



November 13, 2020

PA-2020-20

Policy Alert

SUBJECT: Civics Educational Requirement for Purposes of Naturalization

Purpose

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is updating policy guidance in the [USCIS Policy Manual](#) regarding the educational requirements for naturalization on the knowledge and understanding of the fundamentals of the history, and of the principles and form of government, of the United States (civics) under section 312 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA).

Background

In general, applicants for naturalization must demonstrate a basic understanding of the English language and a knowledge and understanding of civics.¹ Applicants have two opportunities to pass the related English and civics tests.² USCIS has revised the tests periodically over the years, to include the last revision implemented in 2008. USCIS is now implementing a redesigned civics test to ensure the content remains relevant, more meaningful, and comprehensive.³ Specifically, the revised test will improve USCIS' ability to assess applicants' knowledge and understanding of U.S. history and civics as required by the INA. The new test questions were piloted in July/August of 2020.

To ensure that applicants and community-based organizations engaged in test preparation will have sufficient time to prepare for the revised test, this update, contained in Volume 12 of the Policy Manual, becomes effective December 1, 2020, and applies prospectively to naturalization applications filed on or after that date. USCIS will adjudicate applications filed before the effective date based on the previous policy. The guidance contained in the Policy Manual is controlling and supersedes any prior guidance on the topic.

Policy Highlights

- Increases the general bank of civics test questions from 100 to 128, the number of test questions for the exam to 20 (from 10), and accordingly, the number of correct answers needed

¹ See [INA 312\(a\)](#). An applicant may be eligible for an exception to the educational requirements based on age and time as a lawful permanent resident. See [INA 312\(b\)\(2\)](#). An applicant who has a physical or developmental disability or mental impairment may be eligible for a medical exception. See [INA 312\(b\)\(1\)](#).

² This includes the initial examination and re-examination (if needed). See [8 CFR 312.5\(a\)](#) and [8 CFR 335.3\(b\)](#).

³ See USCIS News Release, [USCIS Announces Plan to Improve the Naturalization Test](#) (July 19, 2019).

to pass the civics test to 12 (from 6). The test score required to pass (60 percent correct) will not change.

- Confirms that USCIS will continue to administer 10 test questions (with required 6 correct answers) to applicants who qualify for special consideration because they are age 65 or older and have been lawful permanent residents for at least 20 years.
- Provides that officers will ask all 20 test items (or 10 to special consideration applicants), even if the applicant achieves a passing score.

Citation

Volume 12: Citizenship and Naturalization, Part E, English and Civics Testing and Exceptions, Chapter 2, English and Civics Testing [[12 USCIS-PM E.2](#)].