

## USCIS Citizenship and Integration Grant Program

# Promising Practices

<b>Organization Name:</b>	Colorado African Organization
<b>Location:</b>	Denver, CO
<b>USCIS Grant Program:</b>	FY 2010 Citizenship and Integration Direct Services Grant Program FY 2011 Citizenship and Integration Direct Services Grant Program— Citizenship Instruction Only

### State Capitol Study Visits

The Colorado African Organization (CAO) contributes to the success of the Citizenship and Integration Grant Program by providing students with unique experiential learning opportunities. CAO organizes study visits to the Colorado State Capitol Building so that students can witness the legislative process in action. Students

also get the opportunity to meet with elected officials, discuss local issues, and learn how to participate in government. The study visits provide students with insight about the rights and responsibilities of U.S. citizenship and civic participation.

### Purpose

CAO organizes study visits to the Colorado State Capitol Building in order to prepare students for the civics portion of the naturalization test. The visits enable students to compare and contrast the state legislature

with the federal legislative process. Visiting the Colorado State Capitol Building also helps students gain a greater appreciation for the rights and responsibilities of U.S. citizenship.

### Process

Over the course of the citizenship class, students study the rights and responsibilities of U.S. citizenship. As a class, students discuss the meaning of U.S. citizenship and identify ways that they can participate in their democracy. For example, students identify issues in their communities and discuss how they can contribute to solutions through civic engagement.

During class, students also learn about the structure and functions of state and federal government. Learning about state government allows students to understand the federal legislative process by comparison. While it is important to understand what happens at the federal level, CAO instructors also see the value in teaching students how to participate in government at the state and local level.

After the classroom component, CAO organizes a study visit to the Colorado State Capitol Building so that students can see the legislative process in action. CAO attempts to schedule study visits while the legislature is in session. Tours of the Colorado State Capitol Building are free, so there is no cost associated with the study visit. CAO also helps students arrange car pools and other transportation to the state capitol.

Students spend a half-day visiting the Colorado State Capitol Building. During the tour, students visit the galleries and chambers of the State Senate and House of Representatives. The tour guides provide students with an overview of important state elected officials

and upcoming legislative events. For example, students recently learned that Colorado currently has a naturalized U.S. citizen serving in the state legislature.

If the legislature is in session, students also get a chance to view floor debates and committee hearings. Observing and participating in these activities at the state level provides students with a greater understanding of the federal legislative process. When possible, CAO also arranges a meeting with a state legislator. This is a great opportunity for students to interact with and ask questions of an elected official. Meeting a state legislator also allows students to see the importance of voting in elections.

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## Challenges

It can be a challenge for some students to understand concepts like separation of powers and federalism. For some students, it also can be challenging to understand

the distinction between the role of the federal government and the state government.

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## Overcoming Obstacles

Many students gain clarity about the various government functions simply by visiting the State House and Senate Chambers. The state capitol itself becomes a teaching tool by modeling the federal system

of government. For comparison, one CAO citizenship instructor brings photographs of the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate Chambers for students to view as they visit the state capitol.

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## Outcomes

Visiting the state capitol prepares students for the naturalization test by reinforcing civic concepts taught in the classroom. Students also have the opportunity to experience the law-making process by observing

the legislature and seeing how it functions. Overall, students leave the state capitol better prepared to take the civics portion of the naturalization test.

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