the naturalization process. USCIS interviews test a student’s ability to understand, speak, read, and write basic English. Students who have basic English may still fail the interview because they do not understand the vocabulary used on the N-400 form or they are unable to speak to the information they provided on the application form. Therefore, each lesson must have clear goals to help all students pass the test and interview. Because of varying skill levels of students, the time needed for preparation may range from as little as one or two classes to as long as one year or more.

The teacher’s role is primarily that of a facilitator of a large variety of practice activities that help students successfully prepare to respond to up to 96 possible questions taken from the N-400 citizenship application and to additional conversational questions covering such topics as the weather, traffic, and personal favorites. The instructor also prepares students for the dictation section of the USCIS interview that typically includes one to four sentences in English at a sixth grade level or lower.

Wherever possible, the teacher integrates the topics raised from the N-400 application with accompanying grammar constructs. Grammar constructs can be used to practice

responses regarding U.S. history and civics as well as occurrences in everyday life. For example, when asking, “**How often** do you go out of the United States?” the teacher can also ask, “**How often** do we elect the President?” When asking the students, “**Why did** you come to the United States?” the teacher can ask, “**Why did** the Pilgrims come to America?” These questions can lead to a discussion about students’ own migration to the United States, compared to the migration patterns and motivations of different immigrant groups.

Teachers also provide instruction in what English language skills and gestures to use when challenging situations arise in the naturalization interview. The teacher makes the class more relevant and student centered when eliciting from students strategies they often use when communication breaks down.

For the interview, students need to learn ways to gain clarification on what is being asked. For instance, “Did you say when or where?” or “Can you please repeat your question?” or “Can you say it again?” Students should be taught to relate to different examiners’ personality traits, such as examiners who make no eye contact while typing on the computer during the interview. Examiners may speak quickly or have accents, so students learn to listen critically for key words and phrases. They also learn how to use shortcuts in communicating their own information and ways to demonstrate that they understand the questions asked of them. Students can role play responses to different types of USCIS examiners, such as casual vs. formal, and to different speaking tones, pronunciations, and paces of speech. They can also discuss how to respond to an examiner who is rude in tone or manner.

Teaching Civics and History Lessons

Citizenship teachers need to have adequate knowledge of U.S. history and government. The teacher should have completed at least one secondary or college level class in history or government before teaching citizenship to adults. A teacher should also have a commitment to promoting a deeper understanding of both, beyond the 96 official test questions. A skilled teacher can teach complex ideas taken from great documents and speeches in U.S. history and simplify them for low-literate adults.

Techniques to teach history and civic participation include using crossnational comparisons, site visits, guest lectures, and student-led discussions of local issues and current events to broaden the scope of the class, while always relating the learning to the context of the actual USCIS interview. Instruction needs to motivate active learning in teams or pairs through simulated mock interviews, stimulating critical thinking and problem solving. For example,

students can work together in team activities that challenge them to apply amendments from the Bill of Rights to real-life situations. They can sort government service providers by level (federal, state, county, and city) and determine whom to contact when they need help with a problem. It is important for immigrants to understand American perspectives on key principles of government and historical events and to give them the opportunity to express their own perspectives.

Using Technology in the Classroom

Best teaching practices also include the use of technology in the classroom. Students are more engaged when multimedia is thoughtfully and carefully integrated into the class. Useful technology includes helpful Internet sites, computer-based citizenship software, and videos. Students can practice videotaping each other as they take turns role playing a USCIS examiner and applicant and watch the results for self-correction. Interactive videos that pause, allowing the student to answer questions, offer practical and effective opportunities to apply learned content and communication skills. Students eager to take advantage of computer language labs are then able to work at their own pace.

Knowledge of USCIS Rules and Local Practices

Citizenship teachers need to keep current with naturalization law, immigration forms, and fee schedules. Laws, regulations, and fees for naturalization, in addition to other immigration benefits, change significantly over time. Unfamiliarity with current laws and procedures will not only minimize a teacher's effectiveness but can result in a student's failure to pass a naturalization test, or worse, his or her placement in removal proceedings. For this reason, citizenship teachers should always refer students' immigration questions to a legal expert.

Teachers should also be familiar with varying practices at the local USCIS office. While USCIS may have national guidelines for their naturalization examiners, individual offices and personnel may interpret and apply them differently. It is critical that the citizenship teacher stay in communication with local community-based organizations and advocates who are well informed on these issues. Maintaining contact with staff in the office of a member of Congress is also a good resource for information and advocacy.

Occasionally, a student may fail a naturalization interview for seemingly inappropriate reasons. To learn of these problems promptly, teachers, in partnership with legal immigration representatives, can implement a follow-up system to contact students after a naturalization appoint-

ment. A system might involve a staff member making phone calls when students fail to report back after one week.²⁹ (Administrative appeals for final denials must be filed before one month of a denial notice.) Legal immigration experts can determine if the student should file an appeal with the USCIS. Some matters may require the advocacy of a local congressional representative.

Teacher Recruitment

Methods to recruit teachers depend on the skill sets desired. Teachers in adult public schools and community colleges are required to have a state teaching credential, so recruitment often takes place within the adult educational system. Frequently, existing adult ESL teachers are encouraged to become ESL and citizenship instructors when demand for a class arises or funding becomes available.

Other recruitment strategies include advertising in mainstream and ethnic media outlets for people with bilingual and teaching skills. Alternatively, educational programs will advertise with community-based organizations that provide social services, legal immigration counseling, and advocacy for immigrants. Announcements of job openings can be posted at state board of education offices, at teacher training facilities, and in publications related to English language training and linguistics.

Training for Citizenship Teachers

Training for citizenship teachers needs to be comprehensive even for certified ESL instructors due to the complexities of combining language instruction for multilevel learners and naturalization procedures. Institutionalized staff training is critical when there is a high turnover of teachers. Training is also important since teachers are often expected to function semiautonomously in the classroom with minimal supervision and few resources.³⁰

Formal training can be accessed from federal or state training programs. These programs often cover subjects of: current ESL teaching techniques for a multilevel classroom, learning styles of special needs students (such as the low literate and elderly), lesson planning, adult-based cooperative learning strategies, problem-solving and critical-thinking skill building, and educational program management. Mentoring is important particularly for new instructors. It gives the new instructor the opportunity to be observed by an experienced instructor and receive feedback based on accepted educational theories and proven techniques. "Shared insights enhance the quality of instruction."³¹

Community-based organizations can ask USCIS to provide training on naturalization law, forms, and procedures. Teachers should receive enough legal training to identify potential at-risk students and refer them to legal immigration representatives for legal counsel. (For example, a student who reveals that he or she has been out of the country for more than a year after getting a permanent resident card should seek legal advice before applying, or else run the risk of losing status in the United States.) Training that helps the teacher become better attuned to the student as a whole person with diverse needs and offers knowledge of the appropriate community resources for speakers and referrals is essential.

Staff development training should encourage innovation, leadership development, and collaboration. Ideally, training should be frequent and easily accessible for teachers of all skill levels. Trainings are also a good opportunity for teachers, legal representatives, and advocates to meet and share common concerns that, when addressed, improve citizenship services in the community. Training experiences can lead to the establishment of collaborations resulting in “the sharing of effective practices and an efficient division of labor based on areas of expertise.”³²

Volunteers

Trained volunteers can be very useful as teacher aides and tutors with small groups and individual students, particularly those who are homebound. Bilingual tutors can be very helpful with students who speak limited English and need some instruction in their native language. With supervision, volunteers may teach classes, thereby giving a program coordinator or lead teacher time for learners with special needs or broader program issues. While volunteers are an important and enriching resource, especially for programs with limited funding, they are less reliable and apt to be absent or quit. Contingency plans are needed to cope with this limitation.

Recruiting Volunteer Teacher Aides and Tutors

An often overlooked resource for volunteers is immigrants who have recently passed the naturalization exam with limited classroom assistance or who were former students of a citizenship class. Other possible volunteers include retired teachers, librarians, community service organization staff, members of religious congregations, and skilled and mature high school or university students.

Volunteers can be recruited through personal outreach, organizational flyers or publications, media advertisements, or contacts with community educational, civic, or faith-

based groups. Volunteer recruitment flyers can be distributed at gathering places for seniors or in publications for retired persons.

Volunteer Teacher Aide and Tutor Screening

Every organization needs to screen prospective volunteers carefully. The goal is to find a good match between a tutor who is patient, culturally sensitive, and willing to be trained and a small group of motivated students. A supervisory teacher should check in with students who have individual tutors to gauge the student’s progress and acceptance of the tutor. At times, volunteers may disregard the program’s goals and course material and set their own course. As when selecting a professional teacher, an agency assigning volunteers to students needs to seek references, work history, and educational background, and discern the volunteer’s motivation. Screening can also include getting information about the candidate’s previous volunteer experience, crosscultural experience, other language skills, hobbies, and volunteer assignment preferences. Heeding volunteer preferences will promote volunteer retention.

Training for Volunteers and Tutors

Volunteers and tutors need a comprehensive orientation and ongoing training and support throughout their work experience. The initial orientation helps give them a common knowledge base of the program’s goals and students’ learning needs. An orientation program should not be too lengthy or require too many appointments, thwarting volunteer recruitment. Orientation includes a written job description with discrete duties, and program and agency policies and procedures, such as maintaining confidentiality. It is helpful for the supervisor-volunteer-student relationship to have a volunteer sign an agreement specifying length of service and what to do if he or she must cancel a class or tutor appointment.

Volunteers need to learn in orientation of training opportunities available to them in the host agency or elsewhere. Supervisors can meet one-on-one with volunteers on a regularly scheduled basis. Alternatively, they can maintain regular phone contact and written communication. Workshops on specific topics of interest to volunteers should be offered in-house or outside the agency to demonstrate appreciation and a commitment to their skill development. “Continuing volunteer education training enhances program quality while giving volunteers the support needed to encourage retention.”³³

Volunteer Mentors

Educational agencies are wise to recruit and train volunteers as mentors for special needs students. Mentors can be selected from former students who became citizens, civic leaders in the community, nonimmediate family members, or caregivers for those who have disabilities. Mentors, like tutors, coach students through the naturalization process, helping them stay motivated and confident. Mentors can help with class work and home work and respond to individual student's questions or concerns about the citizenship process. Mentors are usually assigned to work with one student due to the time commitment.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1 The Office of Citizenship should provide free, training-of-the-trainers workshops using its staff or trainers working under a technical assistance grant. Trainings should be offered to develop in each state a cadre of professionals who, in turn, lead local and statewide trainings for paid and volunteer citizenship teachers at the grassroots level. Coordinated national training will enable teachers to use the most successful strategies in preparing students across the country to achieve U.S. citizenship.
- 2 Departments of Education in each state should offer training to paid and volunteer teachers at community-based organizations on best ESL instruction practices, incorporating the unique teaching methods and content for citizenship classes.
- 3 Citizenship educational programs should establish clear guidelines for citizenship teacher qualifications. Specifically, the candidate must speak English fluently, demonstrate experience or training in teaching ESL to adults, and have completed at least one secondary or college level class in U.S. history and government.
- 4 Citizenship educational programs should offer comprehensive training, including start-up orientation, ongoing supervision, and access to special workshops. Training should be formally integrated into a broader plan of staff development in order to offer high quality citizenship instruction.
- 5 Citizenship educational programs should provide teachers with immigration resources to understand the naturalization application process and legal needs of the students. Programs should establish guidelines helping teachers to know their limits in explaining legal immigration matters in a classroom setting or with individual students. Up-to-date referral lists of charitable immigration programs recognized by the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) should be provided to teachers and students.

- 6 Citizenship teachers should customize their instructional settings and curriculum to the needs of their students. Teachers can use innovative approaches in helping students with special physical, educational, and economic needs.
- 7 Citizenship teachers should incorporate technology into the classroom by using helpful Internet sites, videos, and other audiovisual resources. Exposing students to new technologies can better prepare them for future job prospects and for assisting their children with schoolwork.
- 8 In order to help students become more informed, empowered, and engaged citizens, citizenship teachers should provide them with activities that foster deeper understanding of U.S. history and government beyond the required 96 questions.
- 9 Citizenship teachers should empower students to access community resources, government agencies, and elected officials to their advantage. Students can be asked to select places from where guest speakers can be invited to a citizenship class to address topics that will connect students with new information and resources for themselves and their families.
- 10 Citizenship teachers should be encouraged and given time to network with other community service providers, congressional aides, and volunteer associations to strengthen the program. Specifically, teachers need to be linked to community advocates in order to learn about pending or passed legislation that impacts immigrants generally and students in class specifically. Students in class are a target audience for legislative advocacy information.
- 11 Citizenship educational programs should regularly seek support from volunteers as aides, tutors, or mentors. Volunteers should be given formal mechanisms to offer feedback to the host educational agency. Educational agencies should give volunteers recognition, including training, with hopes of making them paid staff on a full- or part-time basis.

ESL and Citizenship Program Models

By **Susan Wexler, LCSW**

Assistant Director

The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society of Chicago
Chicago, Illinois

An ESL and citizenship program is designed with the optimistic perspective that all immigrants are on a path to citizenship. A national citizenship program's success in hastening, increasing, and sustaining naturalization increases when educational and legal support systems help immigrants get on and stay on a path to citizenship, beginning at the time of arrival to this country.

A new immigrant to the United States is faced with an overwhelming array of challenges and opportunities, particularly immigrants with special needs, including those with low income, the elderly, the disabled, those with limited English proficiency, refugees, and asylees. Becoming a U.S. citizen through the naturalization process may be an immigrant's dream, but rather than identifying eligibility requirements and benefits soon after gaining lawful permanent residence, it is viewed as a distant, long-term goal. An ESL and citizenship program promotes the path to citizenship as a means of facilitating acculturation and integration by educating Lawful Permanent Residents about the eligibility requirements and benefits of obtaining citizenship early on.

Newly arriving immigrants are better able to meet and maintain naturalization eligibility when offered information and technical legal and educational supports early in the resettlement process. The USCIS and the Office of Citizenship in Washington, D.C., and district offices across the country need to establish and implement public-private partnerships among state and city governments, ESL and citizenship programs, charitable legal immigration programs, adult secondary schools and community colleges, social service agencies, employers and workplace development programs, religious organizations, and public facilities, such as libraries and community centers, to ensure timely access to naturalization information and assistance. Currently, the USCIS and its Office of Citizenship lack a method to systematically identify immigrants early in their residency and direct them to a full spectrum of citizenship services.

Collaboration among public and private organizations to assist new immigrants can lead to cost effective, non-duplicative services that ultimately support successful integration and naturalization. ESL and citizenship programs create an opportunity to promote a variety of immigration and integration issues beyond providing language acquisition instruction and naturalization test preparation courses. It is common for an ESL and citizenship teacher to be confronted by students of varying levels of integration and general life challenges. The student is well served and ultimately supported in his or her goal to become a U.S. citizen when teachers are trained to respond to the whole person through a social service perspective and are involved in referral relationships with social service providers.³⁴ (Teachers helping students review and study up to 96 questions and answers on the naturalization application may find they reveal, directly or indirectly, personal information that highlights their integration challenges.)

Components of an ESL and Citizenship Program

The ESL and citizenship program is ultimately part of a broad, comprehensive approach supporting the path to citizenship and links with these immigrant service components:

- Charitable legal immigration services providing screening for and completion of the Application for Naturalization (N-400) and accompanying documentation. Included is case management of the naturalization applicant starting with submission of the N-400 and lasting until the taking of the oath of allegiance. Case management involves tracking applicant's progress overcoming barriers to naturalization, data collection, and assessing the determinants in passing or failing a naturalization test and interview.
- Refugee resettlement programs;
- ESL, ESL/civics, and ESL/citizenship preparation classes, including mock naturalization interview preparation courses;
- Immigrant-focused social service agencies with a mission to facilitate immigrant employment, health, and education; and
- Community-based civic participation initiatives helping immigrants, prior to or after gaining citizenship status, to address local issues of concern. Activities might include community organizing for social change, testifying at public hearings, voter registration and voter turnout, and volunteer recruitment for charitable or political events.

Needs Assessment of Target Population

ESL and citizenship programs are rooted in information from a communitywide needs assessment of the targeted client population. Immigrant-focused community-based organizations may serve all immigrants regardless of race, religion, nationality, or ethnicity. This is also true of publicly funded adult education programs. Alternatively, they may seek to serve a specific ethnic group with staff reflecting the same backgrounds. In either case:

“Effective needs assessments generally focus on two levels: (1) community needs, defined in collaboration with other agencies serving the same group or community and (2) client or learner needs, collected through demographic data, focus groups, interviews, and surveys. Community needs assessment tends to focus on indicators such as employment and health issues, literacy and poverty rates, ethnic diversity, numbers of persons eligible to apply for naturalization, and other socio-economic indicators. Client needs assessment tends to focus on targeted learner

groups. Learner needs assessments may seek to establish reasons the targeted learners want to naturalize, their oral and literacy proficiency in English and the native language, when and where learners could benefit from using English in their daily lives, and where they currently use the target language. Life circumstances (age, employment, child care issues) are often examined as well, along with any special factors (such as trauma) that might impede or contribute to success.³⁵

Designing ESL and citizenship programs to the special needs of vulnerable students in and outside the classroom contributes to the potential success of the citizenship applicant. A tailored program design may: offer classes that are free or low-cost for low-income students, offer multiple locations and hours for convenience, be accessible to public or volunteer-supported transportation, and provide childcare. Determining these needs in advance through community assessment and student intake helps program managers identify gaps in services, duplication of services, and shared service among partnering agencies.

Menu of Program Choices

A menu of ESL and citizenship services should be available in all communities participating in a national citizenship program. They should be available from a cluster of community-based organizations, or preferably, from one program providing comprehensive services for its target population. Program choices arise from the tested English levels of learners with high probability to naturalize given supportive services. English levels frequently served in ESL and citizenship classes include:

- Beginning stages of oral English proficiency,
- High beginning and low advanced oral and written English proficiency levels, and
- Advanced oral and written English proficiency.

Programs may offer classroom-based instruction, individual tutoring within an open classroom, intensive in-home tutoring, one-shot seminars or reviews of a few hours, mock naturalization test preparation courses, and self-study materials. Creative programs may seek to offer ESL and citizenship instruction briefly through workplace ESL training funded by state and local governments seeking to bridge specific career paths through vocational ESL instruction.³⁶

Programs may offer a specific citizenship course in a native language for immigrants eligible to take the naturalization test in a non-English language because they meet extended age and residency requirements. Such students still need the program options and services mentioned above but with instruction in a first language. Students with physical and

mental disabilities or psychological impairments may be exempt from taking the naturalization test altogether by having USCIS approve a Medical Certification for Disability Exceptions (N-648), but still need assistance with interview preparation in their native language.

Collaboration among service providers facilitates referral and allows for accommodating a variety of student needs. “By working together, these collaborations encourage sharing of effective practices and an efficient division of labor based on areas of expertise.”³⁷

Effective ESL and citizenship programs use instructional tools to assess student’s progress in learning English, knowledge of civics and history, and skills for a naturalization interview. Standardized assessment tools, implemented at the beginning, middle, and end of the learning process, are essential for teacher and student feedback and provide motivation for student retention. Utilization of the mock or practice interview is appropriate for both initial assessment and the final evaluation of test and interview readiness. In addition to student evaluation, assessment provides valuable information for program adaptation where needed. Teacher evaluations by students in English and native languages are an important and respectful, but often overlooked, tool for program improvements.

Outreach and Promotion

An optimal citizenship program connects early with all newly arrived immigrants and maintains contact throughout the first five years of residency. During this period, immigrants receive information about eligibility requirements and referrals to supportive services for citizenship preparation. Theoretically, this proactive approach minimizes the need for targeted outreach later when residency eligibility is finally achieved. In addition, early contact with information and referrals helps prevent activities that will make someone permanently or conditionally ineligible. Currently, the federal government has no system alone or in partnership with community-based organizations for early contact. An exception is the refugee resettlement program, in which sponsoring agencies conduct early arrival orientation, and information about eligibility requirements and benefits of citizenship can be easily offered. However, there should be more uniformity in how refugee resettlement agencies help prepare refugee clients, with eligibility information, adjustment of status applications, and ESL and citizenship classes throughout the first five years of residency, as well as naturalization application assistance at the earliest possible date.

To achieve this proactive model, community-based organizations need federal, state, and philanthropic support to reach potential students through culturally and linguistically appropriate venues, including immigrant housing centers,

schools, places of worship, social service agencies, health care facilities, community centers, and worksites. Outreach tools include flyers, posters, brochures, ethnic radio and television announcements, and ethnic print media stories and advertisements. Program managers should ensure that vulnerable populations, such as the elderly, the disabled, women at home, shut-ins, low literate adults, and nationalities that naturalize at low rates, are not overlooked.

From the late 1990s until 2005, immigrants could expect USCIS to take up to 16 months to process a naturalization application. This extended waiting period offered limited English speakers more time to study English, U.S. history, and civics. In 2006 USCIS is able to schedule a test and interview in ten months or less after receiving an application. Thus, students requiring classroom study must preferably do so before an application is filed, or at the least, immediately thereafter. Early preparation is a goal of outreach for vulnerable populations.

Citizenship program managers can assess the effectiveness of outreach strategies by asking, tallying, and analyzing how each student or applicant learned about the program's services. Teachers or intake workers can ask students and applicants for ideas for new outreach methods. Celebrating a student's success in becoming a citizen before an audience of family, neighbors, friends, and coworkers is an excellent outreach strategy, as is the normal word-of-mouth advertisement that successful students send when they pass the naturalization test and take the oath of allegiance.

Civic Participation and ESL/Citizenship

ESL and citizenship program managers have many responsibilities: to fund a program; hire, retain, and train staff; implement a comprehensive outreach strategy; and ensure student success and satisfaction. In addition to these duties, they need to capitalize on the ideal setting available to teach immigrants community participation and civic engagement. These activities are included in a curriculum that teaches the individual and collective benefits of citizenship and the measures of responsible citizenship. Indeed, the United States has a century-long history of pairing English language instruction with civics education. The immigrant-assistance community needs to learn the positive lessons of this tradition and infuse its services with new ideas that promote integration at these sophisticated levels. In 2006 federal funds are available to states as grants to community colleges, adult basic education programs, and community-based organizations to teach English literacy and civics education.³⁸

While citizenship preparation focuses on completing the naturalization process, civic participation education focuses on:

“the way that members of a community interact with the social, political, and educational structures around them. ... assisting learners to understand how and why to become informed participants in their communities. A key element of civic participation education for adult English language learners is that learning needs to have real-life consequences. One of its purposes is for learners to become active in community life. For example, learners might collaborate to fight for a community improvement, learn about and participate in the American electoral system (if appropriate), or join the local Parent Teacher Association (PTA).”³⁹

ESL/civics and ESL/citizenship curricula often have purposes, students, and content in common. Yet federal to state funding for ESL/civics instruction is not consistently linked to the naturalization process. Citizenship classes are also not necessarily infused with the right level or balance of civics for the needs of adult learners. The two program models and overlapping student populations need to be better understood by funders and providers. The challenge is for both to meet the student's learning goals while also teaching beyond the curricula or test for civic learning and engagement purposes as students desire.

Linking Students to Application Assistance and Legal Case Management

“Teachers must distinguish between the educational and the legal aspects of citizenship preparation.”⁴⁰ Aliza Becker, citizenship curricula author, and Marketa Lindt, immigration attorney, describe the following elements of the citizenship teacher's role: “Teaching the benefits of citizenship; education about the naturalization process; preparation for the oral and written exams including teaching language skills, culture, content, test-taking strategies, and instilling confidence; empowerment; and *referrals* for legal advice. It is important that the teacher not assume the role of legal advisor ...”⁴¹

Citizenship students are best served when teachers and legal immigration counselors collaborate. Collaboration can occur between departments of one agency or different agencies offering these separate services. Too often, citizenship students only receive eligibility review and application assistance from teachers without the benefit of legal expertise. The applicant is left to manage the steps of the naturalization process without further assistance. Under these circumstances, the ESL and citizenship teacher can

serve as a liaison between the student and legal immigration referral source, a private immigration attorney, or charitable legal immigration program.

Comprehensive legal immigration assistance for naturalization must include: 1) initial legal screening or intake, 2) assessment of all eligibility requirements ending with taking the oath of allegiance, 3) thorough explanation of consequences to every answer on the application, 4) identification of barriers or temporary ineligibilities that can be overcome, 5) identification of permanent ineligibilities that require the applicant to not apply or withdraw an application, and 6) legal representation before USCIS if needed. Legal representation can help an applicant resolve problems of delays or improper adjudication by USCIS. Legal counselors may be attorneys or BIA-accredited representatives working for a nonprofit, charitable agency. Both types of counselors must be familiar with immigration law, specifically naturalization, and the practices of the local USCIS office.

The lack of legal immigration consultation and application assistance leaves applicants at risk of unexpected, undesired consequences, which can fall into three denial categories. First, an applicant may be determined ineligible by USCIS due to a deficiency, like insufficient language ability that needs to be improved, and lose the \$400 filing fee. Second, an applicant may be determined ineligible due to lacking good moral character, evidenced by lack of paying child support or taxes, and be unable to reapply for a five year period. Third, and most consequential, is when an applicant is determined permanently ineligible, often because of committing a major legal offense or “aggravated felony,” resulting in the applicant being immediately placed in removal proceedings.

ESL and citizenship teachers and BIA-accredited representatives are natural allies based on their shared mission to serve needy people in the community, specifically the foreign-born. A national citizenship program will help forge stronger programmatic ties providing comprehensive, wrap-around services. This alliance will require a greater degree of case management between providers. The result of greater collaboration and case management should be a higher naturalization and approval rate for vulnerable immigrants.

Post-Naturalization Follow Up: A Celebration of New Citizens

A comprehensive ESL and citizenship program views the path to citizenship as extending beyond an applicant taking the oath of allegiance. However, follow-up with a student after filing an application is challenging. Applicants who pass through the naturalization process with general ease rarely keep in touch with their teacher or legal counselor. More typically, it is an applicant experiencing delays or

unnoticed eligibility problems who initiates contact. Even so, a student may not consistently notify a teacher or counselor after the problem is resolved.

This scenario makes case management systems all the more important. Students can be given token incentives to confirm their citizenship status, or outreach workers can make phone calls to confirm it. An option is for funders to give programs a small monetary bonus for documenting each student’s receipt of a naturalization certificate. (The state of Florida’s Refugee Naturalization Project from 2000 to 2003 offered its grantees a \$60 bonus for each client completing a naturalization oath.)

Hundreds of thousands of immigrants become citizens under the radar of community awareness. Obtaining citizenship status should be a public celebration in the classroom and in other community settings, especially when immigrants have labored many hours to study. Community-based organizations should institutionalize recognition of new citizens by partnering with USCIS and federal courts to bring guest speakers to naturalization oath ceremonies, distribute important public information, complete passport applications and voter registration cards, and refer people to civic engagement and volunteer opportunities. In addition, community-based organizations can host separate parties for its graduating students with current students in attendance. Inviting successful citizenship students back to the classroom provides an ideal occasion to recognize the new citizen and offer role models to ongoing students. Ultimately, new citizens become the best outreach workers and spokespersons on the benefits of citizenship.

Funding and Sustainability

Students with limited English proficiency may require one year to complete an ESL and citizenship class, and longer, for literacy development. Therefore, funding for these programs must be long term and sufficient to support and sustain the multiple services required to implement a comprehensive ESL and citizenship program. Historically, state and private funding sources have carried the primary responsibility for such services, while federal funding has been minimal. In 2006 the Department of Education’s ESL/civics education program provides up to \$70 million for community colleges, adult basic education programs, and less frequently, community-based organizations.

Illinois has served as a national model in promoting the acculturation and ultimately the naturalization of its immigrant residents. In 1995 the Illinois Department of Human Services established the Refugee and Immigrant Citizenship Initiative (RICI). More than a decade later, Illinois continues to support ESL and citizenship service providers through RICI funds. Also funded under the auspices of the Illinois Department of Human Services is a second project, the New Americans Initiative (NAI). The

NAI is a targeted campaign of outreach, education, and application assistance focused on reaching the 348,000 Lawful Permanent Residents in Illinois who are currently eligible to apply to become citizens and the 142,000 who will become eligible in the near future.⁴²

Each Illinois program promotes collaboration among educators, community-based organizations, and charitable legal immigration providers in order to avoid unnecessary duplication, share expertise, and provide technical assistance. Ample and sustained funding is needed to develop a comprehensive citizenship service infrastructure at the local level. Currently this infrastructure encompasses a targeted outreach to ethnic communities and includes a paid media campaign, paid professional training and development for teachers, volunteers and program managers, technical assistance to educators and community-based organizations, and funding for the development of standardized materials that incorporate program and curriculum standards.⁴³

On the federal, state, and city level, funding for workforce development has typically focused on vocational training. Innovative programming could be designed to extend ongoing support to the immigrant in the workforce by funding coordination between the workforce development system and the adult education system.⁴⁴ Such programming would incorporate ESL training with job skills training, job readiness assistance, vocational education, and ultimately citizenship preparation.

On some level, the federal government through the Office of Citizenship is obliged to support ESL and citizenship programming, if not through direct funding, then through its own production of supportive materials. Bilingual outreach and education materials about the importance of civic participation and naturalization can be made available through printed and web-based formats. With the pending implementation of the revised citizenship test, the role of the Office of Citizenship and federal funding for revision of programming at the local levels will be critical.

Local and national private foundations, working to support acculturation of immigrants, coalition building of diverse populations, and education of the underprivileged, are also potential resources for ESL and citizenship program funding. In the past ten years, private funders created initiatives, such as the Fund for Immigrants and Refugees and the Emma Lazarus Fund, specifically for support of immigrant and refugee concerns. Larger foundations, such as the Fannie Mae Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Carnegie Foundation, and the Joyce Foundation have dedicated substantial financial support for citizenship-related projects in the past.

ESL and citizenship programs must be creative in cultivating new funding sources that support civic participation, diversity, adult education, workforce development, and acculturation of immigrants. Program managers must be prepared to advocate for funding by putting a human face on the aspiring new citizen and demonstrating successful outcomes from collaborative efforts to provide ESL and citizenship assistance.

Programs must capitalize on national developments that impact immigrants, such as the current immigration policy debate, and be prepared to frame the need for ESL and citizenship funding in just such a context. According to the newspaper, *The Post and Courier*, in Charleston, N.C., the prospect of immigration reform and attention to illegal immigration has been a motivator for many eligible Lawful Permanent Residents, who have put off applying for naturalization and are now recognizing the importance of voting to impact the policies that affect their lives personally:

Efforts by Congress and local governments to crack down on illegal immigration—and the protests that followed those efforts—have produced a surge of interest in learning how to become a U.S. citizen.

More of the nation's 8 million legal immigrants are showing up at citizenship classes and seminars sponsored by churches and community groups.

... Applications for naturalization have increased since December, when the House bill was approved. The Homeland Security Department received 53,390 applications for naturalization in January, 23 percent more than the same month a year earlier. In February, that number rose to 57,056.

... The department's Citizenship and Immigration Services office also saw a record number of visits to its Web site in March and is experiencing heavy downloads of immigration forms, including 162,000 naturalization forms, said spokesman Christopher Bentley.⁴⁵

ESL and citizenship programs, which are currently challenged to compete for fewer dollars, must appeal to the common goal of more fully integrating the foreign-born into American society. Keeping funders informed about program accomplishments and involving funders in program activities such as ESL and citizenship classes and naturalization oath ceremonies can help to demonstrate directly how funding impacts the individual, the community, and the country. In addition, funders can become spokesmen and advocates about the need for expanded ESL and citizenship programming and for the additional dollars to implement these programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1 ESL and citizenship programs should support and facilitate the path to citizenship through early outreach and education to Lawful Permanent Residents about the eligibility requirements and benefits of obtaining citizenship.
- 2 ESL and citizenship programs need to create an opportunity to identify a variety of immigration and acculturation issues beyond language acquisition and citizenship preparation. For instance, teachers are trained to respond to the whole person through a social services perspective.
- 3 In addition to test and interview preparation, ESL and citizenship program curriculum should be designed to encourage and support civic participation as an integral part of becoming an active and responsible citizen.
- 4 ESL and citizenship programs and teachers must network with community-based organizations or legal immigration programs, as well as local USCIS offices, to stay up-to-date on all naturalization laws, regulations, and procedures, and join in local and national advocacy efforts.
- 5 ESL and citizenship programs should partner with community-based organizations or legal immigration programs to provide case management and oversight of the citizenship application process—from assistance with completing the application, to legal support, to citizenship preparation services, to interview and ultimately oath—with supportive intervention and assistance at any point when needed.
- 6 ESL and citizenship programs should offer affordable and accessible classes with a wide variety of schedules and locations, supported by public or volunteer transportation and childcare services.
- 7 Various ESL and citizenship program modes should be available, including classroom settings, individual intensive tutoring, one-shot seminars and reviews, and stand-alone practice interviews to accommodate a variety of student needs.
- 8 ESL and citizenship programs should provide classroom or out-of-the-classroom volunteer services in basic ESL literacy to help individuals with longer term potential for attaining citizenship. (Volunteer recruitment is an opportunity to match naturalized and native-born citizens with future citizens.) Learners outside the classroom should be tracked under a case management system to ensure that citizenship is achievable at the next scheduled naturalization interview.
- 9 Volunteers as well as paid teachers should be trained and supervised to ensure quality service and maximum utilization in a variety of settings.

In-Class Curricula Priorities for Integrated Citizenship Program Models

By **Gretchen Bitterlin**

ESL Professor

San Diego Continuing Education Program, San Diego
Community College District
San Diego, California

The criteria for becoming a citizen are written in U.S. law and regulation and are the same regardless of where an immigrant resides; yet the naturalization exam is administered differently among USCIS district offices. Even more different is the variety of citizenship preparation programs across the country. Some programs are stand-alone citizenship classes while others also include basic and intermediate levels of English as a second language instruction. Since ability in reading, writing, and speaking a basic level of English is a major criterion to become a citizen, English as a second language instruction needs to be integrated with citizenship preparation.

Three initiatives will help create integrated citizenship program models. First, there needs to be a standardized naturalization exam. Second, there needs to be a national citizenship curriculum. Third, there needs to be a national citizenship program providing funding, instructional materials, and technical support to create integration citizenship instruction programs.

Most learners studying for their naturalization test typically do not enroll in citizenship classes until shortly before their scheduled interview with the USCIS. Even if learners have an extended period of time to prepare for the exam, they are primarily interested in studying topics on the test. The curriculum must first and foremost address learner needs to know: 1) all naturalization test questions and answers, 2) the meaning of the oath of allegiance, 3) skills to pass the English requirements, and 4) legal and administrative details about the naturalization test as it pertains to their specific case. While curricula should attempt to include broad information supportive of immigrant integration and civic engagement, it must chiefly support the learning needs of adult learners who wish to become citizens. Curriculum writers and instructors must always bear in mind that adult learners must see the relevance of what they are studying to the goals in their everyday lives.

Early preparation for the naturalization exam is likely to become more important to immigrants and teachers. The USCIS may require Lawful Permanent Residents in the future to pass the naturalization test before filing an application for citizenship and receiving a scheduled interview. USCIS's current practice is to have them file an application and receive a scheduled naturalization

interview, at which time the test is also conducted. USCIS expects to achieve greater efficiency in its application processing through upfront testing by screening out people in advance who cannot pass the test and fail to meet the necessary requirements.

Upfront testing would require Lawful Permanent Residents to study naturalization test material in advance of filing an application. No longer could they depend on filing an application, triggering an expected interview date, to begin studying. This reverse process will place more responsibility on Lawful Permanent Residents and community-based organizations providing citizenship services to prompt people to enroll in citizenship classes. Outreach for citizenship will become even more important than today, thus creating a greater need for a national citizenship program to be implemented.

Currently, the naturalization test includes content on the history and government of the United States, including local government, reflected in 96 open-ended questions. The test also includes questions dictated to the applicant to examine English comprehension, and oral and writing skills. The test for comprehension and oral skills also includes questions taken from the 12 parts of the N-400 application form.

Classroom curricula should include many oral exercises since the testing format requires considerable oral skills. For beginning learners, one of the most difficult parts of the citizenship exam is responding orally to multiple questions about the information on the N-400 application. Therefore, the curricula should teach vocabulary that relates directly to the answers and responses associated with the N-400 application form.

In addition to containing specific content related to the citizenship exam, the curricula should focus on the skills needed for effective performance on the test. Although knowing all the necessary history and government information, the learner may struggle to understand the questions asked orally and to articulate the answers, at the risk of failing the exam. Perhaps the two most important skills are listening and speaking, since the bulk of the exam is an oral interview. Citizenship curricula should include, for example, multiple exercises in which students have to interpret the differences between “Wh” questions, such as: “**When** was the Declaration of Independence signed?” “**Where** was the document signed?”

Pronunciation is another critical skill that needs to be taught, particularly how to adjust one’s intonation when not understood. To prepare learners for testing of reading comprehension and for writing answers in a multiple choice exam, reading and test taking skills need to be part of the curricula. Writing from dictation is another skill that must be taught.

Another skill required in a curriculum is interpersonal communication to respond to different characteristics of USCIS examiners. Some are friendly and casual in their demeanor. Others are less friendly in their tone and posture. If the examiners do not make eye contact or face the applicants when they are asking questions, the applicants may have difficulty comprehending what the examiners are asking them because they cannot see their lips. The applicants may also misunderstand the formality of the examiners and think that the examiners do not like them when actually the examiners are following standardized procedures required of all examiners.

Cultural differences may also mislead the examiners. In some cultures, it is very impolite to look people of authority in the eye and more polite to look down. If an applicant does this, the examiner may think the applicant is hiding something or being disrespectful. Applicants will have a much better chance of passing the exam when teachers include a review of cultural differences in interview protocol and practice appropriate body language and interview skills.

Teaching communication strategies is also very important because they are vehicles for maintaining conversations and improving communication. For example, students need to study the language patterns for requesting clarification, such as: “Did you say when or where?” Learners need to know how to introduce themselves and use small talk on everyday topics during the interview. They need to know the language patterns for defining terminology or explaining concepts. Sometimes examiners will say, “Can you explain what that means?” Students need to say, “‘Bear arms’ means to fight for my country.” Knowing nonverbal language to clarify meaning also is helpful. When examiners ask what an “oath” is, applicants can demonstrate that by raising their right hand as they explain the term. The function of reporting events in the past is important. The learner frequently has to relate personal history or a sequence of past events. As a result, the exercise of describing a series of events in the past tense needs to be part of the curricula.

Many learners with restricted English speaking, reading and writing abilities often lack basic literacy skills in their native language because of their limited educational backgrounds or lack of sufficient experience with a non-Roman alphabet. Curricula for these learners needs to include materials and exercises that build literacy and handwriting skills. Exercises appropriate for these learners include building citizenship-related vocabulary words, copying sentences on a line, and taking dictation of spoken sentences. Strategies for sounding out words by decoding letters and sounds, such as consonants or short and long vowels, are also helpful.

Since learners with limited literacy skills are usually few in number in a citizenship class, preparation materials need to be leveled so that less literate learners can progress in a multilevel class. With materials at different literacy levels, the teacher can group students with similar abilities together or have cross-ability groups where higher level students are paired with less literate students and help these students as needed. Teachers cannot always teach these literacy skills directly in a multilevel class; the curriculum materials need to be designed for individual use as well as for whole class instruction. Magnetic card readers are useful in a multilevel class. Lower level students can slide flash cards with words through the magnetic reader, hearing the word and seeing it, and then recording their own voices. By using headphones, this activity does not disturb the rest of the class.

Learners in citizenship classes often lack one or more of the skills above. Therefore, they may lack confidence in themselves to further their studies and quit, or they may be extremely anxious about taking the exam. Instruction should identify learner strengths and take steps to build personal confidence. Practice or mock interviews and tests are very important to give learners a nonconsequential experience in taking the exam. It is important for learners to know the high pass rate for the exam, especially on the second attempt, even for low literate learners who study.

Citizenship curricula also need to be designed to accommodate a variety of delivery modes. Besides whole class instruction, learners can be assigned one-on-one or in pairs to a tutor. Tutors can continue their assistance outside of the classroom. Another possibility is an individualized language lab in which a learner studies alone on a computer, using a cassette player and earphones, through distance education models or via an online class. If learners are studying through a distance education model, they may come to school only to check out materials every week and return to the school only for brief progress checks with an instructor or aide. Materials for this mode of delivery need to include specific directions on how to study the lessons and what exercises to complete to demonstrate comprehension of the content. Obviously, these models require a variety of take-home materials: flash cards, audio cassette tapes or CDs, videos or DVDs, and web-based exercises and practice tests.

For some learners, instruction is best delivered bilingually. For example, older learners qualifying for the 50/20 or 55/15 exemptions from taking a portion of the exam in English can take the history and government portion of the exam in their native language. Of course, such instruction can only be bilingual if all the students in a class speak the same native language. Even if older learners do not qualify for the 50/20 or 55/15 exemptions, they sometimes can learn the content faster in English if they first have the opportunity to learn it in their native language.

For learners who have limited educational backgrounds, “learning to learn” skills need to be included in the curriculum. These skills include strategies for organizing learning materials, such as keeping handouts in a binder and taking notes to study for a test. Students also need to learn how to make personal word lists of new words, how to do certain types of practice exercises, such as multiple choice or fill in the blank, and how to research information related to citizenship. Since all USCIS appointments are made online through InfoPass, learners need to learn how to navigate the Internet and use the USCIS website. Since there are many websites with citizenship curricula, learners also need to learn how to use the computer to access those exercises. In addition to the computer, language master machines, which are a type of magnetic card reader, and video are very useful tools for practicing language required on the citizenship exam.

In the ideal citizenship class, after whole class instruction with the teacher, students can break into groups to practice different tasks. Some students can practice history and government questions and answers with flash cards. Others may role play the USCIS interview and videotape themselves, while others may be reviewing key vocabulary on a section of the N-400, using a magnetic card reader, such as the language master machine.

Essential to any citizenship curriculum are assessment tools that measure mastery of the content and skills that are required for the exam. It is important, however, that assessment tools measure what is being assessed on the actual exam required at USCIS. If the learners must participate in an oral interview, then the curricula should include practice oral interviews. With a national citizenship plan in place and a national standardized test, curriculum and assessment materials could be developed that directly prepare students for the citizenship exam.

Ideally, there should be different testing options to demonstrate knowledge of U.S. history and civics. Students from countries with a strong oral tradition for learning typically have lower literacy skills. Similarly, students with educational backgrounds that rely more on reading and writing typically have a more difficult time with speaking. The Office of Citizenship should study different testing options in consultation with testing and language experts. A variety of assessment tools can then be created to support these options.

Effective citizenship curricula should also include a comprehensive teacher’s guide that instructs the teacher how to use the preparation materials to their fullest and use multiple resources to create an integrated citizenship course. Components of this guide may include the following:

- Syllabi (sequence of course topics) for short or long courses to accommodate learners who have citizenship exams within a few weeks or within a few months;
- A model lesson plan;
- Instructions for facilitating all the activities within the curricula, as in paired and small group activities, role plays, and cooperative learning exercises;
- Strategies for grouping students in a multilevel class;
- Strategies for using volunteers or aides in and outside of the classroom;
- Teaching tips for specific parts of the curriculum; and
- Answer keys.

The teacher’s manual should also provide the steps for techniques that help integrate English skill development with mastery of the competencies to pass the citizenship exam. For example, after learning about “how often” we elect the President of the United States, learners can practice other questions beginning with “how often” in paired activities, such as: “How often do you exercise?” “How often do you pay your rent?”

Following the implementation of a national, standardized curriculum, the Office of Citizenship should study the feasibility of allowing students to successfully complete a USCIS-certified course that includes competency requirements; thereby substituting the course for taking the traditional naturalization test. By substituting successful class completion, including competency requirements, Lawful Permanent Residents will be more motivated to learn more historical and U.S. value-based content.

The option of substituting the exam with a course was implemented by the former Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) in 1991. INS contracted with six private testing services, which in turn subcontracted with various entities willing to provide classroom instruction and testing and issue course completion certificates. The initiative collapsed when testing fraud by one INS contractor and some of its subcontractors was uncovered by the media and investigated by congressional hearings and the Office of Inspector General.

Unfortunately, INS had not limited the types of organizations that could deliver instruction and testing services. An array of commercial for-profits were included, as well as well-established nonprofits that had a mission to serve immigrants. Nonprofits serving immigrants were not implicated in the scandal and the system would have worked if nonprofits had exclusively been awarded contracts. The initiative would have worked even better if INS had only permitted subcontracts with public adult

basic education schools, community colleges, and BIA-recognized nonprofits. Furthermore, INS did not have sufficient funds or staff to monitor contract compliance with its certified entities.

The collapse of the initiative damaged hundreds of credible institutions helping hundreds of thousands of Lawful Permanent Residents to become citizens. These institutions no longer had a desired service to provide, thereby stemming their access to immigrant communities and triggering the loss of much-needed revenue. At the same time, hundreds of thousands of future citizens who have limited English skills no longer had a means to learn U.S. history, government, and values comprehensively.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1 Citizenship curricula should be developed based on varying levels of language proficiency, ranging from low beginner to high intermediate ESL, levels frequently found among students attending citizenship classes.
- 2 Following the development of a standardized naturalization test, the Office of Citizenship should partner with experienced citizenship educators to standardize the citizenship curricula.
- 3 ESL and citizenship experts should develop citizenship curricula, rising from a standardized national curricula, for different delivery modes, including individualized learning labs, distance education, and online learning.
- 4 Citizenship curricula developed for national use should be accompanied by a comprehensive teacher’s guide that provides sample exercises for all suggested learning activities.
- 5 Citizenship curricula should include the language functions used most in the course of a naturalization interview rather than focus exclusively on the content-based material of the history and civics test.
- 6 Citizenship curricula should include a pronunciation component to prepare students for the English oral demands of a USCIS naturalization interview. The curricula should also include listening to different accents and intonations that could possibly be used by USCIS examiners who are nonnative English speakers.
- 7 Citizenship curricula should include practice exercises on interpersonal skills and cultural behaviors deemed important for successful interviewing skills.
- 8 Citizenship curricula should include exercises focusing on the language functions required for the test at USCIS, including phrases like “Please repeat,” “Did you say,” and “I’m sorry, I didn’t understand you.”
- 9 Citizenship curricula should include strategies for remembering new vocabulary and using the words effectively when taking a test or undertaking an interview.

- 10 Citizenship curricula should be translated into non-English languages dominant among immigrant populations to support bilingual instruction that benefits learners qualifying for the 55/15 and 50/20 exemptions.
- 11 The Office of Citizenship should subcontract with language assessment specialists to develop assessment tools for teachers to measure core competencies required in the naturalization process.
- 12 The Office of Citizenship should produce citizenship and immigrant integration materials that are written at a low literacy level for immigrants with the greatest English language challenge. The Office of Citizenship should create parallel materials for people with a higher literacy level to match the English language ability of immigrants who have completed a secondary education or higher. This will ensure that federal immigrant integration materials match the cluster of immigrant language ability from very high to low in the United States.
- 13 The Office of Citizenship should establish, or promote through a grant, the creation of a national clearinghouse of citizenship and immigrant integration materials and resources. The materials need to be consistently updated and upgraded according to new realities. They should also be easily accessible and free of charge to organizations and individual users.
- 14 The Office of Citizenship should commission a study of alternative testing options that accommodate learners with different learning styles or backgrounds.
- 15 The Office of Citizenship should commission a study to investigate the feasibility of a federally controlled course completion requirement as a substitute for passing the USCIS history and civics content of the naturalization test to encourage immigrants with low literacy to apply for citizenship and acquire greater knowledge and experience not easily obtained otherwise.

Current Funding of Adult Basic Education/ESL Services

By **Lynne Weintraub**

ESL/Citizenship Coordinator

Jones Library ESL Center

Independent Consultant for Curriculum Development and Immigrant Advocacy

Amherst, Massachusetts

and

Linda Taylor

Director of Assessment Development

Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS)

San Diego, California

Funding for General Adult ESL Services

Adult English as a second language (ESL) services in the United States are funded through a patchwork of federal, state, and local government agencies, and to a lesser extent by some nonprofit organizations and private entities. A major source of funding is the U.S. Department of Education, which provides approximately \$561 million annually through the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). This funding is authorized under the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), and was enacted as Title II of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998. The purpose of the program is to provide educational opportunities to adults 16 and older, not currently enrolled in school, who lack a high school diploma or the basic skills to function effectively in society or who are unable to speak, read, or write the English language.⁴⁶

WIA funding is distributed according to a formula to individual states, which competitively award grants to public agencies and private nonprofit entities such as community-based organizations (24 percent), community colleges (17 percent), and public school systems (54 percent). States retain 17.5 percent of the federal allocation for administrative expenses (5 percent) and program improvement activities (12.5 percent), such as professional development for instructors.⁴⁷

Nearly half of the participants in WIA-funded programs are immigrants who are studying English as a second language and basic literacy skills.⁴⁸ A separate portion of this federal funding (\$70 million) is earmarked for “English language/civics” services. Intended for adult immigrants, EL/civics programs provide English language and literacy instruction in combination with civics educa-

tion. However, the definition of “civics education” has been interpreted broadly in most states and the funding is often used for general ESL instruction, which may or may not include citizenship preparation. (EL/civics funding is currently approved on an annual basis. It has not been fully incorporated into the Workforce Investment Act appropriation.) WIA-funded programs serve over one million immigrant students. Half of these students are between the ages of 25 and 44, and an additional 20 percent are 45 years of age or older. Students in these programs are predominantly Hispanic (71 percent) or Asian (14 percent).

WIA providers offer instruction at a variety of different types of sites, including public schools, adult learning centers, faith-based facilities, community colleges, learners’ places of work, and libraries. Most of these programs offer classroom instruction, but one-to-one volunteer instruction and Internet-based distance learning options are also available in some states.

Sites at which WIA-Funded Providers Offered Basic Adult ESL Instruction (FY 2003)⁴⁹

Type of site	Percentage of providers offering some instruction at this type of site
Public school	57%
Adult learning center (single use facility)	46%
Community center (multiple use facility)	40%
Adult correctional facility	36%
Faith-based facility	29%
Learner’s place of work in space provided by employer	26%
Community college	25%
Library	24%
Learner’s home	13%

About 80 percent of the instructors in these programs are employed part-time. Many states require that instructors receive a minimum number of in-service training hours each year. Nearly 75 percent of programs reported in 2003 that their instructors participated in some kind of staff development activities.⁵⁰

WIA-funded programs spend approximately \$800 per student annually. Federal dollars make up about one-quarter of these funds, and the remainder comes from state and local sources. However, the share of funds provided by state and local sources varies widely across states. According to a 2006 CBS news report, for each of its residents with limited English proficiency, Michigan spends about \$190 on adult education, while Nevada spends less than \$5.⁵¹ In some states, federal funding varies from as

much as 75 percent to as little as 10 percent of the total spent per participant. States must match 25 percent of the federal contribution with state or local funds, but many states contribute considerably more. For example, Florida, Michigan, and California contribute about a 90 percent share of their WIA program budgets through state and local appropriations.

Most adult education programs have small budgets. Half of providers receive \$200,000 or less to support their adult education programs. About half (47 percent) of providers in FY 2003 reported that a majority of their funding was contributed by states, while 33 percent indicated that a majority of their funds came from federal sources. Another 5 percent reported that local government contributed a majority of their funds.

A small number of WIA-funded programs receive additional funding from nonpublic sources, such as donations from foundations, corporations, or the general public.

Nonpublic Funds Received by WIA-Funded Programs (FY 2003)

Source	Percentage of programs that received any funding from this source
Foundation grants	17%
Civic and individual donations	15%
Corporate giving	11%
Fees charged to participants	8%
Fees charged to employers for literacy programs	5%

However, most programs receive in-kind donations of goods and services. More than three-quarters of programs receive donations of classroom space, for example, and half have received donations of computer hardware.⁵²

Another source of federal funding for adult ESL services is the Pell grant program. This funding provides need-based grants to low-income students to attend classes at community colleges and accredited technical schools. Pell grants may be used to pay for ESL courses; however, students are generally required to show evidence of the equivalent of secondary education in terms of an “ability to benefit” requirement, so primarily immigrants who have prior formal education are able to take advantage of this funding. The average award is around \$2,400.⁵³

Other sources of federal funding are sometimes used to pay for adult ESL services. Funding, in these instances, is often limited to serving a particular subset of the population, such as parents with young children, migrant farm

workers, individuals with disabilities, welfare recipients, elderly refugees, or dislocated workers. In most cases, funding is not targeted for language instruction per se, but is available for a range of services, of which ESL is one eligible activity.⁵⁴

Demand for adult ESL services is increasingly outpacing available resources in many regions of the country. Many programs report waiting lists of six months to a year for a classroom slot,⁵⁵ and some states now estimate that they are able to serve less than half of the immigrants who are in need of services.⁵⁶ Some waiting lists are so long that potential students give up enrolling in classes.⁵⁷ Compounding the problem is the fact that in some less urban areas, ESL classes are simply not available.⁵⁸ Limited information about existing programs also appears to be keeping immigrants from accessing language classes.⁵⁹ The 1995 National Household Education Survey found that about one quarter of the limited English speakers surveyed were interested in taking an ESL class, but had not done so in the past 12 months. Nearly 60 percent of these respondents reported that this was because they did not know of any available classes.⁶⁰

Funding for Targeted Citizenship Preparation Services

Although about two-thirds of federally funded adult education programs offer general adult ESL services, only a subset of these offers any type of citizenship preparation component. There are a number of model citizenship preparation programs around the country that are innovative and offer a wide range of services. However, these programs serve only a fraction of the people in need of citizenship services. Since federal and state funding sources for adult education do not generally provide financial incentives for targeted citizenship education, programs are not encouraged to recruit students to form citizenship preparation classes. In many government-funded ESL programs, when a student identifies citizenship preparation as a learning goal, a volunteer placement or distance learning option is made available. This is a minimal approach to citizenship services which falls short of providing the program components and quality of instruction we recommend.

In some areas where immigrants do not have access to government-funded citizenship education services, a few community organizations and private businesses have stepped in to fill the gap. In various places, ethnic self-help groups (mutual assistance associations), churches, and volunteer and nonprofit community groups charge a tuition fee for citizenship classes, or do considerable fund-raising in order to make their services possible. In some instances, employers or unions use their operating budgets to support citizenship classes for workers. But, by and large, these

efforts are isolated from the larger network of government-funded adult education providers. They do not have access to staff and curriculum development resources, teacher certification or program accreditation standards, or any form of support or oversight from the adult education field. Because of this, and because of the funding restraints they operate under, there are substantial differences between programs, in terms of the quality of services offered.

Finally, it is worth noting that some citizenship study is self-funded. Many naturalization applicants purchase their own study materials or software, and prepare for the test without any government or privately funded services. These individuals are more likely to succeed if they already have a high degree of proficiency in oral and written English, and if they have friends or family members who can assist them in their efforts. No data are available on the prevalence or effectiveness of self-study efforts, but a national citizenship initiative should take this option into account and assist individuals who prefer to self-study by ensuring that low-cost, quality self-study materials are widely accessible to applicants and by ensuring that applicants are able to access information and referrals should they run into difficulties.

Clearly, in order for a national citizenship initiative to be effective, an expansion of funding, availability, and publicity of ESL services will be necessary, but this is not all that will be needed. Current education funders must not only direct that a reasonable portion of adult education dollars be allocated for citizenship education, they must make the attainment of citizenship a “primary outcome measure” in the National Reporting System (NRS), with an emphasis comparable to that now placed on learning gains and other outcome measures. Citizenship preparation is currently a “secondary outcome measure” that is not officially counted for federal NRS accountability reporting.

Adult education funding agencies must incorporate citizenship test preparation into their curriculum frameworks and provide technical assistance to expand the capacity of ESL instructors, counselors, and support service providers in this area. Additionally, they must promote collaboration among ESL providers and between these providers and legal service providers to ensure access to proper screening and application assistance for all students who wish to naturalize. Simply incorporating citizenship instruction (such as civics content and interview practice) into existing ESL classes is not a possibility, because only a subset of students attending any general ESL class is eligible to apply for citizenship. Adult education programs need to offer separate citizenship test preparation options in addition to, or as an alternative to, general ESL offerings and do strategic local outreach to ensure that immigrants are aware that targeted citizenship classes are available to

them. For this reason, it may be necessary to create new streams of funding tailored specifically to the purpose of promoting the attainment of citizenship.

One state initiative is already doing this and can serve as a model for a national citizenship implementation plan. The Illinois Department of Human Services has built an effective infrastructure for citizenship services along with a provider network that offers services to diverse immigrant communities in the state.⁶¹ In the first state-funded program of its kind, the Refugee and Immigrant Citizenship Initiative has, since 1995, funded ESL and citizenship preparation, as well as application services to more than 100,000 immigrants throughout Illinois.⁶² In order to encourage efficiency and promote quality, providers are encouraged to cooperate and share services, information, and advocacy. This has resulted in an efficient division of labor based on areas of expertise, a more comprehensive range of services, and an overall higher quality of services than would normally be available to immigrant students. Highlights of this initiative include a state-wide citizenship hotline and referral service, classroom instruction as well as home-based tutoring, support services (such as childcare and transportation), bilingual teachers, customized instruction for special populations (such as those with low literacy, the elderly, and deaf students), case management, outstanding advocacy efforts, and a highly effective system for technical assistance for instructors.⁶³

In providing additional streams of funding for coordinated citizenship services, policy makers need to consider the question of which types of service providers are best equipped to provide ESL/citizenship instruction. This question and other important citizenship funding matters should be incorporated into the independent, blue-ribbon National Commission on Adult Literacy established in October, 2006. While larger, more established providers of adult education services are generally most effective in providing language and literacy instruction, ethnic organizations are often highly effective at performing outreach and providing counseling to specific immigrant populations (particularly in their native languages). For this reason, collaborations between adult education providers and ethnic organizations should be strongly encouraged by funders and policymakers planning a citizenship education initiative.

Building Capacity

Capacity is not only the ability to offer instruction in citizenship preparation, but to do so at an acceptable standard of excellence. A good first step toward developing and strengthening capacity on a national level would be to establish ESL and citizenship program standards to evaluate and certify both existing and new programs. Some states have already developed adult ESL program standards to varying degrees, and the international ESL teachers' professional organization, TESOL, has also done so.⁶⁴ But

program standards designed specifically for providers of citizenship instruction have never been developed. A national citizenship initiative could build capacity by initiating the development of clear program and instructional standards for ESL and citizenship services, in areas such as:

- Program components, structure, and administration;
- Curriculum, instruction, and materials;
- Class size and instructional hours;
- Student intake, screening, and placement procedures;
- Teacher qualifications and employment conditions;
- Teacher and volunteer training and evaluation; and
- Cost (if any) to students.

Such standards could be used by programs to plan more effective services and by funding agencies in making allocation decisions.

In evaluating program effectiveness, funders should identify the number of students who attain citizenship as a key measure of success, but this should not be the only one. Funders must also ensure that there are incentives for providers to do adequate screening and follow-up of problem naturalization cases, make referrals to other providers when appropriate (such as for specialized literacy services or legal assistance), and provide counseling, information, and application support, as needed, to students who are able to prepare for citizenship through self-study materials.

Another important area in which a national initiative could significantly boost capacity is that of teacher and tutor training materials. By developing citizenship preparation training modules, the initiative could help teachers and volunteers master the information and skills they need to ensure their students' success. A training module could provide program administrators and other support staff with the information to design, maintain, and build upon effective service delivery models. These training modules should be available both as a distance learning option (through the Internet or through audiovisual media) and through in-person presentations. Provisions would need to be made to update these training modules periodically as naturalization regulations, procedures, and testing requirements change.

In order to provide effective services, providers need clear channels of communication with USCIS field offices. Currently very few programs have an effective means for locating accurate and timely information, for example, on application and testing procedures, or for following up on problem cases. This can lead to dissemination of incomplete or misleading information by program staff in spite of

their best intentions. USCIS could boost capacity by establishing a mechanism for responding to requests for information from adult education providers. As part of this effort, it should also provide information on instructional, teacher/tutor training, and funding resources to adult education providers, and provide referrals for students to citizenship preparation services in their area.

A final issue of concern involves two related areas of need: increasing availability and access to citizenship preparation programs and increasing coordination of immigrant-related services in local geographical areas. In many local areas, existing instructional programs complain that they do not have enough students at one time interested in citizenship preparation courses to form a complete class, so they limit their offerings to tutoring or no services at all. However, if there were a way to pool the resources in a local geographical area, it is much more likely that citizenship preparation classes could be formed and that they could be at a high level of educational excellence.

One possible solution to this dilemma is to form citizenship coordinating councils around the country. The purpose of these councils would be to coordinate services within a geographical area and to identify areas of weakness and strength in service provision to immigrants. It is not possible to suggest one solution that will fit everywhere, since strengths and weaknesses in service provision vary greatly. For this reason, a customized local approach to service coordination is recommended. Funding for a network coordinator may be necessary in some geographical areas; the benefit of a paid staff person in this role is that this person can both spearhead the coordination efforts and work toward raising funds to address specific local needs. These councils should be tasked with: studying the specific needs and strengths of local programs, identifying and working to eliminate gaps in services, increasing capacity, and avoiding duplication of efforts within a given community.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1 Current funding streams for adult ESL services should be expanded in terms of numbers served and incorporate the attainment of citizenship as one of the primary objectives of instruction.
- 2 The U.S. Department of Education should clarify the instructional objectives of its EL/civics program and ensure that citizenship preparation is a primary activity, available to immigrant students in every state.
- 3 Current funding policies should reward states and programs for student progress in citizenship preparation as a primary outcome measure in the National Reporting System.
- 4 Federal funders of adult education and ESL services should require programs to incorporate naturalization

information into curriculum for students (particularly new arrivals) to ensure that eligible immigrants understand the citizenship process and can begin, even at the early stages of resettlement, to consider and plan for eventual naturalization.

- 5 New funding streams, specifically aimed at citizenship instruction, should be created.
- 6 Funders should consider positive outcomes in a broad sense when designing accountability measures for programs. In addition to rewarding classroom services that lead to successful naturalization applications, funders should also ensure that there are incentives for providers to do adequate screening and follow-up of problem naturalization cases, make referrals to other providers when appropriate (such as for specialized literacy services or legal assistance), and provide counseling, information, and application support, as needed, to students who are able to prepare for citizenship through self-study materials.
- 7 Funders and policymakers should, in consultation with experienced citizenship educators, establish reasonable program and instructional standards for citizenship providers in terms of: class size, teacher qualifications and pay, general curriculum components, application support services, and maximum costs (if any) to students.
- 8 Funding should be provided to create teacher and tutor training materials, which would be available on the Internet, preferably at no cost to service providers.
- 9 The Office of Citizenship should target a portion of citizenship funding for establishment of local citizenship coordinating councils that draw together immigration advocates and providers of citizenship services to ensure the broadest possible range of services (in terms service locations, scheduling options, support services, and customized services for special populations) and foster collective outreach, referral, advocacy, fund-raising, and technical assistance efforts.
- 10 The Office of Citizenship should create mechanisms for responding to inquiries and disseminating information (such as changes in application and testing procedures, instructional resources, and funding opportunities) to citizenship providers in an effective and timely manner.
- 11 Collaborative service delivery efforts between adult education providers and ethnic self-help organizations should be strongly encouraged by funders and policymakers planning a citizenship education initiative, since both types of organizations have particular strengths to contribute.

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