

# **NATURALIZATION POLICY & PROGRAM MENU**


2017-2018



# Naturalization Policy Recommendations

## Pass a Cities for Citizenship (C4C) Resolution

Pass resolutions in the local legislature or issue mayoral proclamations acknowledging the importance of immigrant communities to the social, political and economic life of the city, and indicating that citizenship is a local priority.

 The Office of New Americans of Miami-Dade (ONA) facilitated the process for City of Miami Mayor Tomas Regalado, and Vice Chairman, Commissioner Ken Russell to issue a Resolution in February 2017 to become a C4C participating community, as well as entering a partnership with ONA to “support and make available City locations at no cost where Citizenship Workshops can be held for the purpose of assisting [legal permanent residents] with their citizenship applications.” The City of Miami issued a Proclamation on September 17, 2007 declaring Citizenship Day in the City of Miami. In 2018, ONA will continue the integration process by engaging additional Miami-Dade municipalities where a large number of legal permanent residents reside to join the Citizenship Initiative. Presently, ONA is in the process of engaging the following municipalities: City of Coral Gables, City of Hialeah, City of Miami Beach, City of Miami Springs, and City of Sweetwater. In addition to requesting in-kind support in the way of City locations and infrastructure, ONA is engaging the leadership of City Mayors and Commissioners to provide financial support toward the implementation of Citizenship Events in each of the participating communities.

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## Issue a Citizenship Day, Week, or Month Proclamation


Declare an annual Citizenship Day, Week, or Month, during which the city celebrates the contributions of immigrants through a cultural events and community activities. This may coincide with a series of naturalization workshops or swearing in ceremonies.

## Craft Legislation for Voter Registration Conducted at all Naturalization Ceremonies

Consider legislation which would allow election officials to set up informational tables outside naturalization ceremonies.

## Advocate at the Federal Level with U.S. Immigration & Citizenship Services (USCIS) for a Reduction in Naturalization Fees and Reduced Processing Times

While USCIS has created the Fee Waiver and Partial Fee Waiver due to advocacy from immigrant rights organizations, the naturalization fee of \$725 continues to be a barrier for applicants. Additionally, processing times are considerably slower than in years past and the backlog continues to grow substantially, almost reaching one million pending applications.

 In 2016, Cities for Citizenship played a critical role in advocating USCIS to create a partial fee waiver for working poor legal permanent residents. Each year, the C4C network has opportunities to participate in national naturalization campaigns that promote naturalization with other national partners.

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# Naturalization Funding Recommendations

## Create a Naturalization Budget Line Item to Fund Local Non-Profit Organizations

Cities and counties can provide financial support to local non-profit organizations that already have the expertise and community relationships necessary to conduct successful naturalization workshops.

**Seattle, WA:** Since 1999, the City of Seattle has received state Department of Social and Human Services (DSHS) funding to help lawful permanent residents (LPRs) become U.S. citizens. The City of Seattle combines the state naturalization funds (\$425,000) with the City's money (\$650,000) and additional funding from the Seattle Housing Authority (\$25,000) for a combined total of \$1.1M for a comprehensive strategy that includes naturalization assistance utilizing both a case management model and group processing services. A unique consortium of 12 community-based organizations called the New Citizen Program (NCP) offers the case management. Each NCP organization provides free naturalization services to immigrants and refugees living in Seattle/King Counties who are low-income, elderly, illiterate, or have limited English skills. Services include citizenship classes, application and fee waiver help, and referrals for legal assistance. Quarterly NCP meetings are held, and as a consortium, the organizations unite as a collective advocacy voice to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. This consortium model complements the new large group processing events that NCP began to offer in 2016. In 2017, NCP began to offer monthly clinics serving 25-50 applicants. The City's 2017 investment in these citizenship clinics and workshops is \$250,000.

NCP serves nearly 800 eligible LPRs each year and has a completion rate of 77% which does not include applicants who for whatever reason do not call back to confirm their successful naturalization. In 2016, the Seattle Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs organized two citizenship workshops, their first ever, serving about 300 at each with a completion rate of around 55%. In response to recent community feedback, the City added free legal consultations and/or family safety planning to our naturalization events, including the 2018 citizenship mega-workshop dubbed "Seattle United for Immigrants and Refugees." This workshop will take place on February 3, 2018, with a goal of serving more than 1,000 people.

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## Fund a Municipal Office Dedicated to Naturalization and Immigrant Affairs

In its most robust form, this might mean the creation of a new city office or agency whose mission is to build relationships with and support the integration of immigrant communities. Alternatively, cities with less capacity can deploy existing staff to assist with discrete tasks such as the recruitment and coordination of workshop volunteers.

## Develop Relationships with the Private Sector

Cultivate private corporations with a strong local presence as potential sponsors of naturalization initiatives.

**San Francisco, CA:** The San Francisco Pathways to Citizenship Initiative (SF Pathways) has successfully engaged private sector partners to support its citizenship efforts. Specifically, SF Pathways has partnered closely with local tech firms through FWD.us, a national advocacy organization bringing together tech partners to support immigrant communities. Through this partnership, SF Pathways was connected to the local Microsoft office, which has actively supported citizenship efforts by sponsoring and hosting workshops in their office space. In addition to providing the space, Microsoft has provided food, volunteers, and other in-kind support for workshops serving over 300 individuals. SF Pathways also partners with other businesses and private sector entities for volunteer recruitment and support. Through partnership with large immigration law firms and other legal firms, SF Pathways has been able to recruit over 100 skilled, multilingual attorneys and legal volunteers, which has greatly improved the capacity to serve clients at workshop events.

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## Build State and Federal Relationships

Collaboration with federal agencies and state governments can help strengthen municipal citizenship initiatives. Political leaders in immigrant rich cities can use the annual budget process to push for investment from their states in local naturalization programs. Cities and counties can also use their influence at the federal level to push for system wide changes that will benefit their constituents.

# Naturalization Programming Recommendations

## Host Oath Ceremonies

Host swearing-in ceremonies at which the Mayor presides and speaks. This is a great opportunity to congratulate the newly naturalized citizens and promote the importance of citizenship.

**Chicago, IL:** As a part of Mayor Rahm Emanuel's New Americans Plan, which was released in 2012, he made a commitment to host regular Naturalization Ceremonies to celebrate one of the greatest achievements as an immigrant—becoming a United States citizen. The City of Chicago hosts citizenship swearing-in ceremonies at locations across the City including City Hall Council Chambers, the Chicago Cultural Center and Harold Washington Library. To date, the City has hosted ten Naturalization Ceremonies in partnership with United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and community-based organizations. This is a special celebratory occasion where Mayor Emanuel reflects on this own family's immigration story and commends all naturalizing citizens on their hard work and perseverance to arrive at this joyous moment. Mayor Emanuel has also taken this opportunity to remind new citizens of their civic responsibility. For example, at the November 8, 2016 ceremony he asked those being sworn in to walk across the street and exercise their responsibility to vote in the presidential election. In May 2017, Mayor Emanuel co-hosted a special swearing-in ceremony for the first time with a visiting foreign diplomat, Mayor Manuel Mancera of Mexico City. Mayor Emanuel often invites well-known community leaders to offer welcoming remarks at ceremonies in order to highlight the contributions made by Chicago's diverse immigrant community.

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## Promote Naturalization

Publicize citizenship as a priority. This can take the form of public service announcements and advertising campaigns, local resolutions, and community events. Advertise existing naturalization initiatives through city-sponsored television and print ads. Run television and radio spots featuring the Mayor or other influential political figures, faith leaders, and local celebrities.

## Incorporate Financial Inclusion & Empowerment

Incorporate financial capability services into naturalization workshops, partner with local institutions to provide financial counseling along with naturalization information. Engage with local banks or credit unions to provide financial literacy information and establish citizenship loans.

**New York City, NY:** The New York City Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs' NYCitizenship program combines citizenship application assistance with financial empowerment services at local libraries across all boroughs in New York City. Individuals are both able to meet with an immigration attorney for application assistance and a financial counselor for services including saving for the citizenship application fee and managing debt. In partnership with the Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability (DESIS) Lab at the Parsons School of Design and Citi Community Development, NYCitizenship has also created tools to facilitate the integration of financial empowerment and citizenship services. The connection between financial empowerment and citizenship acquisition creates a direct link to a thriving immigrant population, which in turn empowers New York City.

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## Register all New Citizens to Vote

Set up voter registration tables at oath ceremonies to encourage all new citizens to become registered to vote.

## Incorporate Education on Other Immigration Topics and Initiatives

Provide information to naturalization applicants and their families about other avenues for obtaining legal status. Provide information to naturalization applicants and their families about other state and local immigrant integration initiatives, such as driver's licenses or municipal ID cards.

## Include Information on Other Public Benefits

Provide information about public benefits programs available to citizens, such as the Affordable Care Act.

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### Reduce Cost Barriers through Citizenship Loan Programs

Work with credit unions and other financial institutions to establish low or no interest loan programs to help pay for naturalization application fees.

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### Increase Legal Capacity

Recruit law firms to provide pro bono legal support to naturalization workshops.

📍 In partnership with Cities for Citizenship, Jones Day Law Firm and the National Partnership for New Americans (NPNA), the Women Empowered to Lead (WE Lead) Program has launched in seven C4C cities to train local leaders, predominately immigrant women, as Community Navigators to increase legal capacity for naturalization and other immigration services.

📄 For more information:

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### Collaborate with Other City Agencies

Identify city agencies and offices that are key points of contact with immigrant communities and establish a practice of referring potentially eligible individuals to local organizations with expertise on naturalization.

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### Assist and Support Municipal Staff Engagement in Naturalization

Promote naturalization with municipal employees. Also, allow city workers to get release time to attend naturalization trainings and volunteer with local organizations to support naturalization work, without using vacation time.

📍 **Los Angeles, CA:** Recognizing the importance of U.S. citizenship, Mayor Garcetti's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) launched the Step Forward LA initiative to help Angelenos navigate through the naturalization process. As part of the initiative's mission to naturalize residents, MOIA has recently launched the Municipal Employee Naturalization Program in partnership with the New American Workforce. This program provides City employees and their family members with free citizenship workshops where they are able to receive application assistance and one-on-one legal consultations



by Bureau of Immigration Affairs certified individuals and pro-bono attorneys. Mayor Garcetti understands the privileges and benefits that come with U.S. citizenship and is urging all eligible City employees to take advantage of this free service provided to them.

📄 For more information:

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### Engage with Native-Born Citizens

Recruit native-born citizens to volunteer to support citizenship initiatives, including citizenship classes and naturalization workshops.

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### Promote Naturalization Fee Waivers

Develop an outreach campaign highlighting the Naturalization Fee Waiver and Partial Fee Waiver that can eliminate, or significantly reduce, the cost barrier to becoming a U.S. Citizen.

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### Connect with your Local USCIS Office and Community Relations Officer

Establish partnerships with USCIS to connect local efforts with federal resources to support naturalization programming.

# Naturalization Capacity Building Recommendations

## Connect Naturalization to Other Services and Programs

Naturalization initiatives are a great opportunity for cities to connect immigrant constituencies with other key services and programs such as housing or educational services.

## Train Staff and Community Members as “Community Navigators” for Naturalization

Train municipal workers, library employees, school counselors, etc., on the basics of naturalization, how to assist with outreach, and how to fill out N-400 applications. These volunteers can be “Community Navigators” assisting community members to navigate the naturalization process. In 2017-2018, the Community Navigator model is being built out through the new Women Empowered to Lead (WE Lead) program, a partnership with C4C, Jones Day and the National Partnership for New Americans (NPNA).

**Jersey City, NJ:** The Office of Welcoming Communities (OWC) of Jersey City held its first community navigator training in April 2017. The community navigator program is part of Jersey City’s Citizenship Campaign. The first session had 20 participants comprised of community members and representatives of community organizations. Notably, some participants engaged by the OWC came from traditional cultural organizations that are usually engaged in social and cultural activities. The participants learned about Jersey City’s Citizenship Campaign, the citizenship process, and basic information and qualification for citizenship.

The Jersey City community navigator training has 3 sessions. First is the orientation where prospective community navigators get to learn about the citizenship campaign as well as the role of community navigators. The second session involves a more in-depth training on the N-400 naturalization application and the I-912 fee waiver request. The third and last session entails actual practice and assistance of constituents in one the Office of Welcoming Communities’ regularly scheduled citizenship application appointments at the City Hall. The community navigator program is part of Jersey City’s Citizenship Campaign #JCMakelYour #Cities4Citizenship, which aims to educating, engaging and mobilizing various stakeholders in Jersey City to promote citizenship.

**For more information:**

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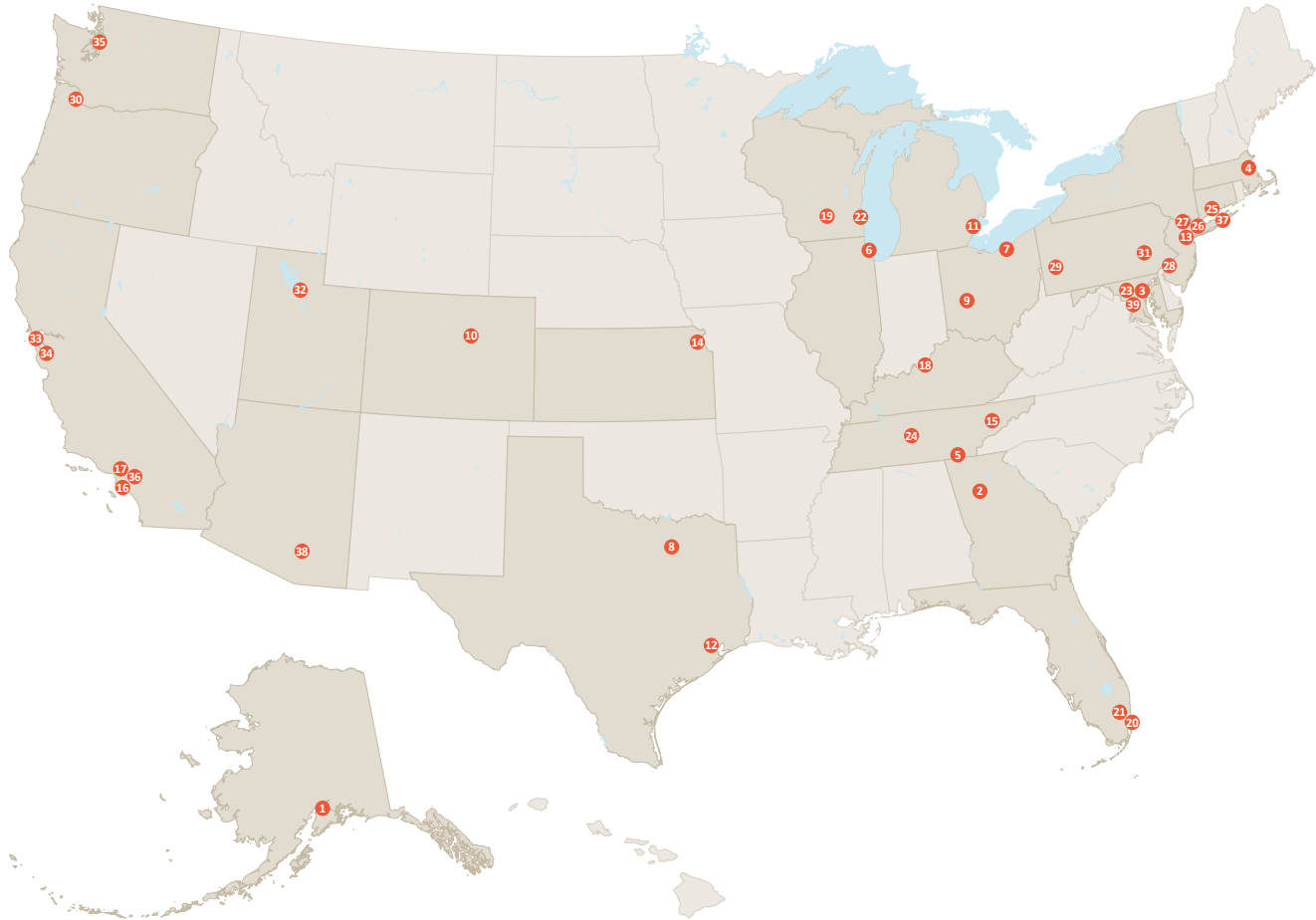
## Provide Space

Offer city buildings and facilities such as libraries, schools and city colleges for free or at a reduced rate to organizations running naturalization workshops.



Image: Jenna Schoenefeld for The New York Times

## Cities for Citizenship (C4C) Cities and Counties



Spanning across 39 participating cities and counties in 23 states:

*\*Indicates founding city*

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|---------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Anchorage, AK    | 14. Kansas City, KS       | 27. Paterson, NJ         |
| 2. Atlanta, GA      | 15. Knoxville, TN         | 28. Philadelphia, PA     |
| 3. Baltimore, MD    | 16. Long Beach, CA        | 29. Pittsburgh, PA       |
| 4. Boston, MA       | 17. Los Angeles, CA*      | 30. Portland, OR         |
| 5. Chattanooga, TN  | 18. Louisville, KY        | 31. Reading, PA          |
| 6. Chicago, IL*     | 19. Madison, WI           | 32. Salt Lake County, UT |
| 7. Cleveland, OH    | 20. Miami, FL             | 33. San Francisco, CA    |
| 8. Dallas, TX       | 21. Miami-Dade County, FL | 34. San Jose, CA         |
| 9. Dayton, OH       | 22. Milwaukee, WI         | 35. Seattle, WA          |
| 10. Denver, CO      | 23. Montgomery County, MD | 36. South Gate, CA       |
| 11. Detroit, MI     | 24. Nashville, TN         | 37. Suffolk County, NY   |
| 12. Houston, TX     | 25. New Haven, CT         | 38. Tucson, AZ           |
| 13. Jersey City, NJ | 26. New York, NY*         | 39. Washington, DC       |

# Appendix

## List of Contacts

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### Advocate at the Federal Level with U.S. Immigration & Citizenship Services (USCIS) for a Reduction in Naturalization Fees and Reduced Processing Times

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### Create a Naturalization Budget Line Item to Fund Local Non-Profit Organizations

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### Develop Relationships with the Private Sector

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### Assist and Support Municipal Staff Engagement in Naturalization

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### Train Staff and Community Members as "Community Navigators" for Naturalization

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**Cities for Citizenship** is a major national initiative aimed at increasing citizenship among eligible U.S. permanent residents and encouraging cities across the country to invest in citizenship programs. It is chaired by New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, and Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti, with support from the Center for Popular Democracy and the National Partnership for New Americans. Citi Community Development is the Founding Corporate Partner.

 For more information, visit:

[citiesforcitizenship.org](http://citiesforcitizenship.org)

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