

COMMENTARIES¹

Preparing Naturalization Applicants for Active and Effective Civic Participation

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A broad spectrum of organizations, including both immigrant advocate groups and mainstream civic organizations, now believe the naturalization process should be more than a legal transition from residency to citizenship status. The view that programs should foster genuine civic engagement and, thereby, expand opportunities for new Americans to have a voice in local, state, and federal decision-making is one most of us share. But there has, to date, not been adequate attention to strategies for doing this. I argue that the first steps toward fulfilling the dream of preparing naturalization applicants for civic participation will be for educators, immigrant advocacy groups, and legal service providers to go beyond the basics, and build immigrant civic participation on the solid foundation of immigrants' experiences in the complex social networks that are a universal feature of human society.

Learning About Voice in a Democratic Society

Ironically, some of the richest conceptualizations of "voice" in democratic society come from dispassionate political scientists and sociologists (e.g. Verba, Scholzman, and Brady, 1995), while the imagination of progressives has been derailed by an understandable but short-sighted focus on the centrality of the ritual of voting as the primary pathway toward immigrant empowerment.

In contemporary America, one vote is not nearly as important as one genuine, passionate voice. As part of civic skills instruction, naturalization programs must provide their clients ample opportunities to reflect on their experiences, formulate and articulate their perspectives and opinions, and persuade others to listen to their points of view and, in matters of civic decision-making, come around to their point of view.

It is crucial for immigrants (especially those, like the Mexican farmworkers with whom I work, who have little schooling) to learn that one's own unique experiences are a valuable resource for participation in civic dialogue. For many, the proposition that we all know enough to have our say will be a radical but useful new concept. Classroom and program exercises involving naturalization applicants

in talking about personally important life experiences and perspectives can begin not only to build the foundation for active participation in civic dialogue but also strengthen self-confidence in interacting with people who "are coming from a different place" (such as USCIS adjudicators, nonimmigrant neighbors, and elected officials). What better basis could there be for actively participating in the now-burgeoning national political debate about the cost of migration (now dominated by anti-immigrant voices) than for immigrants to share with others painful experiences of crossing the Sonoran desert in excruciating heat? What better basis for discussion about expedient politicians (such as the governors of California, New Mexico, and Arizona) who seek to focus public dialogue on fiscal policy and, thereby, ignore the human tragedies of border enforcement strategy? What better basis for participation in local school board politics than for parents to compare and contrast their experiences with their children's good or bad teachers, or their own struggles in learning a new language? Or discussing experiences finding decent affordable housing, as a basis for getting involved in municipal government decisions?

Learning about the Power of Voices Joined Together

One single passionate voice sharing individual experiences, presenting a unique, novel perspective, explaining the realities of immigrants' lives in a nation riddled with inequities, countering opponents' misrepresentations of immigrants' lives, persuading fair-minded neighbors to stand up for immigrants' interests as well as their own, is worth 1,000 votes. An affiliational network of immigrants who have come together to address a common concern, promote a shared policy or legislative agenda, or persuade one or several elected or appointed officials to change their position can be worth 10,000 votes. Naturalization programs can and should stress how important organizational participation is as part of contemporary democracy. Not surprisingly, most immigrants are unfamiliar with the specific organizational landscape of the United States. Citizenship preparation must help immigrants understand how their own organizations (e.g. hometown associations/*clubes de oriundos*), labor unions, neighborhood associations, local membership organizations (such as the PTA) or national ones (such as AARP), and professional groups (such as the American Immigration Lawyers Association) play a crucial role in determining actual political outcomes in contemporary politics. If naturalization curriculum focuses only on voting, we will have unwittingly promoted a vision and practice of second-class citizenship and minimal civic participation.

Another important aspect of immigrants' learning about civic voice is that financial contributions, at the very least, amplify one's voice. Most naturalization applicants are poor but not so poor they can afford to ignore the need to assess and choose among competing candidates for elective office and contribute to those who share their concerns or who, at least, are willing to listen to their views. Contributions can be financial or in-kind, working as a volunteer in a campaign—either oriented toward promoting a cause (e.g. the DREAM Act) or a candidate. In the current environment in which money buys air time and the most loudly heard voices are those with access to air time, immigrants can honestly be told that financial or in-kind participation in democratic dialogue is part of one's civic duty.

Active Listening as Part of Civic Dialogue

American civic dialogue is exclusive in that a broad range of crucial decisions about social programs, taxes, and regulatory policy are highly technical and jargon-filled. The media have become, inevitably, the interpreters of arcane in-group babble, which substitutes for supposedly public discourse about civic life. In addition to stressing self-expression and participation in affiliational networks and organizations, naturalization programs must stress media awareness as being a necessary part of effective civic participation. Language is often a barrier but, happily, ethnic media outlets are growing rapidly throughout the United States. Part of this introduction to U.S. civic discourse must also include at least an orientation to media bias and the necessity of comparing and contrasting divergent arguments and representations of current realities (e.g. Hurricane Katrina, the war in Iraq, immigration policy) and what's really going on in civic life. Naturalization applicants, no less than native-born U.S. citizens, have had ample experience with hypocrisy, dissimulation, misrepresentation, and shading of the truth. Building the skills for effective civic participation requires programs to provide their participants with opportunities for critical analysis, building on their personal experience to understand the intricacies and dysfunctional aspects of civic and political dialogue in the United States.

Conclusion

Naturalization programs can and must find the time to introduce their clients to the real nitty-gritty world of American civic and political life, to the jungle in which an extraordinary range of individuals and special interest groups vie to make their voices heard and to have their agendas prevail. The hope that an appeal for civic engagement simply as a duty of citizenship will actually result in immigrants' actively and effectively participating in civic

life is a vain one, especially when democratic participation is visualized as the miracle of one voice in the voting booth making a difference.

Successful civic skills-building requires practice with different modes of civic participation, particularly those related to analytic thinking and effective communication. Naturalization programs and ESL-civics classrooms can be turned into prototypes of communities in which clients practice reflection, self-expression, negotiating, persuading, active listening, and critical thinking. This does take time, energy, and creativity on the part of service providers but this sort of effort will build naturalization applicants' self-confidence and communication skills to succeed in the USCIS oral interview process as well as providing them the foundations for making a difference in civic dialogue and political outcomes—both locally and nationally.

References

Sidney Verba, Kay Schlozman, and Henry Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*, Harvard University Press, 1995

From the Oath of Citizenship to the Oath of Office

By Ann Morse

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One hundred years ago, when a flood of immigrants came to the United States seeking economic opportunity and political freedom, the country undertook a broad-based campaign to reinforce America's national identity by assimilating the new arrivals. Under the "Americanization" movement, state and federal governments, social clubs, labor unions, and businesses all launched programs to instill the American values of liberty, democracy, and equal opportunity in the newest residents.

Today, with immigration levels approaching those of the 1900s, public leaders are again seeking ways to encourage the civic incorporation of America's newcomers. In its 1997 report, *Becoming an American: Immigration and Immigrant Policy*, the U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform reiterated its call for a renewed commitment to civic education and civic responsibility for immigrants in America. In 2005 USCIS launched a national campaign to encourage foreign-born residents to learn about their rights and responsibilities.

At the state level, legislators have long been active in encouraging Americans to vote, to engage in public policy, to understand the principles of our representative democracy, and to put them to the test. Legislators also have been

working with America's newcomers, encouraging immigrants to become responsible citizens in our democratic system by naturalizing and becoming registered voters.

A number of immigrants have gone even farther by running for office and getting elected to represent the people of their state. At least 79 state legislators have immigrated to the United States from 32 different countries. They hail from Austria, Azores, Bahamas, British West Indies, Canada, Cape Verde Islands, China, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, United Kingdom (England), France, Germany, Greece, Haiti, Hungary, India, Italy, Japan, Korea, Laos, Lebanon, Panama, Peru, Philippines, Portugal, Scotland, Spain, Thailand, Vietnam, and the West Indies.

Providing a Public Service

The concept of public service is not new to many of our newest citizens. Illinois state Sen. Adeline Geo-Karis, for example, has been a dedicated public servant for most of her life. Born in Greece in 1918, she served in the U.S. Naval Reserve, as justice of the peace, assistant state attorney, and mayor before running for the state legislature, where she has now served for 32 years. What motivated her to run for office? The energy crisis of the 1970s and the need to support home-grown solutions such as ethanol and gasohol. Sen. Geo-Karis strongly believes immigrants should naturalize and vote: "I'm an immigrant myself," she says, "and once you're a citizen, you have a precious right to vote, and it must be used."

"Immigrants should be an asset to the community, and they should not sit on the sidelines," says state Rep. Selim Noujaim of Connecticut. An immigrant from Lebanon, he came to the United States after falling in love with an American woman. Although he spoke no English when he arrived, he became a successful businessman and active member of his community. In 2002 he won election to the legislature with the goal of helping businesses and protecting seniors. Most recently, he has helped a new Albanian community become acclimated and self-sufficient. He says: "The best way for immigrants to thrive is not to give them a handout but to help them help themselves."

A desire for better education for her children led state Rep. Swati Dandekar to overcome her reluctance to enter politics. Born in India, she moved to Iowa in 1973 to join her husband, and finally decided to run for the school board. "We live in a global economy, and need a strong curriculum," she says. She was elected to the Iowa statehouse in 2002 and says civic education has become even more important to her. Despite a tight legislative budget, she helped pass unanimous legislation for Iowa's first Asian-American Commission. The law created a public-private partnership with public funds for staff time and an office, and a nonprofit foundation to develop private support with

commitment from the business community. Minorities from across the state now ask her how they can become involved in politics and become a part of the process.

Learning about Democracy

Becoming involved in the political process is not necessarily easy for immigrants and refugees. The members of these communities face special challenges, one of which can be a lack of knowledge about how a democracy works. Political systems in their country of origin may be completely different or even the cause of their emigration. And after their arrival in the United States, immigrants may face isolation, dislocation, cultural and language barriers, and lack of knowledge or access to civic engagement and direct political participation.

This political disconnect can hold immigrant communities back from achieving integration. Refugee communities in the United States often fail to participate in politics because of a fear of government, an unwillingness to voice concerns or make additional requests of the country that has welcomed them, or time constraints and the economic challenges of earning a living. Many refugees and immigrants also remain confused about the roles and responsibilities of each level of government—federal, state, and local—in the United States.

State legislators are helping to bridge this gap by educating their fellow citizens that public decisions on such issues as education, transportation, and budgets directly affect their lives. Rep. Hoon-Yung Hopgood of Michigan is constantly on the road encouraging Asian-Pacific Americans to become more active in civic life. Adopted from Korea when he was 19 months old, he grew up in a political family and decided to run for public office himself. "Immigrant communities often feel overlooked and under-represented," he observes. He tries to help them make the connections between their lives and what government does, and to teach young people how to become a candidate for public office.

Virginia state Sen. Jeannemarie Devolites represents a diverse immigrant district in Fairfax, Va. An immigrant herself by virtue of being born on an Air Force base in England of immigrant parents, she recognizes the need for immigrants to organize themselves and develop strong leaders. With limited resources to effectively reach the diverse, multilingual communities in Fairfax, it is even more important to have community leaders embrace civic education and build bridges with elected representatives. "We need to do a better job of encouraging citizenship and involvement in government—that would be a giant step in the right direction," she says.

Lessons from the Capitol

Many new Americans learn about their rights and responsibilities through hands-on activities at their state legislatures. Legislators sponsor and welcome citizens' visits to the state capitol, and offer an opportunity to see firsthand how the U.S. political system works.

California Assemblyman Leland Yee believes the best way for elected officials to understand the immigrant community is to reach out and invite immigrants to be part of the legislative staff. It is also important for legislators to participate in the social events, political events, and cultural events of the ethnic communities they represent, and to take the time to understand the culture, he says.

Reflecting on how he came to politics, Assemblyman Yee says, "I come from a generation where politics was not something one aspired to do." An immigrant from China, he became the first Asian-Pacific American to be appointed speaker pro tempore in California, in 2004. The immigrant community has very little faith in the system, he says, and tends not to participate. However, the responsibility falls on the immigrant community to realize the stakes: This is their tax money, the education of their children, their quality of life, and their children's future. "To take control of that," he says, "you must get involved: Become a citizen, vote, support candidates, and run for office."

"Move out of your comfort zone," advises Delegate Ana Sol Gutierrez of Maryland, "and meet your constituents where they live." Originally from El Salvador, she served eight years on her local school board, aiming to improve education for the changing student population before deciding that even more important decisions were made at the state level. She tries to give political voice to her ethnically and racially diverse district through culturally sensitive old-style campaigning—voter registration, voter education, and outreach. By walking the neighborhoods and running targeted campaigns directed at both Latino and mainstream communities, she hopes to support newcomer political involvement in a safe and welcoming way. Constant communication, through Latino media outlets, nonprofits, and town meetings, and focusing on the community's priorities, she believes, will help accomplish results and encourage future political participation.

Building the New American Community, a project of the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), offers these ideas for building communication between newcomer communities and state legislators:

- Policymakers can be invited to community events organized by immigrants to meet with their local constituents;
- Immigrants can create partnerships with other community organizations and collaborate for needed changes in legislation or regulation;
- Immigrants can provide information on their community to the legislators who represent their homes, businesses, or community center and organizations;
- Immigrants can identify and publicize examples of their economic and social contributions in the community;
- Government and immigrant groups can develop brochures and guides on state and local government leadership (who they are, what they do, and how to voice concerns to them); and
- Government and immigrant groups can develop ways to support internships at the statehouse for refugee and immigrant communities so young leaders can learn how political and policy processes function.

Because of their experiences in bringing minority communities into the mainstream, legislators in immigrant families can bring new perspectives and new solutions to the legislature. The uniquely American approach to national identity through commitment to democratic ideals continues to make this country one of the most successful multiethnic nations in history. Our state legislatures reflect the changing face of America, encouraging citizenship and civic responsibility for both new immigrants and old.

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Patriotic Integration is the Key to Successful Immigration

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Our nation cannot have a serious immigration policy without an equally serious assimilation policy (the terms assimilation and integration will be used interchangeably in this essay). The United States of America is the most successful immigration country in the history of the world because of the triumph of patriotic integration—the assimilation of immigrants as loyal members of the American body politic.

For more than 200 years immigrants to America and their children have successfully assimilated into what has been called, the “American way of life.” The patriotic integration of immigrants into the American democratic republic did not happen “naturally.” It was the result of a long-range vision formulated by America’s leaders during our earliest days.

President George Washington wrote his vice president, John Adams, that he envisioned immigrants becoming “assimilated to our customs, measures, laws,” and because of this, he predicted, native-born citizens and immigrants would “soon become one people.” In the 1790s the Congress established the Oath of Renunciation and Allegiance requiring naturalized citizens to “absolutely and entirely renounce” all allegiance to their former nations.

More than a century later, President Theodore Roosevelt stated that, “the immigrant who comes here in good faith [and] becomes an American and assimilates himself to us... shall be treated on an exact equality with everyone else, for it is an outrage to discriminate against any such man because of creed or birthplace or origin. But that is predicated upon the man’s becoming an American and nothing but an American... There can be no divided allegiance here. Any man who says he is an American, but something else also, isn’t an American at all.” About ten years ago, the late Congresswoman Barbara Jordan called for a vigorous new “Americanization” initiative.

What is patriotic integration? First let us review the different forms of integration or assimilation. Linguistic integration means the immigrant learns English. Economic integration means the immigrant does well materially and, perhaps, joins the middle class. Cultural integration means that the immigrant acculturates to the nation’s cultural norms and popular customs (for both good and ill).

These forms of integration are necessary, but not sufficient for successful assimilation. We have learned in recent years that there are naturalized citizens who speak good English, are economically successful, are fans of American films, and, at the same, send money to terrorists who seek to kill Americans. At the end of the day, exclusive political loyalty and an emotional attachment to the American nation are required for complete assimilation.

What about “civic integration,” which seems to be the concept de jour? Civic integration presumably means that the immigrant is integrated into our democratic political system, votes, pays taxes, obeys the law, and participates in public life in some fashion. I am sorry, but there is something rather tepid about the term, and something rather ambiguous about the concept of civic integration. It is a weasel word. It is employed because something more meaningful—loyalty, allegiance, patriotism—might not be considered in good taste in some circles, just as a serious cleric exploring the distinction between heaven and hell might draw smirks and snickers from those same circles and for those same reasons (the embarrassment of the overly sophisticated when confronted with foundational beliefs like patriotism and religion).

Theodore Roosevelt did not talk about civic integration, he talked about “Americanization” and patriotism, and we should talk about patriotic, not civic, integration. Patriotic integration means that the immigrant has transferred sole political loyalty to the United States and is (as the Immigration and Nationality Act requires) “well disposed to the good order and happiness of the United States”—that is to say, emotionally attached to the nation in the affective sense. James Madison in *Federalist 49* explains why a nation needs affective (as well as rational and normative) support in order to survive.

What Policies Should Be Enacted to Promote Patriotic Integration?

Sen. Lamar Alexander of Tennessee has introduced legislation “to promote the patriotic integration of prospective citizens into the American way of life by providing civics, history, and English as a second language courses.” There is a “specific emphasis” on “attachment to the principles of the Constitution” and to the “heroes of American history (including military heroes).” This initiative will be administered by the Office of Citizenship in the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Most importantly, the Alexander bill incorporates “a knowledge and understanding of the Oath of Allegiance into the history and government test given to applicants for citizenship.”

It is vitally important for new citizens to understand the Oath of Allegiance and exactly what occurs when one takes this oath. The oath is crucial to the naturalization process because of the kind of country that we are: We are a nation built not on race, ethnicity, or religion, but on political allegiance to American democracy. Hence, political loyalty is central to our regime.

The oath begins, “I absolutely and entirely renounce” all “allegiance and fidelity” to any former sovereignty “of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen.”

In taking the oath the immigrant is transferring political allegiance from his or her birth nation to the United States of America. He or she is leaving a previous “people” and joining the American people. This “transfer of allegiance” from one nation to another must be thoroughly explained to immigrants seeking citizenship by the federal officials in charge of naturalization in the same way that candidates for confirmation in the Catholic Church are taught the significance and meaning of the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed. It must be a central part of the citizenship test. This is the heart of patriotic integration.

The history and government test should pose meaningful questions and eliminate some of the trivia questions such as: What is the USCIS form number that one needs to apply for citizenship? The test could be kept at the current third-fourth grade level and almost all immigrants who seriously study for it should be able to pass the exam.

The overall goal of the Office of Citizenship should not be quantity (increasing the rates of naturalization), but quality, strengthening patriotic integration for all newcomers who voluntarily decide to transfer their political allegiance to the United States. Indeed, strengthening patriotic integration should not be simply of interest to social conservatives but to all Americans who are serious about the future of our country.

Effective Integration Requires Citizenship

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We are living in extraordinary times, on the verge of a new world order. At the heart of the emergent changes is global migration. According to the United Nations, there are more than 180 million migrants—49 percent women—seeking a better life. As a consequence, the host nation and the migrants themselves face extraordinary economic, social, and cultural challenges, and integration of the migrants has become a prominent, critical subject of trans-global inquiry.

Of late, the failure of European nations to deal upfront with the implications of migration has boiled to the surface. France, which has the largest concentration of migrants in Europe, has been the stage for riots. Its immigrants have been marginalized, live in suburbs removed from the mainstream populace, and are victims of racism and poverty. The youth unemployment rate is 40 percent.

Similarly, in Germany, which has a national unemployment rate of 10 percent, the Turkish unemployment rate is 40 percent. In addition to the cultural and religious differences, the German populace looks unkindly upon the Turks for their heavy use of a relatively generous system of welfare benefits. The United Nations High Commission on Human Rights has established the Working Group on Development, which serves to highlight a parallel between the needs of underdeveloped nations and the Committee on Migrant Workers. The Declaration on the Right to Development follows on the Articles of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The right to development is an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human is entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural, and political conditions, through which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized. It is the responsibility of governments to create circumstances favorable to the realization of the rights of migrant workers.

Needless to say, the effort to actualize the rights of migrant workers and address the circumstance of global migration is a struggle in progress. Global migration is a fact, is irreversible, and will continue to increase. At best it will take several generations to approximate the United Nation’s ideals. It will take intensive education for those in denial who long for the days of cultural homogeneity long past. Further, it requires that national and local governments carefully examine ways in which to promote inclusion and integration of both invited and uninvited immigrants into the fabric of the community, including the right of citizenship.

Clearly, the United States, which has 18 percent of global migrants, is years ahead of European and other nations in providing an environment with the opportunity for immigrants to flourish. At the same time, the laissez-faire attitude of Congress, state legislatures, and city councils is no longer acceptable, insofar as the racial, religious, and educational character of the newest Americans, especially those at the lower income sector of the immigration “hour-glass,” cries out for more thoughtful, proactive efforts to expedite integration. Currently, one in nine residents is foreign born, one in five children is the child of immigrants, and one in two new workers is an immigrant. These dimensions have implications that reach to the core of our future as a nation, and these dimensions will grow.

What have we learned in our history as a nation of immigrants that can lead us to a bright future? Without question the opportunity to work and own businesses and homes is more readily available in America than in most nations. Economic self-sufficiency is a necessity of survival, but in itself does not speak to integration. The requisites for full integration are English language, citizenship, and civic participation. Moreover, as we know, it is the children of immigrants that fully enjoy the fruits of immigration. As the adults struggle to learn English and achieve economic viability, the children call out for adult role models that illustrate the importance of citizenship and civic participation. The children of immigrants are 20 percent of the K-12 population and the number is growing. What can be more important than preparing them for constructive participation in our communities?

The traditional vehicles for integration—the promotion of English language, citizenship, and civic participation—have been the churches, schools, unions, and community-based service providers. All are currently challenged by their respective circumstances, and overall limitations in funding. It is essential that government step forward in support of English language training and citizenship in particular, as well as addressing other government responsibilities, such as enforcement of worker rights, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act barring discrimination based on national origin and, when needed, provision of interpreters in healthcare. Enabling immigrant social mobility and inclusion requires full public-private partnerships.

Illinois has been a leader among state governments in taking a thoughtful, proactive approach to immigrant integration. The Refugee and Immigrant Citizenship Initiative (RICI) is now ten years old. RICI has prepared more than 130,000 immigrants for citizenship, two-thirds of whom have had less than a high school education, 20 percent of whom were senior citizens. After this network of mainly ethnic community-based organizations began their work, naturalizations in the USCIS Chicago District Office (formerly INS) doubled, from an average of 17,000 per year to approximately 40,000 per year. When RICI produced a state demography of immigrants by legislative district, the state legislature took notice. Immigration, long considered a city of Chicago phenomenon and, therefore, a Democratic Party issue, became a bipartisan issue. Naturalization has meant more than 600,000 new voters in Illinois, and with that potency the opportunity for influencing governmental policy. A recent study by Public Agenda reports that 76 percent of immigrants surveyed said they wanted citizenship so they could vote. In the words of one Jordanian: “I want to make a difference.”

A case in point, Illinois like most other states has faced serious budget deficits in the last three years, the worst deficits in state history. Most programs experienced reductions. Immigrant services administered by the Illinois

Department of Human Services, which include RICI, increased from \$5 million to \$8.26 million in the last two years largely due to well-orchestrated, thoughtful lobbying by masses of new immigrant voters. Further, the new immigrant vote helped elect Gov. Rod Blagojevich, a son of immigrants and the first Democratic governor in Illinois in almost 30 years.

In Illinois the citizenship initiative has galvanized community empowerment of ethnic organizations that advocate for their constituencies and have become active in seeking betterment of the community at large. Clearly issues like affordable housing, effective schools, and accessible healthcare also impact the general public. The Coalition of Asian, African, European, and Latino Immigrants of Illinois (CAELII) is a grassroots network devoted to promotion of civic participation. One particularly effective initiative has been Active Citizens Technology in Our Neighborhoods (ACTION). It involves computer training for individuals with lower literacy and has enabled the trainees to access information. In one instance, it enabled an immigrant family to communicate with a son in Iraq.

Community empowerment laid the foundation for the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR), now an umbrella for more than 130 community-based organizations. The coalition administers the New Americans Initiative, designed to increase access to naturalization, and also an Outreach and Interpretation Project, providing support for limited-English persons in 40 languages. Fred Tsao, ICIRR policy director, has closely monitored efforts by the Office of Citizenship to revise the citizenship examination, and has been instrumental in the office’s scrapping its first, rather miserable test design.

There is much more than can be said, but to close, progress in Illinois in program and policy development and analyses has stemmed from citizenship and the resultant capacity for community empowerment. In many ways, immigrants, who must earn their citizenship, are more patriotic, loyal, and civically involved than many native-born Americans, who take the rights and privileges of living in this country for granted. The journey of immigrants requires great courage and perseverance. They leave behind friends, family, and all that they know, and venture into a new society. The culmination of the journey is citizenship, a commitment to democratic ideals and constitutional principles. If you have not, attend a naturalization ceremony and experience the pride, patriotism, joy, and multicultural diversity that is uniquely American. It is America at its best.

Justice Denied: Inadequate Legal Aid for Low-Income Persons in the United States

By Robert J. Rhudy

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It is very difficult to gain effective access to justice in the United States for many civil matters without the assistance of an attorney, and persons are not likely to receive legal assistance for most civil matters unless they are able to pay a substantial fee. For a country that proclaims “equal justice for all,” this is shameful. Many other comparably developed countries do a much better job of publicly funding legal aid for low to moderate-income persons in civil matters, including providing legal assistance to noncitizens for immigration, naturalization, citizenship, and other critical legal issues.

While numerous states have increased public funding for legal aid over the past several years, other states (generally with the largest proportional poverty and immigrant populations) have not kept pace, and federal funding for legal aid is less than half its level of 1981 when adjusted for inflation and increases in the low-income population. Federal legal aid is very restricted on services for noncitizens, and such persons receive a low priority for state legal aid resources, with the result that essential services for noncitizens must generally be provided by programs using very limited private contributions.

Federal and state governments need to substantially increase funding for civil legal aid if commitments of “access to justice” and “equal justice for all” are to be other than empty phrases. Acknowledging the multiple barriers confronting many noncitizens in the United States, federal and state governments should eliminate the restrictions and limitations on providing legal aid to noncitizens to help expedite citizenship and address other critical civil legal needs for this population.

Legal Aid Funding

Federal funding for civil legal services for low-income persons began in the United States in 1965 under the Office of Economic Opportunity as part of the Johnson Administration’s War on Poverty. Following several years of opposition under the Nixon Administration, Congress created the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) in 1974 to continue federal support for legal aid. LSC received federal funding (starting at \$70 million in FY 1975) to make grants to over 300 local nonprofit legal aid programs throughout the United States and its territories to serve income-eligible persons with their civil legal needs. Congressional funding grew under the Ford and Carter Administrations to \$321.5 million in FY 1981.

Beginning with efforts to eliminate LSC and federal funding for legal aid throughout the Reagan Administration, LSC’s annual congressional appropriation has gone through numerous ups and downs and is \$330,803,705 for FY 2005. If the LSC budget had kept pace with inflation, it would now be \$718 million; and if it had kept pace with increases in the federal budget, it would be \$1,350 million. More than 43 million persons (in families with income not more than 125 percent of the federal poverty level) are currently eligible for LSC-funded services.

LSC dollars amounted to approximately 95 percent of the total funding for civil legal aid to the poor in 1981, compared to about 31 percent today. In response to steep cuts in LSC funding in 1981, many states began establishing other funding sources starting with interest on lawyer trust account (IOLTA) programs, followed by court filing fee surcharges, state appropriations, and other approaches, while legal aid programs also sought support from private foundations, bar associations, lawyers, and other private contributions. Total estimated funding for civil legal aid to the poor in the United States for 2005 is approximately \$956,344,000, of which approximately \$121,210,000 is from private sources (like foundations, bar contributions, and donations), \$113,905,000 from IOLTA, and the remainder from state and federal sources.

LSC funding is distributed to legal aid programs in states based on the number of income-eligible persons. Some states provide substantial additional public funding for legal aid, while such support is virtually nonexistent in other states; and the same is true for private contributions. The result is that the level of total funding for legal aid ranges greatly from \$20 per eligible person annually in 19 states to over \$50 per eligible person in seven states, and from a low of \$9 to a high of \$65 per eligible person.

Unmet Legal Need

LSC has just released a report, *Documenting the Justice Gap in America: The Unmet Civil Legal Needs of Low-Income Americans*, which concludes that at least 80 percent of the civil legal needs of the poor are not being met. The report’s findings are consistent with those of a 1994 American Bar Association national legal needs study and nine recent state legal needs studies. The LSC report indicates there is currently one legal aid attorney (under all combined funding sources and programs) per 6,861 low-income persons in the United States, compared to one private general civil service attorney per 525 persons in the general population. Because of the great disparity in funding, unmet civil legal need is substantially greater in many states.

Legal Aid Funding by Other Countries

The United States allocates much less public funding per capita for civil legal aid to low and low-moderate income persons than virtually all other comparably developed countries. According to a report from a June 2005 meeting of the International Legal Aid Group, the United States currently invests about \$.65 per \$10,000 gross domestic product for civil legal aid, compared to an average of \$4.38 (ranging from \$2.25 for Germany, \$2.47 for Canada, \$4.90 for Scotland, and \$10.50 for England) for ten other similarly developed countries.

Providing Legal Aid to Noncitizens in Immigration Cases

Unlike the United States, several other countries provide substantial support for civil legal aid to noncitizens in immigration (including citizenship and refugee appeal) cases. England allocates approximately 23 percent of its civil legal aid funding for such cases, compared to about 10 percent of the public funding for legal aid for such cases in Canada.

Conclusion

We are grossly underfunding civil legal aid for lower income persons in the United States, as measured in unmet legal need and in comparison with other developed countries. Unlike many other countries, we also provide very little public support for legal aid to noncitizens in citizenship and other critical civil legal problems. While legal services are inadequate in all states, conditions are much worse in some states that provide virtually no public funding for legal aid. Federal and state funding for legal aid should be increased substantially and funding should be provided for noncitizen services to effectively promote access to justice for all.

Robert J. Rhudy is prior executive director of the Maryland Legal Services Corporation and a past president of the National Association of IOLTA Programs, Inc. He states his appreciation to Justice Earl Johnson, (California Court of Appeals), Meredith McBurney (American Bar Association), and Ab Currie (Department of Justice Canada) for providing information used in this article.

Expanding Naturalization by Supporting Service Providers: The Role of Legal Resource Centers

By **Eric Cohen**

Legal Director

Immigrant Legal Resource Center

With as many as 11 million legal immigrants living in the United States today who are eligible for naturalization, support of their naturalization process presents a vital and necessary effort in ensuring the nation's continuance as a fully functioning democracy, one defined by broad civic participation that includes the influence of the immigrant community. To help ensure a supportive and participatory democracy—and encourage immigrant civic participation and acculturation—it is vital that as many immigrants as possible become naturalized U.S. citizens. Although there are other reasons why some immigrants never naturalize, one of the major barriers facing the community is the limited availability of free or low cost direct legal services. However, in addition to increasing the amount and accessibility of such services, resources in the form of training, publications, and technical assistance must also be provided so as to strengthen the capacity of direct service providers and maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of their efforts.

Why Is Naturalization Important?

In these times of xenophobia, threatened civil rights, and the silencing of dissenting voices in our country, efforts must be made to amplify the voices of grassroots immigrants and community-based organizations. There is a direct correlation between encouraging immigrants to embrace America through naturalization and their active participation as positive leaders and role models.

Naturalization is beneficial for individuals, families, and whole communities. Some of the benefits include: the right to vote in elections; the feeling of empowerment that allows individuals to become more involved in the political, social, economic, and social institutions around them and to fight against abuses of civil and human rights; the right to hold most elected offices and the right to hold certain federal and state government jobs; and the security of not being denied entry to or being deported from the United States.

Why Isn't Everyone Applying for Naturalization?

With all the benefits of naturalization, why are millions of eligible immigrants staying on the sidelines? The fact is, applying for naturalization is not easy and many immigrants decide they cannot do it on their own. Second, many immigrants have complicated cases and either the potential applicants or their advocates decide the case is too complex and risky to apply. Third, many potential applicants have limited literacy or English skills and choose not to apply. What is more, some groups of immigrants need special help and do not receive the assistance they need and deserve. These groups include children and refugees with disabilities. Finally, many immigrants avoid naturalization because they will lose rights in their countries of origin or because of the high cost of the application process.

The Supporting Role of Resource Centers in Strengthening Service Providers

Legal resource centers such as the Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC) enhance the effectiveness of direct service organizations across the country by providing training, technical assistance, expert manuals and guides, and policy analysis. Essentially, we leverage an organization's existing resources by providing immigration services to increase their work's efficiency and effectiveness, thereby improving and expanding the comprehensive services available to immigrants. By providing expertise on naturalization law, policy, and procedures, we give direct service providers the answers to their most difficult questions, the confidence needed to handle complicated cases, and guidance toward efficient and effective representation and advocacy.

Examples of important ways to leverage the effectiveness and efficiency of direct service providers include:

- Providing comprehensive naturalization manuals designed especially for those who work at community-based organizations (CBOs).
- Chairing liaison meetings between CBOs and the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) around naturalization topics with the result of opening up lines of communication between CBOs and USCIS on national and local levels.
- Providing comprehensive training on immigration and naturalization issues so that all direct service providers are competent and well-versed in immigration and naturalization law. It is important that service providers helping with naturalization cases are

knowledgeable in most aspects of immigration law, not just naturalization, because understanding an applicant's experiences from start to finish will aid a service provider's ability to facilitate the naturalization process.

- Fielding requests for technical assistance about individual naturalization cases, policies, or procedures. By providing such technical assistance, not only are we answering the service provider's question about a specific case and thus increasing the likelihood that the applicant will become a U.S. citizen, but we are also building capacity so that service providers know more about the laws and procedures generally involved in naturalization cases.
- Consulting with organizations about how best to conduct off-site processing and other methods of efficient and effective naturalization application processing.

Conclusion

In America's post-9/11 environment, a prevailing anti-immigrant sentiment further ostracizes those whom we would consider the next contributors to the country's immigration narrative. Because our legal system is oftentimes unavailable to the underprivileged and underserved, the support of legal resource centers in combination with service providers is needed now more than ever. There are 11 million immigrants living in the country today who are eligible for naturalization, many of them are our family members, friends, and coworkers. Despite this eligibility, many either cannot afford or cannot access a legal system that is designed to protect and ensure their rights. Many more simply live in fear of a system that may be used against them—fearing detention and deportation consequences, separation and removal, or fraudulent consultants commonly referred to as notarios. By leveraging the support of resource centers such as the ILRC against existing service options, those committed to the rights and privileges of democracy will be better equipped to serve an immigrant community looking only to share in the opportunities that are the hallmark of America's social, political, and economic institutions.

Investing in Our Workforce: The New Americans Initiative

By **Eva Millona**

Policy Director

Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition

Immigrant workers have become indispensable to the expansion and sustainability of the Massachusetts economy. In 2004 immigrants accounted for 17 percent of the state's labor force. Between 2000 and 2004 Massachusetts gained 174,000 immigrants, without whom the population and the workforce of the state would have experienced no growth at all. Over the last 15 years, the number of immigrants living in Massachusetts has increased by 40 percent and now totals over 907,000. These statistical trends show that Massachusetts greatly needs an increase in services to immigrants to support the productivity and the well being of immigrant workers whose initial employment opportunities are often limited to the lowest-paying jobs. Since 2001, the immigrant population in Massachusetts has been devastated by the drastic reduction or complete elimination of many important and successful service programs. These cuts have jeopardized the health, welfare, and education of immigrant families and communities across the commonwealth. The elimination of immigrant services also place at risk the future of the economy of Massachusetts.

The Citizenship Assistance Program

Founded in 1997 in response to restrictions placed by Congress—restrictions still in place today—the Citizenship Assistance Program (CAP) gave low-income immigrants and refugees who might otherwise not have had access to educational services, the opportunity to learn English and civics, and to receive help with the citizenship application process. It also prepared immigrants for the immigration interview. These added skills and increased knowledge facilitated the immigrant clients' integration into the civic life of their communities. English proficiency is critical in acquiring and sustaining employment.

At the same time, CAP provided access to federal safety net programs. This was critically important because the federal welfare reform of 1996 restricted eligibility for many life-line programs, such as food stamps, Medicaid, and SSI, to immigrants who lived in the United States before 1996.

CAP was a great success, funding over 100 community-based organizations and serving over 23,000 individuals, 11,000 of whom became new American citizens.

At the time, the commonwealth recognized the importance of this safety net for low-income workers and their families and allocated state dollars that funded the continuation of many of these essential programs for this vulnerable population. Since then, however, state funding for most of these helpful programs has been eliminated.

Currently, vulnerable immigrants who work, pay taxes, and contribute to the U.S. economy must be citizens to access federal assistance during times of economic downturn and need. Because CAP helped immigrants become citizens, and thereby become eligible once again for federal benefits, Massachusetts saves over \$14 million annually in funding state food stamps and Emergency Aid to Elders, Disabled and Children (EAEDC). CAP was initially funded at \$2 million in 1997. Over the years, it was cut to \$1.5 million, then \$750,000. CAP was completely eliminated by then Acting Governor Jane Swift in 2002.

The New Americans Initiative

The successes that CAP enjoyed left providers with many lessons learned in the organization and implementation of services. From these lessons, CAP stakeholders designed the New Americans Initiative, a new program that would try to expand CAP's functions and capacities. The New Americans Initiative would be comprised of three components:

1. **English for New Americans.** The program will coordinate a statewide network that leverages urgently needed public, private, and individual funding of ESL classes for recent immigrants provided by mutual assistance associations, faith-based organizations, community-based organizations, and others. According to a recent study by the Massachusetts Institute for a New Commonwealth (MassINC) and Northeastern University, an immigrant who speaks English at home earns, on average, 2.5 times as much as an immigrant who does not speak English well (\$38,526 vs. \$14,221 annually). In Massachusetts, strong English-speaking skills are key, not just for civic participation, but also to economic success.
2. **Civics for New Americans.** Utilizing the expertise of local universities and national leaders, programs integrated with ESL services will be developed to prepare immigrants for the naturalization test and provide opportunities for civic engagement and increased participation in the civic life of their local communities
3. **Citizenship for New Americans.** The program will fund local immigrant-serving organizations to assist

immigrants in the often intimidating and confusing naturalization process. Services include application review and assistance, transportation for disabled applicants to and from the Boston USCIS office, and accompanying applicants to citizenship test interviews. These services increase the number of immigrants becoming U.S. citizens in a safe, efficient, and effective manner.

In Massachusetts there are over 300,000 legal immigrants eligible for, or in the process of, naturalization to become U.S. citizens. Of these, 18,501 are on waiting lists to access ESL classes in Boston alone. A large number, 71 percent, of the adult immigrants in Massachusetts are not prepared, primarily because of language barriers, to participate in the knowledge economy. It is evident that with nominal funding, Massachusetts has the capacity to effectively and efficiently implement a national citizenship plan to address these needs.

As a result, a campaign was waged to fight for funding in the state budget for the Citizenship for New Americans program. This campaign successfully garnered \$500,000 to go to the Massachusetts Office of Refugees and Immigrants to be disseminated to community-based organizations across the Commonwealth that provide citizenship services. These services include English as a second language classes with a focus on naturalization preparation, civics classes which concentrate on preparing students for the naturalization exam but also to be civically engaged in their communities, and technical assistance such as application preparation and follow up for immigrants in the naturalization process. Through this funding, about 7,000-8,000 immigrants will be served in the first year.

A Chronology of Naturalization Funding in Maryland

By **Gail Kramer Mogol**

Citizenship Program Coordinator
Baltimore City Community College

How excited we were in 1997 that the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services issued a sizeable \$250,000 Request For Proposals for citizenship preparation! Refugee resettlement as we knew it was on the wane. For the most part, the Vietnamese and people from the former Soviet Union—the large refugee influxes of the late 1970's and 80's—had completed their journey to freedom in the United States and were successfully integrating into the fabric of our country. It didn't seem as though there were as significant refugee crises elsewhere in the world, and thus, acculturation was the buzzword of the time. Acculturation included naturalization.

Slightly earlier, Congress had passed the Welfare Reform Act of 1996. Tying a citizenship requirement to benefits eligibility was unpalatable to immigrant advocates, but on balance, certainly doable. After all, our culture is based on concepts of immigration, freedom, liberty, democracy, and inclusiveness. Couched in all of those terms, naturalization is a favorable, positive goal. Besides, there is an expectation that naturalization is highly desirable, given the opportunity. Congress assumed that a citizenship interview would provide no additional hardship. Citizenship preparation could be taught!

It was determined that the elderly were the most vulnerable as a result of the legislation. The Maryland state refugee coordinator, Frank Bien, always cognizant of the similarity of needs of immigrants as well as refugees, convened a work group of service providers to bring the issue to the Maryland General Assembly for inclusion in naturalization efforts. In conjunction with the Jewish community alliance, a lobbying effort was successful: \$75,000 was included in the year's budget allocation by the governor of Maryland, Parris Glendening. As Mr. Bien had envisioned it, the state grant would make no distinctions according to status, refugee vs. immigrant, for citizenship class registrations.

In Baltimore, Jewish Family Services and Baltimore City Community College (BCCC) had preempted the idea of offering citizenship preparation to the local community's naturalization-eligible population and were already teaching to full classrooms.

Funding was not an issue. And no one dreamed that it would be an issue.

BCCC won the statewide grant for a Citizenship Promotion Program based on its extensive experience. Classes were offered primarily in the Baltimore metropolitan area and in suburban Maryland—Montgomery County and Prince Georges County. These are the areas in the state most impacted by the foreign-born. In order to comply with the purposes of the federal grant, elderly students were targeted. The Maryland Department of Aging connected us to senior center sites and their respective directors; we also identified HUD-subsidized residences and churches; the various ethnic communities were engaged as partners; English as a second language (ESL) instructors and administrative staff were hired; volunteers were recruited; a textbook was chosen; and a curriculum based on its content was written. Should a formally educated instructor not be available, even a volunteer could teach from it. Both audio and visual aids were purchased for classroom use; a relationship with the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) was created through its community-based outreach effort, and a compilation of sliding scale or pro bono legal resources for referral was made available. CLINIC helped with staff development workshops. It was indeed a successfully coordinated effort.

By offering its grant, ORR had identified the burden on the elderly that the 1996 welfare legislation imposed, but immigrant advocates lobbied Congress to further ease that burden, and by October 1999 new legislation had diminished the threat. So ORR changed its grant focus toward mainstreaming the elderly into existing aging services. In just a few years, BCCC was without federal funding for the ESL, civics, and citizenship instruction it was providing to approximately 25 classes.

The only funding stream was the state monies appropriated through the governor's initiative.

While it was necessary to make changes in the program, not all developments could be construed as negative. For example, younger students who had wanted to enroll in classes were now able to attend, since the restrictions of the federal grant no longer held. In an effort to continue to accommodate all students, adjustments and revisions were made in the administration of the program where possible, without eliminating any classes. Weekly instructional hours were affected, however. For example, if a class previously met for three hours of instruction, the time was reduced to two hours. Additionally, some courses were shortened from twelve weeks to nine weeks. Instructors took on registration responsibilities, as a class facilitator position was left unfilled. Transportation expenses were assumed by either students' relatives or underwritten by other resources available at the senior centers.

In early 2000 when INS increased its fees, the program itself was unaffected, but additional distress for students and their families was caused. Fortunately, voluntary agencies and INS attended to this problem through subsidies and fee waivers.

By 2001 BCCC negotiated to add a portion of State Department of Education civics education funds to the citizenship effort, although it was limited to the Baltimore area. Finally, however, the impact of reduced funding affected the number of classes offered. Those sites having the highest enrollments were retained, and those with less than an optimum number of students were either consolidated or eliminated. Total enrollment dropped from about 225 to about 150 per session. In addition, the facilitator positions were greatly reduced. As a result, teachers assumed more administrative tasks in the classroom, and communication was effected via telephone, e-mail, or the postal service, rather than face-to-face interactions at classroom visits. Marketing was concentrated on free advertising—public service announcements, notices in ethnic newspapers, and media publicity during opportune times, such as Independence Day. Proudly, the quality of the instruction never faltered.

Further reductions in funding came as a result of the program's popularity and success. Many students were being naturalized! Local jurisdictions wanted to be included and pressured the state office to fund efforts in their areas. BCCC responded to the loss of funding by again eliminating administrative costs. Finally, the program coordinator acted as coordinator, facilitator, and secretary. In addition, the summer session was eliminated.

By the beginning of 2005, the program coordinator was administering two other unrelated programs in addition to the citizenship program, since the other two paid a concomitant portion of the salary. But the greatest danger to the program was from the annual budget of the state legislature. Every year the program was carefully reviewed and able to pass the scrutiny of the legislature and then the governor. Despite a few close shaves, the program had always survived. This year, however, Maryland was in the throes of serious budget cuts, in order to comply with the law requiring a balanced budget. Despite all efforts, citizenship preparation was eliminated from the state budget.

Although the college had applied for a newly issued ORR Request For Proposals for elderly citizenship preparation, it was generally assumed that the citizenship preparation program had ended.

Then in July, the governor discovered some additional funds, and reinstated the citizenship program, but only in the one jurisdiction with the largest number of immigrants. At the same time, ORR assigned its funding for the elderly, and Maryland was one of the state recipients. So the citizenship preparation program in Maryland continues to offer classes for naturalization-eligible people of all ages, of all legal statuses, in convenient, neighborhood sites.

As illustrated above, the availability of funding has played the significant role in whether citizenship preparation can be offered on a regular basis. Although BCCC has had the longest experience in the state with the program, navigating funding streams has offered extreme challenges. Through it all, the excitement of preparing applicants for the naturalization interview is still as paramount to immigrant advocates as it was at the program's inception. After all, isn't citizenship a cornerstone of our culture?

That philosophy and commitment has maintained the program throughout. Adjustments have been varied and at all levels of the program. To reiterate, the primary administrative salary has been underpinned by the addition of other program responsibilities, although in exchange, citizenship program issues get addressed in less depth. Other changes include narrowing class sites to those that are most convenient and cater to the largest enrollments. E-mail has replaced face-to-face coordination and mentoring. Some administrative processes have been transferred to the classroom teacher, who has assumed those roles out of

dedication to his or her students and to the idea of the program. When there was the real possibility of the elimination of funding, several of the instructors continued teaching on a voluntary basis! And several sites explored methods to continue the offering independently!

Stable funding, perhaps at the national level, directed toward all types and all ages of immigrants would certainly alleviate these problems and reinforce the traditional American concepts of inclusion, tolerance, and diversity.

State Support for Citizenship: An Illinois Perspective

By **Fred Tsao**

Policy Director

Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights

The state of Illinois has been among the leaders in the nation in promoting citizenship. The Refugee and Immigrant Citizenship Initiative (RICI) and the New Americans Initiative (NAI) have shown how states, partnering with immigrant community organizations, can assist thousands of immigrants in becoming citizens.

Refugee and Immigrant Citizenship Initiative

In 1995 Illinois became the first state in the nation to fund citizenship services. Under the leadership of Republican Gov. Jim Edgar, the state launched the Refugee and Immigrant Citizenship Initiative (RICI) program. RICI sought to address the needs of two groups who would imminently become eligible for naturalization: immigrants who had legalized under the 1986 amnesty and were about to complete five years of Lawful Permanent Resident status, and refugees who had resettled in Illinois from Southeast Asia, the former Soviet Union, and other parts of the world. The need for refugees to naturalize became especially urgent with the passage of the 1996 federal welfare law, which set a seven-year limit on refugee eligibility for most safety-net benefit programs.

RICI has sought to build a public-private partnership to facilitate naturalization. The state distributes grants totaling more than \$1 million each year to organizations within immigrant and refugee communities, agencies that these communities know and trust, so that they can provide citizenship preparation classes and assistance with naturalization applications. To date, RICI-funded programs have assisted more than 90,000 immigrants and refugees to receive citizenship services, with particular success among the refugee communities. Another measure of RICI's

success is that since its inception, the average number of immigrants naturalizing in Illinois each year has doubled from 16,000 to more than 33,000.

RICI also specifically funds educator training, as well as networking and communication among grantees, and administrative advocacy on citizenship-related issues. RICI funding to the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR) helped our efforts to highlight the naturalization backlogs at the INS during the late 1990s and, in alliance with other state coalitions, successfully advocate for federal resources for INS to reduce the backlog. With RICI support, ICIRR and our allies also advocated for changes to the revised N-400 naturalization application form drafted by the INS (which replaced a four-page form with a ten-page form); argued against proposed fee increases for naturalization and other immigration benefits; raised strong concerns about the proposed redesign of the naturalization test; and worked locally to ensure access to immigration services for immigrants with disabilities.

RICI has thus not only benefited immigrants and refugees who now have improved access to citizenship education and services through organizations in their communities, but it has also helped raise the voice of these organizations in advocating on behalf of their constituencies.

New Americans Initiative

Even with the success of RICI, the numbers of legal immigrants who had not naturalized was staggering. In 2003 the Urban Institute reported that according to the 2000 Census, 340,000 Lawful Permanent Residents in Illinois were eligible for naturalization but had not yet become citizens. Another 140,000 would become eligible within five years. Combined, these lawful residents made up one-third of the state's foreign-born population. Further research by the Chicago-based Metro Chicago Information Center revealed the most common obstacles that discouraged these immigrants from seeking U.S. citizenship: lack of information about the application process, lack of confidence in their English proficiency, and lack of knowledge about the benefits of U.S. citizenship.

In response, ICIRR developed the NAI, which Gov. Rod Blagojevich, a Democrat and son of a Serbian immigrant, embraced and included in his proposed state budget. In July 2004, at a time when other states were cutting back or even eliminating their citizenship funding, the Illinois General Assembly approved \$3 million in funding for NAI for each of the following three years.

NAI currently provides grants to 12 collaboratives, involving 49 community-based organizations. These collaboratives team up agencies that perform outreach and identify potential applicants with immigration service

providers that assist with applications, legal service providers that offer technical support and representation in problematic cases, and education programs that offer English and citizenship classes. The collaboratives organize workshops where would-be citizens can complete their applications and receive appropriate referrals to participating education and legal service programs. ICIRR administers the program overall, works with media, foreign consulates, and other allies, and offers training and technical support to grantee staffers. In the first nine months of the program, NAI grantees have made contact with 35,000 immigrants and completed 2,879 citizenship applications. NAI's overall goal is to move 60,000 Illinois immigrants to U.S. citizenship during the three years of the program.

Continuing Challenges

Even with ongoing funding for RIC and NAI, immigrants and refugees face major obstacles in seeking citizenship. Perhaps the most significant is the lack of English language educational resources. According to the 2000 Census, more than 9 percent of Illinois residents, 1.1 million people (both U.S.-born and foreign-born), have difficulty speaking English. This includes more than half of the 1.25 million Illinois residents who reported speaking Spanish and just under half of the 249,000 Illinois residents who speak an Asian or Pacific Island language. Public resources for English education come nowhere near meeting the needs of this population: In fiscal year 2004 the Illinois Community College Board granted \$57.6 million to schools and community organizations for programs that reached 161,000 adult education students, including 87,000 ESL students. Several times that figure will be necessary to reach every Illinois resident who needs English training, even as the federal government continues to put these programs in danger of budget cuts.

The state has taken an important step toward addressing this and other obstacles. On November 19, 2005, Gov. Blagojevich issued a first-in-the-nation New Americans Immigrant Policy Executive Order commanding that the state develop a comprehensive approach for immigrant integration. The order establishes an Office of New Americans Policy and Advocacy within the governor's office to coordinate integration efforts within state government, as well as a blue-ribbon policy council staffed by ICIRR that will consider policy alternatives on issues such as education, health care, and housing, and produce a short list of concrete, practical recommendations on how to best address the needs of immigrants in each area. This New Americans Executive Order Policy Project specifically examined English acquisition and citizenship at a session on February 23, 2006. Building upon ten years of success with RIC and NAI, our goal will be to create a blueprint not just for the state of Illinois but also for states across the country, for supporting immigrants as they learn English, apply for U.S. citizenship, and reach for their American dream.

Building Community, Building Trust: Citizenship Efforts in the Arab- American Community

By **Karen Rignall**

Director of Network Planning National Network for Arab-American Communities

Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services

Anyone who has attended an oath ceremony for naturalizing Americans understands the atmosphere of anticipation and accomplishment surrounding the occasion. A sense of hope joins together people with disparate histories and experiences of life in the United States—refugees healing from war, families reunifying, and immigrants building new lives. For Arab Americans, this experience has been especially poignant in the last few years. The oath ceremonies that the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS) has hosted in Dearborn, Mich., offer a hopeful beacon of the role Arab Americans can play in making our democracy as diverse and rich as it could be. The ceremonies have also provided palpable relief to a community that feels targeted—by the government and by other Americans—in the wake of September 11.

ACCESS believes that partnerships supporting the citizenship efforts of new Americans are essential for building a culture of dialogue and understanding. If Americans saw the monumental efforts that new immigrants had gone through to become citizens, many misperceptions about immigrants would indeed be mitigated. Dismantling these stereotypes is a particularly urgent task for Arab Americans. Many see Arab Americans as “foreign,” with a culture “alien to American values,” even though they have contributed to this country for over 150 years. We hear often that Arab Americans should integrate more, yet 55 percent of Middle Eastern immigrants held American citizenship in 2000, compared with 38 percent of immigrants overall (according to the U.S. census). Arab-American community organizations are stepping in with limited resources to help Arab immigrants fulfill their dream of becoming full participants in our civil society.

We ought to show how much we support American values by helping immigrants—Arab and non-Arab—along the path to citizenship. Reducing backlogs and providing resources for citizenship programs are important, but in the meantime, we can make tangible progress with smaller efforts such as building partnerships with the government in hosting citizenship ceremonies. For Arab Americans, this symbolizes the positive role our own community plays in strengthening civic engagement and provides an alternative image to the suspicion and scrutiny that mark our daily lives.

A Rush to Citizenship

Arab Americans are used to being a “problem.” Negative stereotypes pervade the media and influence public policy, and have affected our community’s experience of American life for decades. After September 11, 2001, these stereotypes became much more dangerous for Arab immigrants. Beyond the secret detention of thousands of Arabs and Muslims in the wake of the attacks, the National Security Entry Exit Registration System’s “special registration” program has resulted in the deportation of thousands more. Periodic FBI interviewing of certain classes of Arab and Muslim immigrants and visitors has further heightened the fear of government and the immigration system itself. Despite this fear, or perhaps because of it, there was a rush to citizenship after September 11. In addition to the standard reasons for naturalizing—the desire to vote, family unification, and access to better jobs among them—Arab immigrants wanted the additional protection that American citizenship would afford. Beyond the traditional backlogs, however, immigrants faced some new challenges. ACCESS has seen that three out of ten of our Arab clients are delayed up to two years in the FBI “name check” background check required of all applicants. Anecdotally, this delay is experienced more by Arab immigrants than immigrants from other regions.

How the Arab-American Community Is Engaged

These challenges make the citizenship efforts of ACCESS and other Arab-American groups all the more important. As the largest immigration services provider in the Detroit metropolitan area, ACCESS has seen the benefits of building strong relationships with the USCIS and our congressional representatives. In the past three years, we have hosted six oath ceremonies bringing together between 500 and 700 naturalizing Americans for this celebration of citizenship. Alfonso Aguilar, chief of the USCIS’s Office of Citizenship, returned to Dearborn in late 2005 to preside over his second oath ceremony hosted by ACCESS. These ceremonies cement ongoing efforts to build bridges with USCIS so that we can both better serve our community.

At a time when Arab immigrants are so fearful of stepping forward, we can use our long history as an immigration services provider to serve as an advocate and engage with our government counterparts. Our relationship with our congressional representative has been similarly productive. Rep. John Conyers has placed a bilingual staff person at the ACCESS office twice a week to help our clients clarify complicated cases and move along appeals. This not only helps our clients navigate a complex system, it has maintained an open line of communication so that the congressman can follow the issues his constituents and their families face.

ACCESS has evolved from a small storefront offering basic services in the early 1970s to become one of the premier community-based organizations offering immigration services in Michigan. We have been able to maintain the trust of our community precisely because of our ability to build relationships with the government offices that so many Arab Americans fear. Arab immigrants know that we will serve as a strong advocate for their needs and that we understand the way the immigration system works. ACCESS is far from the only example of this in the Arab-American community. Grassroots organizations use similar approaches all around the country, joining together in 2004 to form the National Network for Arab-American Communities in order to share experiences and advocate for our community’s needs. Immigrant integration is one of the network’s first priorities because we know the importance of promoting community empowerment and sustaining civic participation.

As our nation grapples with easing the path to citizenship, we should not forget the pivotal role grassroots organizations play in reaching vulnerable or marginalized communities. Community-based organizations are often the only institutions that have been able to garner the trust of immigrant groups. While we figure out how to reduce backlogs and allocate more resources to citizenship efforts, we can still make progress by building community-government partnerships and using these partnerships to lay a foundation of trust and dialogue.

Citizenship for Seniors

By **Robert Moser**

Deputy Director

Catholic Charities of San Diego

In the United States, the elderly are commonly referred to as “senior citizens.” This nomenclature implies a respected social status. Unfortunately, this population too often experiences barriers that challenge if not contradict this interpretation. Such reality is particularly poignant for seniors seeking to attain citizenship as a legal status. In their case, becoming a “senior citizen” is often an oxymoron.

Catholic Charities, Diocese of San Diego (CCSD) has been a provider of services to refugees and immigrants since 1975. Prior to the passage of federal legislation in 1996 that limited receipt of SSI to citizens, our immigration program seldom saw elderly applicants for naturalization. Since then, however, the number of persons over the age of 65 assisted by our agency to complete and submit an N-400 amounts to 1,823 or 13.4 percent of the total filed. Those aged 55 to 64 represent an additional 11 percent (n =1,504). This data can be compared to figures published by the USCIS for the period 1986 to 2004.

Nationwide, the percentage of naturalized persons who were 55 years of age or older more than doubled over the decade from 1986-96 (10.2 percent to 22.2 percent), peaked in 1998 (28.6 percent), and declined since then to 18.1 percent in 2004. Clearly the demand for naturalization among older legal permanent residents has changed over time. Although the approval rate by age is unknown, information regarding the total number of denials as a percent of the total number of applications adjudicated shows a dramatic increase beginning in 1996 when Congress passed legislation to eliminate noncitizen eligibility for federal means-tested benefits. Denial rates over the past decade (1996-2004) average 23.3 percent compared to 2 percent in the decades between 1950 and 1990. Such significant changes suggest, if not signify, a need to reevaluate how seniors are viewed and treated in their quest toward citizenship.

Both advocates and adjudicators recognize that the aging process itself, with associated illnesses and infirmities, can impact the ability of older persons to learn and retain the information and skills needed to satisfy the civics and English requirements. The N-648 waiver and the 50/20 and 55/15 rules are examples of accommodations that enable qualified elders to receive exemptions from the language criteria. A problem occurs, however, when steps intended to address the special needs of seniors serve instead to detract from both the process and outcome of citizenship.

For example, in certain countries, persons over the age of 55 are considered “old.” Cultural beliefs and social roles define what these elders can do. Respected for their age, such seniors are often tapped for their experience and wisdom. Unfortunately for many, somehow after they immigrate to America a change takes place, as they now become viewed as “incompetent.” Whether it is the American bias toward youth, the complexities and difficulties of acculturation, the fear of failure, or the desire on the part of others to help, the popular view has developed that older immigrants cannot learn new information or cannot demonstrate certain competencies simply because they are “old.” Such a stereotype flies in the face of the fact that an individual’s intellectual and sociological capacities are influenced by multiple factors, including self-identity, educational background, and social support systems. Similarly, there develops a self-fulfilling prophecy when the way in which people are defined influences how they are treated, and in turn, how their responses reinforce the initial assessment. It is a premise of this article that it will never be known how much any senior can achieve if labels box them into a generational category of “cannots.”

Another issue involves the N-648 waiver process. Intended as a means for a person with a bona-fide disability to obtain objective verification and validation of the condition’s connection to the ability to learn, the N-648 can devolve into a meaningless “doctor’s excuse” that speaks more to

the person’s age and educational background than to her or his medical or mental status. At worst, some physicians and psychologists provide diagnoses and prognoses that are contradicted by other information, thereby raising concerns about the integrity of their input. Recent reports of a governmental investigation into possible fraud in the San Diego area regarding the N-648 underscore this problem.

As an alternative, the naturalization process could utilize and expand upon the existing methodology of combining age and years of legal permanent residence to excuse an applicant from the English requirement. The current 50/20 and 55/15 rules could easily be extended and applied to any combination that totals or exceeds 70, starting at 50/20 and ending at 65/5. Any age after 65 combined with 5 years of Legal Permanent Resident status would also qualify for this waiver.

Such a proposal would leave intact the civics requirement, which the eligible elderly applicant could fulfill orally in his or her native language. Hopefully, the redesign of the naturalization test to make it more meaningful would also apply to seniors. Many older immigrants and refugees are experienced in the principles that underlie American citizenship. Freedom, loyalty, sacrifice, and service are not foreign to the foreign-born. Often the elderly exhibit a greater interest and insight into politics and government than younger generations. Given the opportunity to express themselves about core values and given appropriate support to learn about American democracy at work, many seniors would be empowered to demonstrate their assets and abilities rather than enabled to document their disabilities.

Granted this recommendation does nothing to address those applicants who would not qualify under its condition, but it does something substantive, however, for a segment of the population. Namely, it provides dignity to both the applicant and the application. If achieved, becoming and being a “senior citizen” gains the respect it deserves.

Bringing Community Groups into the Citizenship Classroom in Formal Collaborations: Lessons from Chicago

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and

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The naturalization process presents an opportunity for future citizens not only to obtain individual benefits (e.g. the ability to petition for U.S. residency for family members and the elimination of the threat of deportation), but also to engage in a transformative experience, building an understanding of, and interest in, civic participation.

Historically, service organizations and community groups have been involved in the citizenship process with overlapping but distinct goals. Many community groups, especially those in immigrant communities, are concerned with reaching and motivating the largest number of noncitizens in their community to naturalize and subsequently encouraging them to become active community participants and voters. In contrast, service providers are largely focused on making sure that applicants' papers are legally sound, and that the applicants are able to pass the citizenship test.

Community groups generally operate under the organizing principle, "don't do for others what they can do for themselves." Their focus is on leadership development and collective action. Such groups facilitate leadership training in a process whereby people identify issues of concern in their community and organize groups of residents to make changes. Community groups primarily work with institutions—churches, hometown associations, schools, and other organizational entities. Their target audience is community residents who are already part of networks that include many new and prospective citizens.

Classroom citizenship engagement instruction is generally within the purview of the citizenship preparation instructor. Civic empowerment exercises are integrated into the class curriculum, which is necessarily focused primarily on helping students pass the test.

While there are many good civic engagement materials available, the quality of classroom civic engagement instruction varies greatly, for several reasons: limited time available for instruction, the service orientation of the institution conducting the classes, and the idiosyncrasies of individual teachers—their knowledge and training, access

to resources, understanding of relevant issues, and overall level of comfort in teaching a topic that is tangential to passing the citizenship test. Also, teachers generally do not have an existing relationship with local groups that are already working on issues important to class members, making it difficult to foster an atmosphere that allows students to practice these skills on an ongoing basis after they have completed the class.

In order to enhance the quality and impact of civic participation instruction, several collaborative partnerships were recently formed between community groups and citizenship education providers in the Chicago area. Experience to date with these new initiatives indicates that these models offer many promising approaches.

Staff from two collaborations were interviewed for this paper. One partnership is between an organizing group, Interfaith Leadership Project, and the satellite classes of a larger educational institution, Instituto del Progreso Latino. The second is between Instituto and the Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP), with outpost classes based at SWOP member institutions. In one case, the community organization's involvement was motivated by an interest in building and sustaining relationships, and identifying potential leaders in a member institution; in the other, the group was interested in reaching beyond its traditional member constituencies.

Both collaborations emphasize the idea of building a connection between organizers and students. The organizer spends four to eight classroom hours with the students during the session, both in formal leadership development training and as a resource for other local volunteer opportunities or community activities, such as motivating other neighborhood residents to become citizens, sharing their success stories with members of the media and elected officials, or participating in one of the community organization's standing issue committees.

The leadership development curricula include discussion of how the seemingly individual decision to naturalize affects the community as a whole, giving students a broader sense of what becoming a citizen means. In one program the discussion is fostered by introducing students to community organization leaders who have played a key role in developing neighborhood improvement initiatives, including immigration reform, school improvement efforts, or housing initiatives. The curricula may also include discussions of the organizing process required to obtain the resources to pay for the class itself, and current students' potential roles in seeing those initiatives continue in the future.

Students are also invited to participate in and reflect upon a collective action, such as large community meetings, rallies, or conventions. At a recent event, citizenship students attended a town hall meeting at a local church with former

vice-presidential candidate, John Edwards. One student had the role of asking Edwards his position on immigration reform. Reflection upon these meetings is critical to having students understand the role of their participation in the success of the event. Questions may include: “How did you feel to be a part of this action? Did you feel respected? Did you feel powerful? Why or why not?”

Planning and conducting a meeting with a local elected official is another effective activity used by organizers. Students learn about the role of government as they think through questions they plan to pose, and how to respond to questions the elected officials might have for them. The classes are conducted bilingually, but the meeting is conducted in English. Questions from a recent meeting included, “Why did you decide to become a public official?” and “What did you think about President Bush’s announcement that he would put the National Guard at the border?” Students practiced responses to potential questions about why they came to the United States and why they want to become citizens, and their opinions about salient immigration issues.

This model for collaborations should be explored further, with the understanding that conditions for such partnerships are not universal. The issue of sustainability is particularly important to understanding how best to have a long-lasting impact on students’ ability to continue their civic participation efforts after taking their citizenship exams.

The model underscores the fact that civic engagement need not be limited to a citizenship classroom under the direction of a single citizenship instructor. Rather, teachers and organizers can work in their own areas of expertise, allowing students to learn about a spectrum of opportunities for civic engagement, including voting, but in no way limited to that activity. Collaboration allows for a hybrid model, which links the expertise of service organizations, specializing in preparation for and passage of the citizenship exam, with organizing and leadership development, thereby increasing the likelihood that students who choose to will have a venue in which to sustain their civic engagement even after the class is completed.

One difficulty with this model is the variable of trust in developing partnerships. Organizing entities presented here had long-standing, trusting relationships with the educational service organizations, and these relationships were instrumental in carrying the project forward. Both groups needed to have a commitment to the roles of their partners and an understanding that students’ foremost priority was to pass the citizenship exam. Trust between the citizenship students and the organizer in the community group is also significant in ensuring that students exercise their new skills upon completion of their classes. Organizers were present in the classroom throughout the students’ class time, and developed opportunities for

students to interact with each other and reflect upon shared experiences as a class. Community organizing partners must use a model that encourages students to develop their own opinions on key issues and provide opportunities to discuss and debate them.

Some additional limitations relate to the question of language: The groups presented here were able to utilize a bilingual (Spanish/English) model with Latino immigrants, but many citizenship classes combine students of different countries of origin speaking a diverse number of languages.

This paper presents several promising ideas for engaging students in long-term civic participation efforts through collaboration between service organizations and community organizers, but the scope allows us only to scratch the surface of the lessons learned. Additional research is needed in order to ascertain the level of ongoing involvement once students have left the classroom, as well as examining other promising practices throughout the country.

Teaching Citizenship Classes

By **Peter J. Slevin**

Retired Probation Officer

Volunteer at La Esperanza Social Service Center

I had moved down to Bethany Beach, Del., in 1993 after retiring twice. I suppose I was open to the idea of eventually doing some volunteer work, but in no hurry to get involved. Then, a year or so later, I met one of the Carmelite sisters who had just recently opened a social service center to help meet the needs of recent immigrants from Mexico and Guatemala. These people had come to the area around Georgetown, Del., to find work in the poultry industry. Learning that my mother had been a Spanish-speaking immigrant, she suggested that I could possibly be of some service. There was a need for someone to give citizenship classes to prepare eligible people for the final exam in the naturalization process. Since my Spanish was less than proficient I expressed some hesitancy.

Sister Ascensión would have none of that. She said people needed a teacher who spoke in English since the exam was given in English. I agreed to take a stab at it and started to get ready. I looked over the material she gave me, a sheet of 96 questions and answers about American history and our form of government. I also had a booklet from the INS, which explained the naturalization process in detail. After I had a few days to review my son’s American history textbook, as well as a shorter text from the INS that was geared to the level of a high school senior, I bit the bullet and told the secretary at La Esperanza to get the word out that we were now going to give citizenship lessons. Sister had insisted on some sort of schedule that would make it possible for persons from varying work shifts in the

poultry plants to attend the classes. We ended up with a class early Monday morning and another late Wednesday afternoon. We scheduled the classes for an hour's length.

Well, in no time we had two classes going per week with the average size of the groups around six. I had decided to reorder the 100 questions according to a theme so as to avoid mere memorization and make the questions meaningful in their thematic context.

The subjects were the flag, the colonies, independence, the Constitution, the legislative branch, the executive branch, and the judicial branch, with several additional questions regarding later U.S. history. The only handout was an explanation of the course's purpose, a page on the theme list, and a copy of the famous 100 questions with their answers.

I am sure anyone who has taken on teaching any kind of class will say that one learns as one teaches. This was certainly the case for me. To make a long story short, I learned that the differences in English proficiency were notable and caused a good deal of discomfort for many of the less fluent students. Most were between the ages of 20 through 40 and had had varied educational backgrounds at home. Another problem was the occasional absences that made it difficult to move on with the majority of the class. Often, the absent student did not even have the time available for me to bring him or her up to speed. I also learned that my Spanish was a lot better than I thought. This helped explain terminology, and even allowed for some teaching of basic English specific to the test language.

Also unexpected was that the fact that I could speak some Spanish, and even more, that my mother was Hispanic and had to take the same test in 1940, sort of created a bond between many of the students and myself. Another insight I will mention is learning that I would have to put more into the orientation about the conditions surrounding the exam itself.

I had a regrettable experience of having a man go to the exam quite ready to answer any question. He arrived at the examination thinking he was well prepared. The examiner ordered, "Raise your right hand, please." My student froze, not knowing what to do or say, and was immediately told that the exam was over. (He later passed!)

At present, as a result of these early experiences, I now continue to hold classes on each Monday morning and Wednesday afternoon. I take the students one at a time. I have a worksheet for each class that, in essence, requires the student to write out the answers to the day's questions as a homework assignment, just as he or she will have to do in the real final exam. I can give whatever special attention the individual student may need.

Missed classes are no longer a problem. I have a world map and one of the USA on the wall that have turned out to be surprisingly useful. I have the time to work with students who can use some help with specific English problems that could affect test performance, and I will refer people to academic programs available in the community if I believe they are not sufficiently ready language-wise to take the final exam. My students do well on the tests, becoming citizens. Those who don't make it the first time will usually do so if they return for a review course.

I should mention that one thing I am privileged to do is to light a fire of self-confidence in many of my students who for many reasons do not always have the confidence they need to be successful in some area of life. If they make it in this exam, they are learning to negotiate a system within a different culture, and they are doing it in that system's language. I have also learned that I can get the job done in 30-minute classes. It seems to focus me in my presentations, and takes into consideration that a man or woman who has worked all night, or all day, for that matter, can do much better in that time frame.

I understand there are many persons in our population who are, in fact, eligible to apply for citizenship. It may very well happen that there will be a need for more persons to involve themselves as teachers to prepare these candidates to pass their final test. I would encourage anyone who feels called to do this to not allow himself or herself to be discouraged or dissuaded. With a bit of preparation, it is quite amazing what one can do. Also, it is a humbling but rewarding experience to really help a person do something as worthwhile as to become an American citizen.

1 Commentaries in this chapter are the opinions of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC).