

## Creating a Citizenship Preparation Program

### I. Introduction: Tools for a Legal Program Interested in Starting a Citizenship Program

#### Who is this toolkit for?

Anyone seeking ways to better serve the foreign born as they prepare to naturalize.

#### What is a citizenship program?

Citizenship test preparation and quality legal services go hand in hand in assisting an immigrant along the path to citizenship. A prospective bill for comprehensive immigration reform most likely will bring changes in legal and language requirements for those eligible. It is recommended that of all legal service providers and teaching professionals working with the foreign born anticipate these requirements and prepare clients in advance.

A citizenship program provides eligible immigrants with the legal and language assistance they need in order to become a naturalized citizen of the United States. Qualified *legal* staff provide the client with authorized immigration legal services to accurately prepare the application needed to apply for citizenship. Qualified *language* staff prepare the client with the civics and English language knowledge needed to pass a naturalization interview with a USCIS representative. At least 2 levels of classes are offered: civics-based ELL provides students with the fundamental English language knowledge used on the test, and citizenship class provides students with the factual knowledge required to pass the test.

#### What does a citizenship program look like?

Offering comprehensive naturalization preparation services typically utilize two distinct teams of staff – the legal staff and the language staff. Some features of this comprehensive program are:

- Two teams working collaboratively
- Intake process that gauges both legal and language needs
- Tracking systems that follow both legal outcomes and language outcomes
- A minimum of two course levels – civics-based ELL and citizenship
- Trained teachers in adult pedagogy.
- Confidentiality protections

#### What are the benefits to offering both legal and language services?

Work to prepare a client for naturalization does not stop once the applicant's application is filed. Clients require both legal and language support to prepare fully for the citizenship interview with a USCIS officer. Offering both services to clients allows program staff to address comprehensively the citizenship needs of clients seeking this immigration benefit. The integration and empowerment of ELL learners benefits the local community as a whole and efforts should be supported and promoted.