

USCIS FY 2025 ANNUAL EVALUATION PLAN



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

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OVERVIEW

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is responsible for administering the nation's lawful immigration system. USCIS has the responsibility to deliver decisions about immigration benefit requests to individuals while ensuring the security of our nation. The work of USCIS employees makes the possibility of the American dream a reality for immigrants, receiving communities, the economies they join, and the nation as a whole.

In accordance with the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (Evidence Act), U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) policy, and USCIS policy, USCIS is issuing its FY 2025 Annual Evaluation Plan (AEP). Along with the USCIS FYs 2023-2026 Learning Agenda, the USCIS FY 2025 AEP is part of USCIS' broader efforts to expand and mature capabilities to build and use evidence in shaping strategy and operations. USCIS generates and uses rigorous evidence from evaluations to inform decisions about programs, policies, regulations, and organizations, better enabling the agency to achieve its mission.

The AEP describes a subset of USCIS' evaluation work for FY 2025. Evaluations designated as "significant" are shared with the American public and receive additional resources to ensure successful completion. Each year, USCIS works with stakeholders to identify new evaluations. Many evaluations are designed to address priority questions identified in the USCIS FYs 2023-2026 Learning Agenda. As such, they contribute to building a body of evidence to support decision makers while fostering organizational learning. USCIS evaluations are conducted consistent with relevant legal authorities and privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties protections.

USCIS defines significant evaluations as evaluations that:

- ✦ Support the USCIS FYs 2023-2026 Learning Agenda
- ✦ Align with USCIS leadership and administration priorities
- ✦ Respond to a mandate such as Government Accountability Office or Office of Inspector General recommendations
- ✦ Have potential for agency-wide impact or engagement
- ✦ Have potential for high financial impact
- ✦ Have potential for high stakeholder impact

USCIS evaluations may include a range of evaluation types and methods to best answer the questions proposed. To ensure credibility and quality of evidence for learning and decision making, USCIS evaluations follow the principles of relevance and utility, rigor, independence and objectivity, ethics, and transparency. These principles align with published Federal evaluation standards,¹ DHS policy,² and USCIS policy.

1 [Phase 4 Implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018: Program Evaluation Standards and Practices, M-20-12](#) (OMB, 2020)
2 [Program, Policy, and Organizational Evaluations Directive 069-03 Revision 01](#) (DHS, 2023)

USCIS FY 2024 SIGNIFICANT EVALUATIONS

Evaluation #1	
Name of Evaluation	Citizenship and Integration Grant Program (CIGP): Citizenship Instruction and Naturalization Application Services (CINAS) Grant and Community and Regional Integration Network Grant (CARING) Program Evaluation
Type of Evaluation	Outcome evaluation
Strategic Plan Goal and Objective	Goal 1: Strengthen the U.S. Legal Immigration System Objective 1.3: Naturalization Promotion and Process Improvement
Learning Agenda Priority Question	Section C: Naturalization Promotion and Process Improvement Priority Question: To what extent and in what ways do USCIS’ grant programs successfully prepare eligible populations for Naturalization?
Evaluation Background, Purpose, Use, and Evaluation Questions	<p>Background: The goal of CIGP is to expand the availability of high-quality citizenship preparation services for immigrants across the nation and to provide opportunities for immigrants to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to integrate into the fabric of American society. The CINAS grant is awarded to public or nonprofit organizations that prepare immigrants for citizenship by offering both citizenship instruction and naturalization application services. The CARING (formerly known as the Refugee and Asylee Integration Services Program or RAIS and as the Refugee and Asylee Assimilation Program or RAAP) is awarded to public or nonprofit organizations that provide extended integration services to vulnerable immigrant populations who entered the United States through USCIS’ humanitarian programs or benefitted from those programs while already in the United States. These groups often experience unique challenges with civic, linguistic, economic, cultural, and institutional integration when resettling in the United States, which may impact their progress toward full civic integration.</p> <p>Purpose and Use: The study is an outcome evaluation to assess whether the CINAS and CARING programs contribute to intended civic integration and naturalization outcomes, such as improved civics-based English language proficiency, civics knowledge, and naturalization of participating noncitizens. This evaluation will inform USCIS leadership and program staff, Office of the Citizenship and Immigration Services Ombudsman, CINAS and CARING program grant recipients, Congress, Office of Budget and Management, and the interagency Naturalization Working Group.</p> <p>The study will demonstrate whether the targeted outreach efforts increase naturalization filings. If proven, the findings will enable USCIS to incorporate such outreach into its regular services/ processes. Testing the impact of such targeted outreach on behavior change will be valuable research to other federal agencies, universities, and research organizations, as well as state and local governments.</p> <p>Key Evaluation Questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To what extent do CINAS and CARING program participants increase their civics-based English language proficiency? 2. To what extent do CINAS and CARING program participants increase their U.S. civics knowledge? 3. To what extent do CINAS and CARING program participants apply for naturalization? How does this compare to similar eligible lawful permanent residents (LPRs) who did not enroll in the program? 4. To what extent are CINAS and CARING program participants successful in obtaining naturalization? How does this compare to similar eligible LPRs who did not enroll in the program? 5. Which services provided through grantees help program participants achieve intended outcomes?

Evaluation #1

Data / Information Needed	<p>Primary data sources: Primary data sources may include CINAS and CARING program staff, grant recipient staff, and grant recipient program participants. Methods of primary data collection will include surveys and qualitative interviews.</p> <p>Secondary data sources: Grant recipient administrative and operational data reported to USCIS, including data on grant recipients' implemented activities, services provided, and individual participants; CINAS and CARING program administrative data, including required progress reporting; and USCIS Electronic Immigration System, USCIS Computer Linked Application Information Management System, and Central Index System data, mainly collected in Form I-485, Application to Register Permanent Residence or Adjust Status, Form N-400. Application for Naturalization, and Form G-28, Notice of Entry of Appearance as Attorney or Accredited Representative.</p>
Methods	<p>The study is an outcome evaluation to assess whether the CINAS and CARING programs contribute to intended outcomes, such as improved civics-based English language proficiency, U.S. civics knowledge, and naturalization of participating noncitizens.</p> <p>Descriptive statistical analysis and inferential statistical analysis will be used for quantitative data. Ex post quasi-experimental design is planned to be used to compare participant outcomes with the outcomes of similar, eligible LPRs that did not receive grant recipient services. Qualitative analysis, such as content analysis and theme identification, will be used for qualitative data.</p>
Challenges and Limitations	<p>Gaps in data access or quality could be a challenge to conducting the evaluation, particularly for the CARING program, which has a small volume of recipients and participants.</p> <p>For an ex post quasi-experimental design, the study could compare naturalization outcomes of non-participating LPRs who are statistically similar to participating LPRs using data that USCIS already collects on these populations. However, we cannot account for all potential confounds using this method. For example, there may be some unaccounted-for personal characteristics for which we cannot control using USCIS data that affect naturalization outcomes. Additionally, an eligible LPR who seeks assistance from a CINAS or CARING program grant provider may indicate that they are personally more motivated to naturalize or, conversely, that they need more help than others to achieve naturalization. Therefore, USCIS does not intend to make definitive statements about causality or attribution.</p>
Dissemination	Public disclosure is anticipated.

APPENDIX A. GLOSSARY

Terms used in the evaluation plans are defined below.

Formative evaluation – Formative evaluation assesses whether a program, policy, regulation, or organization approach (or some aspect of these) is feasible, appropriate, and acceptable before it is fully implemented. It may include process and/or outcome measures. However, it focuses on learning and improvement and does not aim to answer questions of overall effectiveness. It can help answer the questions, “Is the program, policy, regulation, or organization appropriate for this context,” “Does it feasibly address the identified needs,” and “Can it be implemented as designed?”

Impact evaluation – Often used for summative purposes, impact evaluation assesses the causal effect or impact of a program on outcomes by estimating what would have happened in the absence of the program or aspect of the program. This estimation requires the use of experimental/randomized control trial (RCT) designs or quasi-experimental designs (QED) in which another group is compared to program participants. Experimental/RCT designs randomly assign (e.g., lottery draw) persons to either a treatment group that receives the program or policy intervention or to a control group that does not. Quasi-experimental groups identify a program or policy intervention group and comparison group from pre-existing or self-selected groups and not through random assignment. Impact evaluation can help answer the question, “Does the program, policy, regulation, or organization work, or did it lead to the observed outcomes?”

Outcome evaluation – Used for summative purposes, outcome evaluation assesses the extent to which a program, policy, regulation, or organization approach has achieved certain objectives, and how it achieved these objectives. Outcome evaluations use non-experimental designs characterized by the absence of a control or comparison group. Unlike impact evaluation, outcome evaluation cannot discern that outcomes result from or are a causal effect of the program. It can help answer the question, “Were the intended outcomes achieved?”

Primary data sources – Individuals, groups, or organizations from which new data collection is expected, designed specifically for the evaluation.

Process/implementation evaluation – Process/implementation evaluation assesses the extent to which essential elements of a program, policy, regulation, or operation are in place; conform to requirements, program design, professional standards, or customer expectations; and are capable of delivering positive outcomes. It can help answer the questions, “Was the program, policy, regulation, or organization implemented as intended?” or “How is it operating in practice?” In the learning agenda, several evaluations study process-related questions to understand underlying mechanisms of outcomes achievement.

Quantitative surveys – Surveys are predetermined set of questions, often with set response options administered to samples or panels of respondents to cost-effectively compile statistical information about individuals, households, and organizations. USCIS uses surveys in different ways. USCIS uses surveys to track variables of longer-term interest, as well as to obtain reliable information about conditions through shorter-term studies. USCIS conducts low-burden Customer Experience (CX) surveys to gather near real-time impressions of customers’ touchpoint(s) or transaction(s) with a government service in terms of trust, overall satisfaction, and experience drivers (e.g., service quality, process, and people, when applicable). USCIS also uses surveys of participants in program evaluations to determine their baseline conditions and subsequent outcomes.

Qualitative data analysis – A flexible set of approaches to examine patterns in communicated information. Content analysis may focus on the presence and frequency of concepts—typically words, phrases, or images— or show how concepts are related to each other and the context in which they exist. Thematic Framework Analysis identifies patterns of meaning, or themes. Themes may be determined deductively (themes selected from existing research or theory) or inductively (themes built from the data) to develop patterns. The analysis may examine explicit content of data or examine subtext or assumptions from the data.

Qualitative interviews/focus groups – These qualitative data collections use primarily open-ended questions to converse with an individual respondent or with a small group of respondents simultaneously to collect narrative information about a subject, circumstance, or event. USCIS uses this method across evidence-building activities to understand the way people think, their motivation, and their attitudes toward the topic or experience. Although qualitative interviews/focus groups cannot be used to infer causality or to measure effectiveness, they are often valuable tools for theory building and developing awareness of factors that affect outcomes. As such they often complement other evidence building such as surveys, economic analysis, and different types of program evaluation.

Secondary data sources – Existing data, or data collected for purposes other than the specific evidence building activity.