



THE AMERICAN LEGION

CITIZENSHIP OUTREACH GUIDE



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A MESSAGE FROM THE AMERICANISM COMMISSION CHAIRMAN

Fellow Legionnaires,

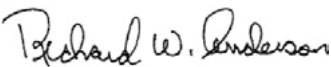
Helping lawful immigrants prepare for citizenship and assimilation into American society is in the best interest of our nation and has been a longstanding and proud tradition of The American Legion almost since its founding. In 2008, The American Legion adopted Resolution No. 12 “Task Force on New Americans” that calls upon American Legion posts to support the efforts of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), the federal government agency that oversees lawful immigration to the United States. Over the decades many posts throughout the country have hosted naturalization orientation sessions to help teach proficiency in the English language and lessons in U.S. history and civics. I encourage posts to revitalize their efforts by making a concerted effort in helping lawful immigrants assimilate into our society by collaborating with and enlisting the services of their local USCIS.

This guide provides several ways in which posts can work together in collaboration with USCIS beyond hosting educational classes. Some examples include hosting a welcome reception for new immigrants arriving to the community, establishing a corner in the post where new immigrants may seek citizenship information, or hosting a naturalization oath ceremony, just to name a few.

The Americanism Commission encourages all posts and Legionnaires to renew their commitment and dedication in helping immigrants seeking the lawful path to citizenship with that journey. By working together, in a myriad of ways, we will continue to “... foster and perpetuate a 100 percent Americanism.”

I extend my sincere “thank you” for your continued service to America as a proud member of The American Legion and your support of our citizenship outreach efforts. With warm personal regards, I remain

For God and Country,



RICHARD W. ANDERSON
Chairman, Americanism Commission

FOREWORD

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) recognizes the important role that The American Legion plays in promoting citizenship and strengthening local communities through its programming. USCIS is seeking to foster a collaboration with The American Legion to promote and provide citizenship education and information regarding the naturalization process to lawful immigrants in local communities throughout the country.

Community service is at the heart of The American Legion's core belief and essential to its Preamble to the Constitution of The American Legion, as well as that of the American Legion Auxiliary and Sons of The American Legion, "... to inculcate a sense of individual obligation to community, state and nation." Legion posts take a leadership role in community betterment, and as such, posts are well suited to provide a welcoming and trusted space for immigrant communities. As the government agency that oversees lawful immigration to the United States, USCIS offers a number of resources that may be helpful to American Legion posts in this effort, including educational materials on citizenship and immigration topics, both print and web-based; technical assistance and training; immigrant and public engagement channels; and promising practices in the area of citizenship education.

WHERE TO BEGIN

The first step in organizing citizenship outreach efforts is to get a commitment from post officers in dedicating the time, attention and resources that are needed for this important community service program. The most important resources are of course, dedication and manpower. Once your post agrees to get actively involved, the next step is to organize within the post by forming a committee of interested Legion Family members. Next, assess the needs of your community and the resources available so as to determine what efforts the post is going to support. Then assign duties and responsibilities among the committee to distribute the workload and assist with the overall efforts.

SUGGESTED CITIZENSHIP OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

Naturalization oath ceremonies. One of the easiest citizenship outreach activities is for a post to host an administrative naturalization oath ceremony. USCIS has 86 field offices across the country, many of which regularly conduct administrative naturalization ceremonies, and many of those take

place in venues such as local parks, museums or other locations....like perhaps an American Legion post! (NOTE: *In some locations the federal courts have jurisdiction over naturalization and therefore the courts must conduct the ceremonies.*) Posts interested in opening their doors to host an administrative naturalization oath ceremony should inquire by contacting their local [USCIS Community Relations Officer](#).

Oath of allegiance ceremonies for military servicemembers. USCIS has a streamlined process specifically for military personnel who file under the military naturalization provisions. Posts interested in hosting an oath of allegiance ceremony for local military member(s) becoming naturalized U.S. citizens should contact their local [USCIS Community Relations Officer](#).

Honor the significance. Administrative naturalization oath ceremonies often include ceremonial elements such as color guards or vocalists. Posts that have a color guard can offer their services at a naturalization ceremony. Posts interested in applying to offer color guard services at a naturalization ceremony should contact their local [USCIS Community Relations Officer](#).

Citizenship corners. American Legion posts can consider creating “citizenship corners” where immigrants can find information about becoming a U.S. citizen. USCIS has developed educational materials to help prepare individuals for naturalization. These materials are ideal for setting up a citizenship corner. Here immigrants can find the information and resources they need to start the path toward becoming a U.S. citizen.

Voter registration at naturalization ceremonies. As a non-profit and non-partisan organization, local American Legion posts are eligible to apply to offer voter registration services at administrative naturalization ceremonies (hosted either at an American Legion post or other locations) by submitting a written request to the local USCIS field office to offer voter registration services (Note: *The option to offer voter registration services may not be available in all locations due to the fact that the federal courts may have jurisdiction over naturalization or if voter registration is already handled by local or state election officials*). Posts interested in applying to offer voter registration services should contact their local [USCIS Community Relations Officer](#).

Naturalization information sessions. USCIS and The American Legion can work together to hold naturalization information sessions for immigrants. These sessions are led by the local USCIS community relations officer and are intended to give an overview of the naturalization process and eligibility as well as provide an opportunity for immigrants to ask questions about

citizenship and the naturalization process. As feasible, American Legion posts could make their facilities available for these information sessions and promote attendance through their existing local community networks. (*Note: The use of American Legion facilities may constitute a gift to the agency. If so, a formal gift waiver form will need to be completed and approved by USCIS leadership*). Posts interested in holding naturalization information sessions should contact their local [USCIS Community Relations Officer](#).

Citizenship engagement events. An American Legion post could offer to host an event for immigrants to promote the meaning and importance of citizenship. Such an event could consist of a screening of the USCIS video “A Promise of Freedom: An Introduction to U.S. History and Civics for Immigrants” followed by a discussion on the meaning and importance of citizenship (“A Promise of Freedom” is a 12-minute film that focuses on the history and founding of our nation and the important rights and responsibilities of U.S. citizenship. Accompanying the video is a discussion booklet that aims to encourage discussion and review of the basic concepts of American democracy outlined in the film). The post could also provide additional information and resources on citizenship and the naturalization process using USCIS resources or by inviting a local USCIS representative or community-based organization to attend. The video and discussion booklet are available in the USCIS Civics and Citizenship Toolkit and other resources are available for download from the USCIS Citizenship Resource Center at www.uscis.gov/citizenship.

Celebrate. Posts can consider opening their doors to host a “Citizenship Gala,” “Citizenship Welcome Wagon” or “Citizenship Open House” to celebrate newly arriving immigrants or newly naturalized citizens. Invite members of the community and the new citizens/immigrants to the post to join together to recite the Pledge of Allegiance, make introductions, hand out flags or information, offer refreshments, etc.

English and citizenship classes. The demand for English and civics instruction in many communities exceeds the number of available programs. For posts interested in supporting this effort, USCIS recommends partnering with other local community organizations, literacy programs, libraries, or other groups to teach citizenship or English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. Many programs are in need of classroom space and volunteers. For posts that are interested in starting their own programs, USCIS has resources to help build and develop citizenship programs for immigrants and should inquire by contacting their local [USCIS Community Relations Officer](#).

Tutors. Volunteer tutors across the country dedicate time and talent to provide permanent residents seeking United States citizenship with individualized instruction. Whether it's an individual struggling with learning essential vocabulary, reading or writing skills, or requires assistance acquiring civic knowledge, Legionnaires can play a vital role in expanding the range of educational services within their communities by becoming a volunteer tutor. Legionnaires interested in tutoring should contact their local [USCIS Community Relations Officer](#).

Training seminars. Legionnaires interested in citizenship education are welcome to attend a USCIS training seminar for volunteers and adult educators. USCIS normally offers 15-20 sessions each year at sites across the country. These seminars are designed to enhance the skills needed to teach U.S. history, civics and the naturalization process to immigrant students and to administer comprehensive adult citizenship education programs. Upcoming events are listed at www.uscis.gov/teachertraining.

Volunteer opportunities. Volunteer service is an important part of any community. By providing volunteer opportunities to new citizens or permanent residents, the American Legion can help these individuals learn more about their community and their new country – building lasting connections and relationships.

RESOURCES

Posts looking to promote citizenship and immigrant integration in their local communities can use print and online resources from USCIS. The resources listed below are just a targeted sampling of what's available from USCIS. Visit the USCIS Citizenship Resource Center at www.uscis.gov/citizenship to access all the resources. Additionally, many of these resources are available in print. American Legion posts can contact their local [USCIS Community Relations Officer](#) for information on how to obtain these materials.

Expanding English as a Second Language (ESL), Civics and Citizenship Education in Your Community: A Start-Up Guide. A booklet offering recommendations to help organizations design ESL and citizenship programs for immigrants. www.uscis.gov/citizenship/organizations/program-development.

USCIS online citizenship resource center. A comprehensive website that provides learners, teachers and organizations with a one-stop resource for locating citizenship preparation materials and activities. www.uscis.gov/citizenship.

USCIS promising practices. Discover promising practices for citizenship outreach activities at www.uscis.gov/citizenship/organizations/citizenship-and-integration-grant-program-promising-practices

USCIS civics and citizenship toolkit. Contains immigration and civics publications, handbooks, guidance on product usage, and multimedia tools. Posts serving immigrants can request one free copy at www.uscis.gov/citizenshiptoolkit.

Tip sheets. Teaching strategies related to preparing students for the naturalization process are available online at www.uscis.gov/citizenship/teachers/training-and-professional-development.

Lesson plans and activities for citizenship classes. Detailed lesson plans and handouts for novice and experienced English as a second language (ESL) instructors are available online at www.uscis.gov/lessons.

Volunteer training modules: Adult Citizenship Education Strategies for Volunteers. These training modules are designed to provide volunteers with a basic understanding of adult second language acquisition and the naturalization process, including the interview and test. www.uscis.gov/citizenship/teachers/training-and-professional-development/volunteer-training.

PROMOTING CITIZENSHIP OUTREACH EFFORTS

American Legion posts should take a proactive role to maximize the advantage of the natural interest of the media, public and membership by implementing public information tools. The following are a few ideas from the American Legion Public Relations Toolkit:

Media advisories. Send out advisories to television, radio and newspaper media outlets regarding citizenship outreach events and activities. Since coverage assignments are sometimes made early, it's a good idea to send the advisory at least a week prior to an event, and another reminder a day or two before the event. Repetition does not hurt when trying to get the attention of a bustling newsroom.

Website. Share information by publishing articles on the post website. Not only will membership be informed, but websites are also a great place for journalists to find information about events and the post sponsoring them.

Social media. There are far too many social media sites for a post to be present on all of them. But if a post has a presence on the popular ones, the message will be seen and, hopefully, re-posted and transmitted repeatedly

to the desired audience. Prominent social sites include Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Newsletters. Inform membership at all levels about events and activities by placing articles in post, district and department newsletters. Also share those newsletter articles with community leaders.

The complete American Legion Public Relations Toolkit is available for download from the Legion website at www.legion.org/publications. It provides a complete kit of easy to use media products that can be tailored to promote events and activities of an American Legion post, unit or squadron. The toolkit supplies the print, PowerPoint, Internet, video and audio products to get the job done with confidence in today's high-technology media world and is designed to provide the tools needed using the easiest possible methodologies. From writing a news release to planning a major community event, this PR Toolkit can help get the job done.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: When and why did The American Legion become involved in assimilating new citizens into local communities?

A: *Virtually since its founding in 1919, The American Legion has provided assistance and instruction to those following the lawful path to citizenship. Working closely with the U.S. federal courts, it has conducted naturalization classes throughout the country, teaching immigrants how to become proficient in the English language and about U.S. history and government.*

Q: Why is The American Legion still involved and what is the rationale for this involvement?

A: *The American Legion is not opposed to lawful immigration, but has long supported an immigration policy that is opposed any great influx of immigrants. It instead encourages a lawful path of moderation, embracing a concept that immigration should be regulated so that immigrants may be readily absorbed into the culture and life stream of the United States.*

Q: What does The American Legion hope to achieve by involvement in citizenship outreach activities in local communities?

A: *Failure to absorb new immigrants into society can be divisive to a community, state and nation and promote racial and cultural bias. The American Legion strives to uphold a commitment to be a leader in mentoring candidates for U.S. citizenship and supporting their assimilation into local communities.*



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