

## Best Practices and Innovations for Naturalization Workshops: Volunteers and Partnerships<sup>1</sup>

Providing high-quality, comprehensive, and affordable naturalization services to Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs) is a multi-faceted and complex process that often requires coordination among many individuals and organizations. To increase the efficiency of naturalization efforts, CLINIC emphasizes a naturalization model that relies on workshops or clinics to complete applications. A naturalization workshop is a one-day community event that brings professionals and trained volunteers together to assist LPRs in completing the Application for Naturalization (N-400). Workshops are usually held at a central location in the community that can accommodate large numbers of applicants, such as a community college or parish hall. A naturalization clinic, on the other hand, is a smaller scale event that usually takes place in the organization's offices rather than an outside location. For more information on workshops, see CLINIC's [Naturalization Workshop Toolkit](#).

Part of the challenge in conducting naturalization workshop events is in galvanizing the participation of many individuals and organizations that make them a success. This document examines best practices when considering the formation of partnerships and the recruitment, training, and management of volunteers.<sup>2</sup>



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### Partnerships

Building partnerships is key to putting on a successful naturalization event. Robust and meaningful partnerships can help to raise awareness around naturalization in the broader community, reach populations or communities your organization may not have access to, and provide resources your organization may lack (i.e. space to conduct workshops or access to

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<sup>1</sup> For additional information on outreach, registration, workflow, and technology, refer to CLINIC's companion document, [Best Practices and Innovations for Group Application Workshops](#).

<sup>2</sup> Much of CLINIC's experience with conducting naturalization workshops comes from its work with the New Americans Campaign (NAC). Many of the best practices shared in this document come directly from the NAC. For more information on the New Americans Campaign please visit: <http://newamericanscampaign.org/>.

technology). Following are some additional considerations for forming partnerships. You can find more information in CLINIC's [Partnership Toolkit](#).

- Aim to have a wide variety and diversity of partnerships. Attorneys from the state bar and local American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) chapter, public libraries, government agencies or offices, elected officials, businesses, religious organizations, members of the media, refugee resettlement programs, and other non-profit organizations are all examples of partnerships that can help your organization. Different organizations will have different resources and capacities that can help you plan and conduct naturalization events.
- When partnering with other non-profits, find an organization with resources and skills that either complement your own for expansion purposes or are unique and fill a gap. For example, if you need more immigration practitioners, you can train attorneys from other organizations on naturalization law. Or, if you have enough volunteers but lack adequate space, you can collaborate with a community college that can provide many large rooms, copiers, a computer lab, and wifi.
- With any partnership, make sure you identify how formal you would like your relationship to be, how often you envision collaborating, and what your organization wants out of the relationship. Draft a memorandum of understanding that your organization and the partner will review and sign to clarify and solidify expectations of your work together. Make sure the MOU describes the roles and responsibilities for each partner.
- Form partnerships with organizations that have direct access to large numbers of LPRs. For example, some businesses or unions may have large numbers of LPRs as employees or members, or they may have attorneys on their staff or board of directors who can be trained as volunteers. Your organization can tailor outreach or naturalization events around the organization and its members. By bringing information sessions and workshops to large groups of LPRs and with the support of the partnering organization, your organization should be able to more efficiently engage with a larger number of LPRs.
- Form partnerships with consulates in your community. Partnerships with consulates allow your organization to target specific immigrant communities for outreach. In many cases consulates will work with your organization to help promote, carry out, and even host workshops.
- When forming partnerships, make sure you understand, listen, and engage with what your partnering organization hopes to achieve through the partnership. Make sure you identify how your organization can assist the partner organization, even if it is not directly naturalization-related.

- Establish a relationship with your local USCIS office and your USCIS community relations officer. Having a relationship with USCIS can be helpful in understanding the policies and practices of your local USCIS office. Inviting a community relations officer to one of your community outreach events or to a workshop can also help bolster your event and allow members of the community to get answers to their questions directly from USCIS.
- Establish partnerships with financial institutions willing to make micro-loans to applicants. Defraying the cost of the N-400 application should greatly reduce financial barriers for many LPRs.
- Partner with your local public benefits office, which can send letters to the non-citizen population about your naturalization services. In addition, the public benefits office can be invited to staff a table at workshops to provide attendees with documentation needed for fee waiver eligibility.

## **Volunteers**

Volunteers are what make large naturalization events possible. Having a large, well-trained, dependable group of volunteers is crucial to your organization's overall naturalization success. The tips below should help your organization when recruiting, training, managing, and retaining volunteers. For more information on effectively recruiting and using volunteers, see CLINIC's [Volunteer Management Toolkit](#).



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## ***Recruiting Volunteers***

- Recruit volunteers from a wide range of organizations or partners, such as law firms, law schools, AILA members, colleges, local religious organizations, ESL and GED teachers, refugee resettlement caseworkers, immigrant community organizers, and AmeriCorps/VISTA volunteers. Recruiting from a large number of organizations ensures not only that your organization can maximize the number of volunteers recruited, but also that there is a diversity of relevant skills to help with naturalization activities (i.e. people with legal background, technological expertise, or relevant language skills).

- Recruit former naturalization clients or American citizens that have recently taken the oath of citizenship to help with naturalization events or outreach. Naturalization clients who have worked with your organization will be able to provide a unique perspective on the workshop experience and can help bolster your organization's credibility in the community and drive turnout. Naturalization clients can also be surveyed to help look for improvements or efficiencies that can be implemented for outreach and conducting workshops. Recruiting new American citizens to do outreach can also help give eligible LPRs the confidence they need to begin the application process.
- When recruiting volunteers, know your audience and promote volunteering in a way that appeals to them. For many volunteers the opportunity is a chance to give something back to their community, learn a new skill, expand their knowledge or experience, or pass on their own expertise and knowledge to others. Understanding what motivates potential volunteers and what will give them the greatest sense of fulfillment is key to not only recruiting volunteers but also fully engaging and retaining them over the long term.
- Promote volunteering as an opportunity to build skills and network with legal professionals. For legal professionals, offer trainings that can count toward Continuing Legal Education (CLE) credits.

### ***Training Volunteers***

- Offer standardized training sessions to volunteers on an ongoing basis with times and locations that are convenient. Consider recording trainings and making them available online for volunteers that can't make it to in-person trainings.
- Use CLINIC's rapid e-learning, [Completing the Application for Naturalization](#) as an introductory training for volunteers.
- Ensure that trainings are divided between workshop process trainings and substantive legal trainings to make training more efficient and ensure that volunteers with specific roles are receiving appropriate instruction.
- Where appropriate, develop introductory, intermediate, and advanced trainings for volunteers as a way to keep them engaged with naturalization work over the long run.

### ***Managing Volunteers***

- For all-day events, have volunteers work in morning and afternoon shifts of four hours each. Shorter shifts for volunteers will keep them productive and energized and will limit volunteer burnout and help with retention.
- For long-term volunteers, consider asking them to take on additional responsibilities or offering them opportunities to participate in new trainings or gain new skills. This will deepen volunteers' engagement and give them a greater sense of ownership with your organization's naturalization program.

- Maintain regular communication with volunteers to keep them engaged and let them know about events. Be sure to demonstrate how much your organization appreciates the hard work and commitment of its volunteers. Consider having volunteer appreciation events or periodically calling or writing to volunteers to thank them individually.
- Make sure volunteers are comfortable and enjoy their volunteer experience. Be sure to provide food and drink for volunteers along with regular breaks.
- Make sure volunteers understand that they may be dealing with clients' personal information and have them sign confidentiality agreements.