A naturalization group application workshop is a one-day community event that brings professionals and trained volunteers together to assist Lawful Permanent Residents in completing the Application for Naturalization (N-400). The workshop is an essential tool in a national citizenship program for efficiently and effectively providing naturalization assistance to large numbers of people.

Workshop Models

There are two common but distinct naturalization group application workshop models. The legal model views immigrants first and foremost as applicants eligible for a federal immigration status based on immigration law and regulations. Eligibility is determined through a prescreening or intake process before beginning the application and is verified through a quality-control procedure after the application is completed. These steps help ensure that applicants avoid any negative consequences from submitting an application in error, such as denial or deportation. A legal model considers a workshop successful when all eligible applicants are assisted to file complete and accurate applications and all ineligible applicants are identified and screened out.

The community organizing model views immigrants primarily as a disenfranchised population needing to become voters to overcome their marginalized status. This model tends to emphasize the importance of filing a high number of applications so that immigrants can be linked to organizers for future voter registration and participation at the polls. While the community organizing model may provide all the necessary pre-screening and quality control steps to protect immigrants from harm, this model is frequently driven by numbers.

It is important to note that the two models are not irreconcilable. The goals of both can be blended. Workshops can assist large numbers of people and ensure efficiency and quality of service if the sponsor of the event takes necessary precautions. However, the authors of this report strongly recommend that the legal model prevail in defining workshop operations and that it be the basis for decisions that are made in the applicants’ best interests.

Elected officials, typically congressional representatives, occasionally sponsor workshops as a constituency service. They view immigrants as a unique constituency that needs special assistance to navigate the naturalization application process. The congressional representative’s workshop may also serve as a soft-sell campaign device to garner support from future immigrant voters in an upcoming election. Whatever the primary motivation, elected officials are encouraged under a national citizenship program to sponsor workshops and partner with qualified legal organizations that have experienced staff who serve as the chief decision makers for each applicant.

Rationale for Choosing the Legal Model

The legal model is based on the fact that naturalization is a legal process guided by federal law and regulations. The application is signed under penalty of law. In addition, increasing numbers of states are enacting statutes that prohibit the unauthorized practice of law, including legal immigration assistance. It is advisable for workshop sponsors to know their state law in this regard. As a legal process, naturalization can result in extremely positive or negative outcomes. The positive outcome is for immigrants to obtain U.S. citizenship with all its rights, benefits, and responsibilities. A negative result is for the applicant to be denied citizenship because of a correctable ineligibility, or, worse, detained, separated from family members, and removed from the United States.

A Workshop by a Different Name

The workshop model goes by various names in different communities—naturalization workshop, naturalization group processing, citizenship workshop, citizenship group processing workshop, or citizenship clinic. Further, there are differences between “workshops” and “clinics.” A workshop is a periodically scheduled event typically held away from the sponsoring organization’s office at a location that can accommodate large numbers of people seeking to complete an immigration application. A clinic is held at a regularly scheduled time, often a weekday evening or Saturday morning, when a limited number of persons without appointments can meet a legal immigration counselor in the sponsoring organization’s office for consultation or application assistance.
Workshop Benefits

The workshop model can result in many positive outcomes for both immigrant communities and immigrant-service organizations. Outreach that draws immigrants to a workshop increases knowledge of the naturalization process and appreciation for citizenship rights and responsibilities:

- Through targeted and ongoing outreach, the immigrant community learns the benefits of citizenship and how to prepare for the eligibility requirements.

- Through mass communication messages and individual contacts from influential community members, immigrants are motivated to attain citizenship.

- Through friendly, professional consultation, immigrants who fear immigration officials or the naturalization process have myths dispelled and concerns allayed.

At workshops, immigrants who have minimal confidence in their English language ability can be conveniently assessed by naturalization experts and learn if their proficiency is sufficient to succeed with or without English and naturalization classes. They also receive instructional aid and referrals:

- Applicants are given access to English- and native-language study materials.

- They are referred to citizenship classes that provide instruction on English, U.S. history, and civics. Such classes increase an applicant’s chance to pass the naturalization test and provide a forum to learn, discuss, and participate in the “American experience.”

- Immigrants collect useful information on vocational training, English classes, community safety, health, and the electoral process in addition to “know-your-rights” materials related to employment, housing, civil rights, and immigration law.

Workshops offer immigrants the opportunity to ask general questions or discuss specific problems with their pending application:

- Immigrants applying for naturalization can learn how their minor, dependent children will become citizens through derivation and how to document their status.

- Immigrants who are already citizens through derivation can verify their existing citizenship status.

- Since the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) severely limits walk-in appointments and requires an InfoPass to see an officer, immigrants can meet informally with a USCIS public information or adjudication officer.

- Immigrants with special needs, such as the elderly, disabled, and low-income, as well as those who speak limited English or have complex immigration and legal histories, can ask experts questions and learn how to overcome these barriers.

- Immigrants requiring additional services can receive referrals, including to services unrelated to naturalization.

With the workshop model, community resources are efficiently used through professional and volunteer support when time, money, and talent can be in short supply. At the same time, applicants receive high-quality legal immigration services at a low cost compared to private attorney fees, particularly saving money for multiple family members wishing to become citizens together.

In turn, workshop-sponsoring agencies can achieve increased community visibility and garner positive, hard-to-come-by media attention. They may also receive more in-cash and in-kind community support.

Community members—native and foreign-born, of all races, nationalities, ethnicities, religions, and socioeconomic levels—work together for one common purpose, resulting in increased familiarity, understanding, and empathy. Integration services and community organizing efforts expose immigrants to U.S. ideals and traditions that continue to define our country.

Workshop Formats

Immigrants apply for citizenship sooner and in higher numbers through a convenient, “one-stop” format. Below is an extensive description of a “one-stop” or “same-day” workshop. An alternate format is completed in two stops or two days. Simply described, this second model asks intending applicants to: preregister, pay a workshop fee, attend an information meeting about eligibility and documentation requirements, and take an Application for Naturalization (N-400) home to complete as well as possible. On the following day, or a day soon thereafter, the applicant attends a workshop where the application is completed and packaged for mailing. This model saves time on the day of the workshop but has a lower completion rate than the one-stop model because it requires applicants to appear twice.

Preparation for a Workshop

The decision to conduct a naturalization workshop cannot be taken lightly. Performed badly, it can result in weakened community relations, poor reputation with clients, and, worst of all, an immigrant placed in removal proceedings. Performed successfully, it can become an institutionalized event that transforms an immigrant community into one with members enjoying the full benefits of citizenship.
Good preparation and attention to detail before a workshop will give sponsors a feeling of confidence and give applicants evidence of professionalism and community collaboration.

**Needs assessment and planning:**
First, a team of legal immigration and community organizing professionals assesses the need for implementing the workshop model using demographic data on noncitizens and interviews with stakeholders, particularly noncitizen Lawful Permanent Residents and potential volunteers. Second, sponsoring and cosponsoring organizations must identify the level of staff time and financial resources required and available for each workshop. Third, the capacity of local service organizations to provide increased follow-up services needs to be assessed. Lastly, the sponsors choose mutually acceptable goals, objectives, and implementation strategies.

After choosing a model and format, the following policies can be determined: 1) the feasible number of workshops to be sponsored in a year, taking care to avoid federal, religious, and ethnic holidays, 2) a cap to the number of applicants to be served at each workshop, 3) “custody” of the reported number of people served, 4) services that will and will not be provided at the workshop, 5) pre-registration requirements and policies toward walk-ins, 6) fee levels for each discrete service, as well as for packaged services, 7) desirable locations, 8) volunteer recruitment ideas, and 9) responsibilities for outreach, training, on-site management, quality control, and project evaluation. These policy decisions cannot be competently made ad hoc on the day of the event when questions and challenges arise.

**Site location:**
The success of any community event greatly depends on the appropriateness of its location. If a sponsor organization’s office is not adequate, it is preferred that an alternative site be made available at no cost or for an affordable rental fee. The location should have ample parking and be accessible to public transportation and the disabled. A large waiting area is needed for registered people and walk-ins and a common area for workstations, including registration, intake, USCIS staff, study materials, and photographs. It is desirable to have application workstations at separate tables for maximum privacy. The workshop area needs to accommodate a required number of tables and chairs. A photocopier is essential for copying documents and applications. A kitchen is a desirable to provide volunteers with food and drinks.

**Volunteer recruitment and role assignment:**
The quality and dedication of staff and volunteers drives the success of the workshop model. The sponsor is preferably a charitable legal immigration agency offering its staff of attorneys and Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA)-accredited representatives to: 1) organize the event and train volunteers, including attorneys who do not practice immigration law or are not experienced in naturalization law, 2) assist in completing naturalization applications, 3) back-stop volunteers by answering questions from immigrants on the spot, 4) conduct quality control reviews of all completed applications, and 5) take referrals for complex cases that are not appropriate for workshops.

Volunteers should be recruited with the help of volunteer coordinators from other organizations and lists of past volunteers. It is desirable to use volunteers who are comfortable in cross-cultural settings, adept in communicating in English with speakers of English as a second language, sensitive to people with disabilities or age-related problems, and nonjudgmental about people’s background and behavior.

Workshop sponsors need to ask volunteers what skills and interests they bring to the event. They should seek volunteers’ agreement to specific roles and provide written explanations of every role a volunteer is likely to play. In addition, workshop sponsors need to give volunteers a written confidentiality agreement to sign and date stating they will refrain from sharing details about an applicant by name or identifying information with anyone during or after the workshop. The exception is if a volunteer is seeking professional input from an assigned person in charge of quality control and making final decisions as to how an applicant should proceed.

Legal immigration experts from nonprofit organizations and private law firms are highly desirable volunteers. Attorneys in good standing with the local bar association are also valuable in assisting with the completion of applications. Those with experience can monitor quality control. However, non-immigration attorneys may not know immigration or naturalization law and need detailed training just like any other volunteer. It also cannot be assumed that even immigration attorneys know all the important points of naturalization law, regulations, and policies. This is especially true when assisting unique populations with special circumstances or needs, such as refugees, low-income applicants requesting fee waivers, the elderly who may be eligible for an English-language waiver, the disabled who require a Medical Certification for Disability Exceptions (N-648), or persons with criminal convictions.

Teachers of English as a second language (ESL) are a second group offering dedicated, highly qualified workshop volunteers. They see the workshop as a logical extension of their professional goals. With training, they can be competent application assistants. Their participation also facilitates referrals to ESL and citizenship classes. Overall, the high standing and earned respect of these teachers within the immigrant community is an asset to the reputation of the workshop.
It is generally favorable to have a USCIS public information officer or adjudication officer present at a workshop. USCIS participation can be a draw for people, especially those who do not have legal representation, but need information. Organizers of workshops should be in agreement on whether to have USCIS officers attend and in what capacity. Their presence should be clearly indicated with a sign and nametags. Officers should explain their workshop role and its limits.

A USCIS presence at each workshop helps the agency fulfill its community information mission and promotes improved working relationships between government and community-based organizations. Furthermore, it gives USCIS an opportunity to see the immigrant population at one of its best moments, applying for citizenship with community volunteer support.

Training:
A well-developed training program greatly assists in keeping volunteers active and satisfied with their contributions. Insufficient or sporadic training can result in high turnover. Even worse, poor training can result in a misinformed applicant, which could possibly lead to the applicant’s detention or removal from the country.

The sponsoring agency should take responsibility for training. Co-trainers can be recruited from the local bar association, the membership of the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA), or the roster of USCIS naturalization adjudication officers.

It is best to give volunteers repeat training opportunities before their first workshop and to provide them with written materials explaining eligibility requirements and the application process. Training should cover: 1) the sections of the Immigration and Nationality Act related to naturalization, 2) naturalization ineligibilities, 3) the different versions of Lawful Permanent Resident cards, 4) a step-by-step review of all questions on the N-400 and N-600 forms, 5) the responsibilities of the different stations in the workshop process, 6) lines of supervision for assistance and quality control, and 7) information on accessing Selective Service, English and naturalization classes, immigration attorneys, court records, FBI records, the USCIS office, and the passport office. Volunteers should not be permitted to complete applications unless they have attended training on all these topics.

At minimum, inexperienced volunteers can receive training the night before a workshop and come early the day of the event for a quick review. First-time volunteers should shadow someone with experience for one or two application interviews. It is important to get the feedback of first-timers, no matter how briefly, before they leave the workshop.

All volunteers should be encouraged to seek on-the-spot consultation from an expert assigned to conduct quality control. The applicant needs to be included in the consultation, with an interpreter if necessary. All volunteers should have formal and informal opportunities to give feedback to the workshop’s sponsor.

Outreach:
Outreach is essential for idealistic and practical reasons. It promotes citizenship, educates about the benefits of citizenship, and informs potential participants about the workshop, date, and documentation requirements. A communication effort also helps ensure that enough people will attend to make the workshop effective and efficient.

Outreach is a responsibility shared by the sponsoring and cosponsoring agencies, volunteers and their employers, non-English and immigrant-focused media, and public and private social-service providers that work with the immigrant community. A workshop coordinator continually updates and expands the list of outreach contacts and records where contacts were made prior to the event.

Since an efficient workshop depends on applicants’ foreknowledge of citizenship eligibility requirements so that they arrive prepared, the most effective outreach is in writing. A flyer or bulletin, rather than a radio or TV announcement, allows prospective applicants to read and retain important details about citizenship and the workshop. A flyer should include: 1) a logo and heading that clearly presents the purpose of a naturalization application workshop, 2) date, time, and location, 3) names of sponsoring agencies, 4) phone numbers to call and pre-register, 5) workshop application fee indicating accepted forms of payment, 6) total USCIS fee that must be paid by check or money order, and 7) necessary documents, such as Alien Registration Card, “green card,” past and current passports or travel documents with entry and exit dates from the United States, dates and addresses of residences and employment in the past five years, and data for spouse or former spouse and children. It is best to include the date of the next available workshop in case the current date is inconvenient for the applicant.

Forms, documents, materials, and supplies:
A naturalization workshop is paper intensive. It is advisable for a workshop coordinator to have a checklist for the items below and collect a sufficient number of them in advance, particularly immigration forms.

Key USCIS forms include N-400, N-600, and N-648. Multiple copies of the forms can be ordered by dialing the USCIS Forms Request Line at 1-800-870-3676. This automated recording service asks that the caller select the type of form(s) needed and give the name of the person making the request and a mailing address. Forms typically take...
five to ten days to be processed in addition to several working days for U.S. Postal Service delivery. They can also be downloaded from the USCIS website at http://uscis.gov/graphics/formsfee/forms/index.htm. The Application for Naturalization (N-400) is located at http://uscis.gov/files/form/N-400.pdf.

The sponsoring agency should create N-400 and N-600 attachment sheets for extra information that does not fit on the application form. Attachment sheets must include headings for the applicant's name, Alien Registration number (A #), and type and section of form.

Two final, necessary forms: Every applicant should be given a written disclaimer about services performed and not performed, signed by the sponsor's immigration director and the registered applicant. Copies should be made for the applicant and workshop sponsor. In addition, workshop sponsors should have on hand an advisement form that indicates why an applicant is warned not to apply for naturalization until legal counsel has been secured or stated ineligibilities have been overcome.

Among the documents and literature to have available are the Immigration and Nationality Act, reference documents such as the Code of Federal Regulations (Section 8), USCIS's A Guide to Naturalization (M-476) and its list of 96 U.S. history and government questions and answers, sponsoring agency training books, naturalization self-study guides for the English, history, and civics tests, and translated study materials.

Necessary materials include receipt slips for checks and cash, signs for the front door and individual workshop stations, volunteer and applicant registration sheets, intake sheets, flyers for future naturalization workshops, referral lists to English-language and naturalization classes and charitable legal immigration services, naturalization audio-visual training materials, and business cards.

It is important to have the following supplies on hand: Notepads, pens, pencils, markers, post-it notes, a camera, film, batteries, photocopy paper, photocopy toner, nametags, an audio-visual player, mailing envelopes addressed to USCIS, workstation checklists, numbered tickets (with time slots if morning and afternoon sessions are scheduled), food, beverages, plates, cups, and eating utensils. It is wise to have someone on hand to make simple repairs to the photocopier and camera.

The Naturalization Application Workshop Event

The workshop is a lesson in crowd control. People will arrive before the workshop starts and after it is scheduled to end. A policy should be set for those arriving very late. Every workstation is set up with tables, chairs, and supplies and clearly marked with signs prior to the doors opening. The registration table is the first station that applicants reach, inhibiting them from progressing further until all registration and intake matters have been completed.

Guiding applicants through the stages of a workshop with signs, a checklist, and polite verbal instructions will help everyone navigate the process. The checklist should list each workstation in progression and have space for a checkmark. Applicants carry the checklist from station to station, receiving checkmarks from volunteers after completing each stage. By connecting signs with stages on the checklist, applicants will know where to go next and be able to gauge the time required to complete, review, and copy the application before the workshop ends. The workshop sponsor should take notes on what was not prepared properly to make corrections for the next event.

A table should be set where volunteers sign in ahead of time, giving their name, organization, address, phone number, e-mail, and fax number. This information allows the coordinator to send thank-you letters and flyers about the next workshop. Volunteers receive and wear nametags and are assigned a workstation. Coordinators should know how many hours each volunteer is able to spend at the workshop, ensuring backup when volunteers leave.

Stage One: Registration and Intake

Ideally, every applicant will have pre-registered in person or by phone, receiving specific instructions on eligibility requirements and documents needed to complete the application. For workshops with high registration numbers, registered applicants should be assigned to morning or afternoon sessions to avoid a crowded waiting room of increasingly frustrated applicants waiting their turn. Pre-registered applicants should be given priority in line for application assistance. This benefit, and possibly a reduced pre-registration fee, should be an incentive to pre-registering. If the policy allows, unexpected walk-ins should be accepted graciously until the hour of open registration ends.

At the registration table, applicants pay the workshop fee and receive a receipt. They also receive an 8 x 11 envelope with a number indicating where they are in the queue to meet an application assistant. The envelope contains the checklist, an N-400 application, a referral list...
for English and naturalization classes, and any other printed information the sponsoring agency wants the applicant to take home.

Intake includes a simple assessment of the applicant’s English and literacy skills and a determination of general eligibility. Applicants deemed ineligible need to speak with a naturalization expert to confirm if an ineligibility exists and if, how, and when eligibility can be achieved. A person with a permanent bar is discouraged from applying for naturalization and told how to avoid being placed in removal proceedings. If needed, an appointment is made for an in-office consultation.

At intake, the sponsoring organization takes key biodata information deemed necessary to update the client’s file as well as the agency’s database and mailing list. The information will likely include name, address, day and evening phone numbers, email address, nationality, age, gender, immigration code indicating how Lawful Permanent Resident status was acquired, or any other information useful to the sponsor’s parent organization or funder. Here is a good opportunity to ask applicants their reasons for wanting to become citizens. The answers can be written, tallied, and analyzed.

After intake, applicants are assigned to sit in a general waiting area for their number to be called to meet with an application preparer. The waiting period is a good time for people to meet with a USCIS officer if one is in attendance. Alternatively, if conducive to the workshop atmosphere, a verbal presentation can be given or a video played, offering important information about the naturalization interview or other pertinent matters.

Stage Two:
Application Assistance

At the second station an applicant is met by a trained volunteer application preparer. Preferably, the preparer and applicant have some privacy and are seated away from other applicants. The preparer reviews the intake sheet to verify registration, payment, and status. All supporting documents for the application are reviewed. Preparers remind applicants of the waivers they signed and repeat the importance of total honesty and the consequences of providing false or misleading information. After entertaining any immediate questions from the applicant, the preparer begins to complete all sections of the N-400.

The preparer addresses problems such as previous arrests and convictions, lack of child support payment, or evidence of the failure to register for Selective Service. (Males between the ages of 18 and 26 may go to their local post office to register or may register on-line at www.sss.gov.) The preparer asks the applicant if he or she has any plans to change addresses while the naturalization process is underway, advising the applicant how to send proper change of address notification to USCIS.

If confusion arises, the preparer asks for on-the-spot assistance from an expert who is roaming the room. Unresolved questions or problem areas, also known as “red flags”, are noted for the expert at stage four who will do the final review. (See Citizenship for Us: A Guide to Naturalization, produced by the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc., or CLINIC, for details on completing the N-400 and the naturalization process.)

Lastly, applicants are asked to reaffirm the veracity of all their responses, and sign and date the application. Then, the preparer signs the section asking for the preparer’s name, signature, and affiliation. The preparer marks the checklist and, if the application is completed, directs the applicant to the area where photographs are taken. (To prevent film and money from being wasted, photographs are not taken before an application is completed, in case ineligibility is determined.)

Stage Three: Photographs

A volunteer familiar with USCIS photograph requirements has an applicant stand before a blank white background and takes two, full-face, side-by-side images. Applicants should be informed beforehand to look their best, as the photograph will appear permanently on their naturalization certificate. Once the photograph is dry, the volunteer writes the applicant’s full name and alien registration number twice on the reverse, once on each side of the picture. The photograph is placed in the applicant’s envelope and the applicant is instructed to go to stage four to receive a final review.

Stage Four: Final Review

The importance of final review cannot be overstated. Also known as quality control, final review requires the expertise of a naturalization expert, such as an immigration attorney or BIA-accredited representative with knowledge of naturalization law, USCIS regulations, policies, and procedures, and the unique needs of special populations who frequently seek assistance at workshops.

At final review, the expert examines eligibility documents, reaffirms English-language skills and the accuracy of each statement, ascertains that forms are completed, makes a determination on tagged “red flag” issues, and corrects any errors by volunteers. Typical errors include reading the green card’s adjustment of status incorrectly, failing to list residence, employment, and travel dates in reverse rather than chronological order, failing to list travel dates according to visa stamps in passports, failing to list the
Follow-Up for Volunteers and Applicants

Appointments are made for applicants who have legal and language barriers to naturalization. Follow-up calls are made to applicants who were referred to English and naturalization classes and mock naturalization interview sessions, encouraging them to attend. Thank-you letters are sent to location host, staff, volunteers, USCIS, in-kind sponsors, and funders. First-time volunteers are called to get feedback on the workshop experience and to determine if additional training is needed.

Conclusion

Experts in delivering naturalization workshops need to share best practices using the model outlined above and similar models. Funders should take note of the workshop model’s benefits to immigrant communities, service organizations, and civic-minded volunteers. Workshops themselves are not costly but require the time and talent of immigration experts to conduct outreach, train volunteers, and provide the needed supportive services, such as English and citizenship classes, test preparation and naturalization interview sessions, and advocacy.

The naturalization group application workshop is a crucial component of a national citizenship program. It has proven to be an efficient and successful way to promote naturalization and deliver naturalization services. The naturalization workshop is a testament to our nation’s immigrant heritage and affirms the belief that citizenship should be accessible and all-inclusive.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUNDERS

Workshop supporters can fail individual applicants and the community if they prioritize only by the number of applicants served. Funders should not weigh numbers too highly and overlook the many other benefits achieved. Factors funders should consider include:

1. Which organizations provided citizenship outreach?
2. Which organizations acted as workshop supporters?
3. How many volunteers per applicant were in attendance?
4. Were USCIS officers at the workshop to respond to immigrant inquiries?
5. How many immigrants registered for the workshop?
6. How many registered immigrants came prepared to complete the application?
7. How many applications were completed? What is the ratio to the number registered?
8 How did the ethnic representation of applicants compare to neighborhood demographics?

9 How many immigrants were identified as permanently ineligible and would have been at risk if they applied on their own?

10 How many immigrants were identified as currently ineligible but eligible in the future with the help of legal consultation, English or civics classes, or other supportive services?

11 How many immigrants successfully accessed supportive services later?

12 How many low-income immigrants were assisted with application-fee waivers?

13 How many immigrants were identified as potentially requiring a disability waiver?

14 Did the workshop gain any media attention?