



Citizenship and Naturalization Programs

A Municipal Action for Immigrant Integration Brief

Winter 2009

Many municipalities have established programs aimed at preparing immigrants for the naturalization test and helping new citizens to exercise their right to vote. Some of these programs include efforts to involve the community at large by organizing diversity celebrations, recruiting volunteers for programs, providing immigration legal advice clinics, and holding citizenship ceremonies.

Citizenship classes and workshops not only help immigrants apply for naturalization or prepare for the naturalization test, they are an important way for cities to foster civic engagement among immigrant communities. Cities can also use these programs to disseminate information about local services to new residents. The following are examples of how communities are promoting civic engagement.

For more examples, visit the City Practices database, online at www.nlc.org → About Cities → City Practice Resources.

Alexandria Citizenship Day

City: **Alexandria, Virginia**

Population: 128,283

For more information, contact: JoAnn Maldonado, Multicultural Affairs and Community Outreach Coordinator
(703) 838-0709

Each year the City of Alexandria, through the Alexandria Multicultural Services Initiative, joins with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services in recognizing newly naturalized United States Citizens with the Annual Citizenship Day ceremony. The City's event is scheduled during the month of September (in honor of National Citizenship Day) and is held in historic Market Square in Old Town, Alexandria. Citizenship Day provides an opportunity for diverse communities to celebrate newly naturalized foreign-born citizens who live and work there, and for local officials and residents to welcome them to the City. A reception following the ceremony provides an atmosphere of warmth and inclusiveness for all who attend. New citizens are offered the opportunity to register to vote and to interact with other residents, and to speak with and ask questions of the City's Multicultural Services Coordinator and with City officials, staff and other local elected officials.

Louisville Metro Office for International Affairs

City: **Louisville, Kentucky**

Population: 256,231

For more information, contact: Claudia Peralta-Mudd
(502) 574-1457
www.louisvilleky.gov/International/

The Office for International Affairs (OIA) was created in response to the growing number of immigrants and refugees in Louisville. The OIA connects newcomers to community resources and information through outreach, advocacy, awareness programs, and referral services. The annual Mayor's International Awards honors local businesses and organizations that have contributed to multiculturalism and diversity. The annual WorldFest on the Belvedere celebrates both the heritage of native Louisvillians and the diversity of new residents through food, music, games and other activities. In 2005, WorldFest included a naturalization ceremony, with 138 people from 44 countries becoming U.S. citizens. As an extension of the OIA programs, each month the Mayor hosts the "Mayor's Community Conversations" in a

neighborhood with a high concentration of international residents, where they can speak directly with the Mayor about their concerns and ideas.

Immigrant Population Initiatives

City: **San Antonio, Texas**

Population: 1,144,646

For more information, contact: Cindy Schoenmaker
(210) 207-5921
www.sanantonio.gov/comminit

San Antonio offers a variety of services through Immigrant Population Initiatives that enable individuals to enhance their ability to read, write, and converse in English and to solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society. The initiative also includes basic literacy and advanced computer classes. The EL-Civics program allows immigrants to study English and helps prepare individuals for citizenship. The city's Senior Services Division offers a range of services designed to promote active civic involvement and overall health of program participants. A city ordinance that provides a means for immigrants to obtain identification cards opens the doors to accessing banking services, education, and social services.

Mayor's Office of New Bostonians

City: **Boston, Massachusetts**

Population: 589,141

For more information, contact: Reverend Cheng Imm Tan, Director
(617) 635-2980
www.cityofboston.gov/newbostonians

The Mayor's Office of New Bostonians (MONB) encourages full participation by the city's new immigrants and others from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. In 2000 the New Bostonians Vote Campaign was launched with over 170 community-based organizations partnering to address issues that included countering a preconceived notion that immigrants are civically apathetic, advocating for attention and resources to address community needs and aspirations, and increasing civic participation and voter registration in immigrant communities. The program culminated in a New Bostonians Community Day celebrating the effort and announcing the count of voters registered through the campaign. The MONB released the New Bostonians Civic Participation & Voter Information Kit, which includes a video (available in Spanish, Haitian Creole, Vietnamese, Cape Verdean Creole, Portuguese, Chinese, and Russian) showing residents how to register to vote and a voter information book. The MONB also holds free immigration consultations at City Hall twice each month.

Littleton Immigrant Integration Initiative

City: **Littleton, Colorado**

Population: 40,340

For more information, contact: Alejandra Harguth
(303) 795-3968
www.connectingimmigrants.org

The Littleton Immigrant Integration Initiative (LI3), which began in 2005 with the support of a grant from The Colorado Trust, aims to involve the community in immigrant integration efforts. Among the LI3 initiatives are one-on-one Citizenship Mentoring, the Immigrant Friends Program, and the One-Stop Information Center. The Citizenship Mentoring Program relies on volunteers who tutor immigrants in preparation for the naturalization test and interview. A ceremony is also held in Littleton to swear in new citizens. The Immigrant Friends Program fosters cultural understanding through partnering new immigrant residents with existing Littleton residents for mutual learning. In addition, the One-Stop Information Center is an important resource for new immigrants – the Center provides information on a range of local services, such as where to find a physician to how to enroll in school.

Latin American Coalition

City: **Charlotte, North Carolina**

Population: 540,828

For more information, contact: Ruben Campillo, Advocacy Coordinator
(704) 531-3848
www.latinamericancoalition.org

The Charlotte-based Latin American Coalition offers citizenship classes to area legal permanent residents who are preparing for the naturalization test and interview. The eight-week, bi-lingual course covers basic ESL training, US history and government, and individualized instruction for students in advance of the naturalization test. In addition, the organization sponsors citizenship clinics, which provide assistance at no cost to people who want to file naturalization applications. The Latin American Coalition also offers classes for the Latino community on a range of other topics, including computer literacy, ESL, homeownership, workforce development, and small business development.

Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights, Park Avenue Foundation/ Volunteer Lawyers Network Walk-in Legal Clinic

City: **Minneapolis, Minnesota**

Population: 382,618

For more information, contact: Colleen Beebe, Director of Education
(612) 341-3302
www.mnadvocates.org

The Advocates for Human Rights partners with the Park Avenue Foundation and Volunteer Lawyers Network to provide free immigration legal advice—such as naturalization guidance—on a walk-in basis to low-income residents of Hennepin County. The clinic has been in operation since 1997 and serves over 300 individuals each year. Open to low-income Hennepin County residents without existing legal representation, the clinic operates each Thursday.

New American Service Program

City: **Atlanta, Georgia**

Population: 416,474

For more information, contact: Vinny Serpico, New American Service
Program manager
(770) 938-1112
www.btgonline.org

The New American Service Program (NASP) is an initiative of the Bridging the Gap Project (BTG). NASP operates in both the Atlanta and Charlotte offices of BTG and provides immigration support services. Among other NASP-provided services, the program assists with appointments made through the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' (USCIS) InfoPass, a system that allows members of the public to make an appointment to speak with an Immigration Information Officer; notary services; assistance with immigration-related photographs and forms; and foreign language document translation.

Asian Counseling and Referral Service

City: **Seattle, Washington**

Population: 563,374

For more information, contact: Jeff Wendland
(206) 695-7600
www.acrs.org

The Asian Counseling and Referral Service (ACRS) provides the largest Naturalization Services Program in the state of Washington. The ACRS program offers a range of naturalization-related services: ESL classes; informal English-language practice sessions; citizenship classes in both Asian languages and English; and individual assistance in naturalization legal matters. In addition, ACRS partners with the Asian Bar Association of Washington and the King County Bar Association's Neighborhood Program to offer free advice in several legal areas, including immigration.

Pan-African Association

City: **Chicago, Illinois**

Population: 2,896,016

For more information, contact: Jean-Pierre Valbrun
(773) 381-9723
www.panafricanassociation.org

The Pan-African Association operates a Citizenship Program that was designed to assist Africans seeking to naturalize. The program's activities include assistance with applying for naturalization; free English-language and civics classes; test preparation tutoring; and counseling. The Pan-African Association also operates several other programs, including workforce development, computer training, and driver's education.

Catholic Charities of Dallas

City: **Dallas, Texas**

Population: 1,188,580

For more information, contact: Vanna Slaughter, LCSW-ACP
Director, Immigration and Legal Counseling Services
(214) 520-6590
www.catholiccharitiesdallas.org

The Dallas agency of the Catholic Charities Network provides citizenship classes and naturalization services through its Immigration and Legal Services program. The citizenship classes are held in English and help students prepare for the naturalization test. Immigration and Legal Services staff can also assist individuals in determining their eligibility for naturalization and provide guidance on naturalization applications, adjustment of status applications, and family visa petitions.

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City Practice Briefs contain examples from NLC's City Practice database, available at www.nlc.org. Series editors: Bruce Calvin and Larry Foxman. For more information contact the NLC Municipal Reference Service at (202) 626-3130 or email mrs@nlc.org.

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