



February 13, 2012

Executive Summary

Education Strategies for Better Serving Older Applicants and Citizenship Students

Background

On December 14, 2011, the USCIS Office of Citizenship and the Office of Public Engagement hosted a stakeholder engagement to discuss challenges that older immigrants may face when applying for naturalization and taking the citizenship test. This engagement was a forum to share ideas and practices for assisting this population as they prepare for the test.

Challenges for Older Applicants

Older applicants often face an increased and unique set of challenges not encountered by their younger counterparts. Challenges, which may affect all applicants, include financial considerations, lack of access to technology, having to learn about unfamiliar topics, and adjusting to the stress involved in being interviewed by a USCIS Officer.

Challenges unique to older applicants include difficulty memorizing questions and answers, remembering dates or facts, and slower reaction times to answering questions. Additionally, older applicants who are illiterate in their first language may have a difficult time learning to read and write English. Older applicants may also lack familiarity with computers and the internet. This unfamiliarity hinders their ability to benefit from the tremendous learning resources which are available online via USCIS and other sources.

Strategies for Working with Older Population

There are many tools and resources that can be employed by educators and other service providers to better serve the older population. This engagement provided a forum to share ideas and resources for how to best help older applicants as they prepare for the naturalization process and citizenship test.

A general tip when working with older individuals is to be respectful and patient. Be aware that it may be a challenge for these individuals to retain new information and it may take them some time to recall information they had previously learned. Older applicants may retain information more effectively when they are taught using visual tools rather than when taught in a listen-only setting. Taking time to individually work with older individuals one-on-one, in addition to a group setting is often very helpful as well. This type of individualized attention and time may be beneficial in assisting with memory and stress

issues. Another tip shared by stakeholders included copying *Form N-400, Application for Naturalization*, after it has been completed by the applicant but before it is mailed to USCIS. The photocopied form can then be used to review the questions with the applicants and ensure that they understand all the items listed on the form.

One USCIS resource that is currently available is the [USCIS Civics and Citizenship Toolkit](#). Also available is the [USCIS Citizenship Resource Center](#) (CRC). The CRC can be found online and contains a variety of tools and materials that can be used by teachers, learners, and organizations. An example of an online tool from the CRC is the short video, [The USCIS Naturalization Interview and Test](#), which is available with both English and Spanish captions. In this video, USCIS Officers perform the steps that may replicate an actual interview. Stakeholders indicated that they have, in some instances, taken this video one step further by conducting their own in-class mock interview with help from volunteers. This gave older applicants practical experience as they prepared for the naturalization interview.

USCIS Community Relations Officers are also able to provide organizations with printed materials as well as the possibility of visiting citizenship classes for a presentation on naturalization requirements and the citizenship test. USCIS field offices throughout the country offer open houses and [naturalization information sessions](#) to allow applicants the opportunity to visit a federal building prior to their scheduled interview. For more information on how to reach your local Community Relations Officer, please send an email to the USCIS Office of Public Engagement at Public.Engagement@dhs.gov.

Additional suggestions provided by stakeholders during the engagement included making board games using the 100 civics test questions. This allows students to learn in a different way. One instructor suggested including historical stories. This instructor also recommended using field trips to bring the historical stories to life and which may enable older applicants retain more information. Another instructor indicated that her students read the questions from *Form N-400, Application for Naturalization* aloud to one another to help familiarize them with the wording. One instructor said that she encourages her older students to practice the 100 civics test questions and their English skills with their grandchildren whom they are caring for at home. Some stakeholders shared that once a student passes the test and becomes a U.S. citizen, they have the individual return to class to share their experience with older applicants who will soon be going through the process themselves.

Other tips provided by stakeholders included using computers or mp3 players that are sometimes available at public libraries to access USCIS electronic/online tools. Stakeholders suggested that organizations that offer citizenship classes could look into providing childcare to give older applicants who normally care for their grandchildren the opportunity to attend classes during the day. Stakeholders also indicated that teacher supply stores often have a wealth of ideas and tools that can be used in the classroom to teach older individuals.

Next Steps

Stakeholders presented USCIS with several suggestions to better tailor currently available tools for older applicants. One suggestion was to transcribe [The USCIS Naturalization Interview and Test](#) video, which is currently available online into English and Spanish documents. Another suggestion was to expand this video to include more questions that may be asked by a USCIS Officer during an interview. Stakeholders also indicated that they would like to see the adjudication of *Form N-648, Medical Certification for Disability Exceptions*, be adjudicated centrally to standardize the review process. USCIS has taken these suggestions under advisement.