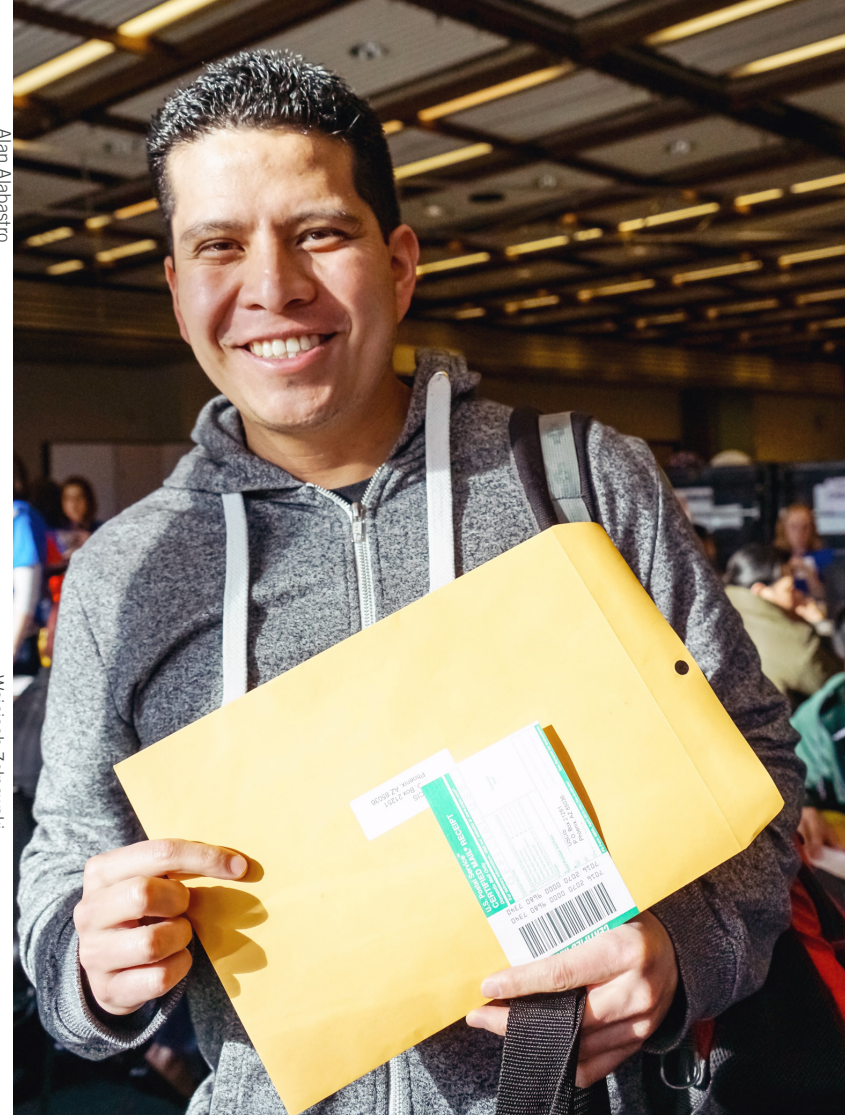


Citizenship Strategies to Create Welcoming Communities

Alan Alabastro



Wojciech Zolnowski



INTRODUCTION

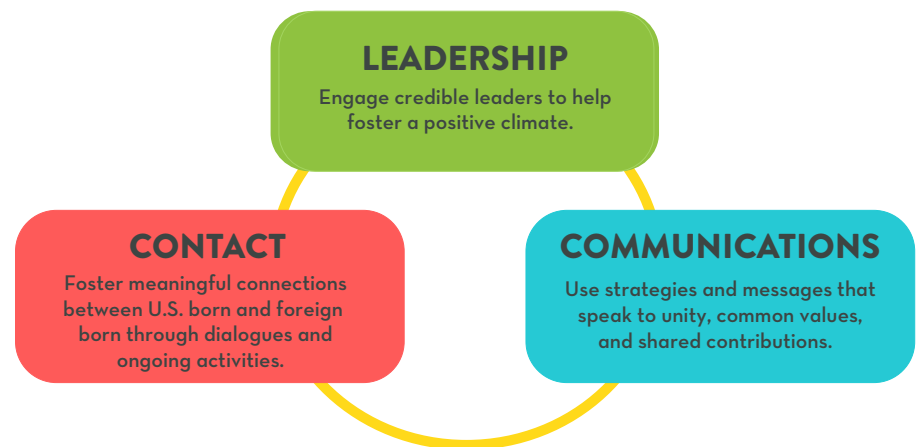
Why Citizenship is a Powerful Strategy in Welcoming Immigrants and Refugees

Our nation faces deep divisions, recently fueled in part by political rhetoric, cultural anxieties, misunderstandings, and even an organized hate movement. In such times, it is more important than ever to proactively address the fears and concerns that longer-term, receiving community members may have about the changing demographics in their communities and to harness the outpouring of volunteerism and the powerful appetite to welcome migrants in concrete, proactive ways that challenge negative narratives. Many organizations and local governments have found success using citizenship not only to provide immigrants an opportunity to become full participants in our democracy, but also to build greater support among the unsure who may not know their immigrant neighbors. Citizenship efforts have the potential to engage a broader cross section of receiving communities in welcoming immigrants and refugees, building upon the values of freedom and liberty that unite our nation – newcomer and established resident alike.

About This Toolkit

This toolkit was developed by Welcoming America and the Immigrant Legal Resource Center, the lead organization of the New Americans Campaign, to provide promising practices and suggestions to engage receiving communities at the intersection of citizenship and welcoming work. Receiving communities are comprised of both established immigrants and non-immigrants alike. The toolkit is informed by lessons learned from demographically and socioeconomically diverse communities across the United States that are building receiving communities engagement strategies into their citizenship work. Using the three-pronged receiving community approach of promoting meaningful contact between longer-term residents and newcomers; strategic communications and messaging; and engagement of local public, business, and faith leaders—while building on the citizenship expertise of the New Americans Campaign model—practitioners are using citizenship as an effective avenue for creating immigrant and refugee-friendly environments.

RECEIVING COMMUNITIES MODEL

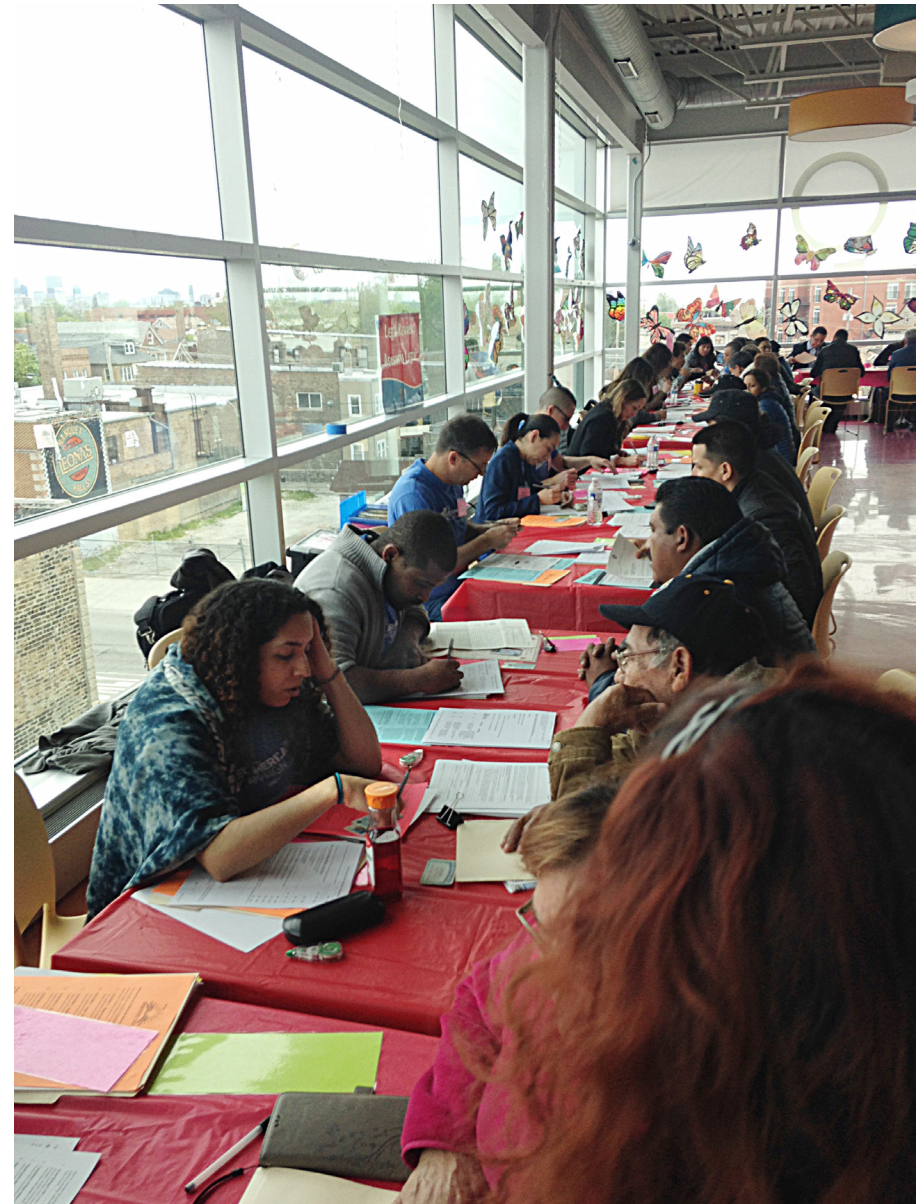


Local Communities That Informed This Toolkit

The field examples in this toolkit come from interviews with practitioners working in local government and nonprofit organizations from a cross section of diverse cities in terms of size, demographics, traditional and newer migrant gateways, and overall political climate. Interviewees hail from New Americans Campaign and Welcoming America partner sites in Atlanta, GA; Dallas, TX; Detroit, MI; Greensboro, NC; Hartford, CT; San Francisco, CA; and Seattle, WA. A full list of interviewees is available on page 18.

How to Use This Toolkit

This toolkit is designed to be a user-friendly, how-to guide to help local governments and nonprofit organizations that would like to implement, expand, or refine citizenship and welcoming work in their local communities. This is not an exhaustive list of promising strategies, and given the dynamic nature of this work, we expect to continue to hear stories of effective practices not included here. In fact, the New Americans Campaign has a number of best practices toolkits, which are listed at the end of this toolkit, for those who seek to expand and deepen their citizenship work. We encourage you to consider which strategy or combination of approaches is most appropriate for the specific context in your community.



Sarah Latson

PROMISING PRACTICES

MEANINGFUL CONTACT

Research has shown that lack of meaningful, personal interaction between receiving and newcomer communities is likely to exacerbate fears and misperceptions. In too many places, language and cultural differences unnecessarily discourage people from getting to know those from different backgrounds. However, when individuals build relationships with each other and work together towards a common goal, the experience can be powerful and rewarding for both parties, and foster more supportive and welcoming environments for immigrants and refugees. Activities leading up to naturalization provide opportunities for diverse contact-building and celebrating shared successes.

“One-on-one help is just transformative for people. Volunteers thank me for involving them. They admitted they felt different before they had a hands-on opportunity to help someone. A volunteer is a powerful ally.”

— Vanna Slaughter, head of immigration policy for the City of Dallas Office of Welcoming Communities and Immigrant Affairs and former Director of Catholic Charities of Dallas, New Americans Campaign Site Lead

Interactions in Community and Cultural Settings

Facilitating interactions between receiving community members and newcomers in settings that are less formal and encourage cultural exchange and learning can make experiences more impactful and spark relationship-building.

The International Institute of Metropolitan Detroit (IIMD) serves as the Site Leader for the Detroit New Americans Campaign. IIMD, in partnership with Global Detroit, offers a Citizenship and Cultural Ambassadors program in which volunteers can engage in a range of citizenship and welcoming activities—from promoting naturalization in community settings, to assisting applicants in test preparation, to volunteering at citizenship events—depending on each volunteer’s interest and level of expertise. Individuals can volunteer as one-on-one tutors and mentors, and meet their student at IIMD offices, in a home setting, or at a community site, where they meet twice a week and spend at least a couple of hours interacting. The Ambassadors program also provides citizenship services in a culturally rich context—for example partnering with a temple or mosque to host workshops and tutoring, which often includes a dinner and time for volunteer instructors to learn about the host’s culture and traditions. This often leads volunteers to continue or deepen their engagement over time. Wojciech Zolnowski, IIMD’s Executive Director, notes, “We give volunteers the opportunity to learn about other cultures and traditions, taste homemade food, have a tour... Showing them other cultures is another reward for their volunteer time.”



Sarah Lelison

Volunteers also tend to not only value meaningful interaction and community-building with naturalization candidates, but with other volunteers and members of receiving communities. In Seattle, volunteers who lend their time to large workshops report interactions with clients they have on the day of event, as well as the ability to connect with other volunteers of different backgrounds they would not have met otherwise, as being a highly rewarding component.



Alan Alabastro

At New American Pathways in Atlanta (a partner in the Atlanta New Americans Campaign, which also includes Welcoming Atlanta—housed at the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs), one of the most popular volunteer positions is a one-on-one English or civics tutor, and tutors will often go to a client’s home over a period of at least four months. This has helped facilitate real and lasting connections between volunteers and newcomers. Similarly, at Church World Service in Greensboro, civics test prep tutors are trained to work with students both in class and outside of class, and meet for one to two hours for tutoring that can be catered according to a student’s needs, such as spending more time on the interview questions or the reading and writing portions. Pairs can meet

at the nonprofit’s office, or are encouraged to meet at a community location like a library.

› **TIP: Explore fun and creative ways to expose the U.S.-born community to the naturalization process and increase understanding of the level of civic knowledge and dedication required.** Megan Shepard, Site Director of the Immigration and Refugee Program at Church World Service in Greensboro, shared, “It’s always fun to go through citizenship questions with native-born members—most Americans wouldn’t be able to answer half of them. It really puts it into perspective.” Vanna Slaughter of Dallas said, “At a book fair, we did a fun giveaway, and had people answer a question from the list of 100 citizenship exam questions to win a prize. We asked them, ‘Do you want to test your knowledge of citizenship?’ It was very illuminating to people who were not immigrants.”



Volunteer Recruitment, Training, and Retention

Engaging members of receiving communities as citizenship volunteers is one of the most concrete and transformative ways to build lasting relationships and more welcoming communities. The following are some methods and strategies that local practitioners have found to be effective for attracting, preparing, and keeping volunteers engaged in citizenship and welcoming efforts. The New Americans Campaign also has two toolkits available for free download about how to recruit, train, and retain citizenship volunteers, the links for which can be found at the end of this toolkit.

Volunteer Outreach and Recruitment

Citizenship service providers and local governments identified the importance of casting a wide net, using social networks and word of mouth, and being prepared to channel interactions out in the community into volunteer opportunities. Richard Whipple, Deputy Director of Programs for the San Francisco Office of Civic Engagement & Immigrant Affairs,



Sarah Leitson

- › **TIP: Start with a modest task—such as attending a naturalization ceremony or volunteering at a one-day citizenship event (or for tutors, starting at a three- to four-month commitment)—to avoid discouraging potential volunteers. Practitioners have found that once relationships and a feeling of investment in the work develops, it will often progress into longer and deeper engagement.**



Volunteer Orientation and Training

Many local communities found it helpful to streamline and standardize the volunteer orientation process by creating introductory videos, webinars, and web-based resources that could be shared in advance.

Making sure that volunteers have the right role for their level of experience, are not overwhelmed, and understand what their specific role will be that day is also key, such as creating two to three well-defined volunteer descriptions that explain roles, tasks, and expectations. The Hartford Public Library found that initial tutoring sessions that are very structured, with provision of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) materials as guides, helped new citizenship coaches feel more comfortable and secure in their role. From there, a relationship and customized coaching can develop secondarily over time.

The citizenship volunteer training and orientation process can present an opportunity to educate community members about the broader immigration context and systems. Practitioners and local governments in Seattle and Atlanta partnered with nonprofits and facilitated dialogues to deepen receiving community members' understanding of how immigrants and refugees arrived at this point, and the hurdles they must often overcome to navigate the naturalization and immigration process.

shares, “We rely on existing networks—ranging from immigrant-serving nonprofits to city employees to faith communities—to expand our volunteer pool... and now we have several thousand names.” Asking existing volunteers if they are a part of social groups and to outreach to their peers has been a helpful practice for New Americans Campaign partners in Atlanta. The International Institute of Metropolitan Detroit has made volunteer outreach a part of its organizational culture, training staff to make citizenship presentations and asks as they provide services from other programs and interact with community members, faith institutions, and community-based organizations. Liz Cedillo-Pereira, director of the City of Dallas Office of Welcoming Communities and Immigrant Affairs, was pleasantly surprised at the positive response that resulted from simply making an ask: “We invite people to participate at every opportunity we get—sometimes we have a hesitancy to ask someone, but keep inviting them, because you never know. People want to be asked to participate in something special.”

“To address the large number of new volunteers and bolster a better understanding of immigrants, we worked with Northwest Immigrant Rights Project (an immigration legal services and advocacy nonprofit), which offered Immigration 101 trainings for volunteers, so people who might not have a good understanding could learn more about the immigration process generally, and so we’re not just preaching to the choir.”

– Christina Guros, Citizenship Program and Policy specialist, City of Seattle Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs

Volunteers are critical for ensuring the success of naturalization workshops. Many organizations that work with volunteers to provide application assistance workshops provide application-specific training prior to the workshop, and then a refresher training right before the event. Many organizations require that volunteers attend an in-person training or watch a video that reviews what happens at a workshop and the various parts of a naturalization application before volunteering. Although many volunteers are not attorneys, and therefore cannot provide legal advice during the workshops, these trainings help make sure that volunteers are equipped with a basic understanding of the naturalization application so that they can help guide the applicant through the application process. On-site attorneys then provide legal assistance. The New Americans Campaign has a toolkit that specifically addresses how to recruit, train, retain, and effectively use volunteers at group processing workshops, the link to which is included at the end of this document.

› **TIP:** The Pro Bono Training Institute, working with the Immigrant Legal Resource Center and New Americans Campaign partners, produced a series of free online naturalization training modules that teach volunteers how to assist individuals seeking naturalization assistance under the supervision of a trained immigration attorney. The course is available here: www.pbtraining.org/all-courses/naturalization.



› **TIP:** Organizations are often approached by pro bono attorneys who are eager to volunteer but who do not have a background in naturalization or immigration law. To capitalize on their interest and support of immigrant communities, the New Americans Campaign and OneJustice produced a toolkit specifically on how to productively engage pro bono volunteers at naturalization workshops. The toolkit is available here: www.newamericanscampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Best-Practices-Toolkit-ProBono-final.pdf.



Volunteer Retention

Volunteers are a valuable asset, both for citizenship programs and for building bridges with the larger receiving community. Ensuring that volunteers feel appreciated, have an opportunity to build their skills, and see that they are making a difference in a newcomer’s life are key components of engaging volunteers from receiving communities over the long-term.

The International Institute of Metropolitan Detroit considers a volunteer’s personal goals and incorporates professional development, skill-building, and measurable outcomes accordingly, so that both students and volunteers are successful. Volunteers who provide tutoring or mentoring will meet together for a monthly training to build their skills and troubleshoot. These trainings are led by a coordinator who prepares trainings, shares best practices, and facilitates collective problem-solving, such as how to best provide instruction for citizenship candidates with different levels of English proficiency.

“We show [volunteers] available resources and aim to enhance their skills; it gives them empowerment and enrichment. For some, this might be their new or second career, so volunteering gives them something in return. We don’t just recruit volunteers for numbers. We have a plan around how to deploy them effectively using their skill set, and how to build their skills according to the needs of the community we want to target.”

– Wojciech Zolnowski, Executive Director, International Institute of Metropolitan Detroit

The International Institute of Metropolitan Detroit also holds a yearly Ambassador Ball where they recognize volunteers, present a Volunteer of the Year award, and celebrate achievements and contributions.

Taking the time to stay in touch with volunteers, such as calling them to share good news about the organization or a client they worked with, asking how their tutoring efforts are going, and receiving their feedback reinforces that they are a valued part of citizenship and welcoming efforts. In addition, community members are also more likely to stay engaged if they can see how they’re contributing towards a newcomer’s success.

› **TIP:** When possible—for example, if your organization uses a case management model of service delivery, or works with a smaller volunteer and applicant pool—share with volunteers the outcomes and successes that resulted from their efforts. Stephanie Ali, Civic Engagement Manager at New American Pathways in Atlanta, shares, “Contextualizing the work for our volunteers—for example, this is how many people we helped put closer to citizenship, this is how many people you helped today (the outcomes they helped us achieve)—makes a huge difference beyond just thanking them. They feel ownership over part of the program. The results are just as much theirs as they are mine.”



“One of the simplest things you can do is follow up with volunteers and let them know that the person they helped became a citizen. People want to hear success stories. It’s rewarding to know they were a part of that success, that they helped them reach their goal. A little goes a long way to keep volunteers engaged.”

– Megan Shepard, Site Director, Immigration and Refugee Program, Church World Service, Greensboro

Engaging Immigrant and Refugee Volunteers

In many cities, especially traditional immigrant gateway communities or those with a long history of resettlement, there is a large presence and continuing opportunity to engage volunteers who are naturalized immigrants and refugees themselves. These volunteers are often especially effective and eager to help other aspiring Americans navigate the citizenship process, whether encouraging friends and family to apply, helping with the N-400 form and exam preparation, or addressing peers’ anxieties. In Hartford, many volunteers are migrants who want to share their experiences and lessons learned with those embarking on the naturalization journey. Church World Service in Greensboro invites students who naturalized to come back and speak to a new cohort of citizenship students.

“Often what’s most intimidating about the citizenship exam is the interview portion. A native-born person telling students about the interview is not as meaningful and insightful as hearing it from a peer who has gone through the process. It’s also a way for immigrant volunteers to become more engaged. We’ve seen former students come back and share their stories or even become citizenship instructors.”

– Megan Shepard, Site Director, Immigration and Refugee Program, Church World Service, Greensboro

COMMUNICATIONS AND MESSAGING

The value and importance of citizenship is one area that enjoys large support across a broad cross section of Americans. Citizenship provides individuals an opportunity to engage in a shared, aspirational conversation around the values of becoming and being an American. The pride around what it means to be an American is something that many U.S.-born individuals and naturalized citizens have been eager to share with newcomers in a positive way.

Sharing Stories of Newcomers and Aspiring Citizens

Collecting and sharing stories of new Americans can convey the immense value and meaning of citizenship for newcomers, reinforce positive narratives around welcoming, and help build understanding and empathy among receiving communities. Storytelling is a powerful tool, and as Stephanie Ali in Atlanta shares, what has been most compelling and effective in both local media and for reaching new audiences is for directly impacted immigrants and refugees to share their own stories. “Storytelling has been great, ... creating opportunities for people to tell their own story is even better,” says Ali.

Messaging to Receiving Communities: Reflecting Shared Values and Local Culture

Local citizenship and welcoming practitioners have experimented with and refined various messages in order to educate and engage members of receiving communities, which has proven helpful in attracting more volunteers, as well as advancing supportive and pro-migrant

environments. Messages should be tailored to local contexts in order to more successfully resonate with receiving community audiences. Below are a few examples of themes and talking points that local practitioners have found effective.

Democracy and Civic Engagement

Messages around supporting newcomers towards participating more fully and proactively in our democracy, such as gaining the ability to vote, were found to be helpful, especially for drawing new volunteers. The concept of engaging civically can also include themes of reciprocity and mutual benefit: In the process of helping an immigrant or refugee on the path to citizenship, both receiving community members and newcomers are exercising their civic participation.

Community-Building and Common Cause

Themes of knowing and helping your neighbor, supporting newcomers to gain protections offered by citizenship, and the sentiment that “We’re in it together and we can make a difference” resonated especially in localities in which there was already a prevalent desire to protect and integrate immigrants and refugees.

Family and Stability

Messages around family and establishing roots resonate with receiving community members, such as the increased opportunity naturalization provides for new citizens to reunite with family, achieve homeownership, and build a better future for their children.

Economic Opportunity

Narratives that emphasize economic contributions and entrepreneurship are also effective for building broader community support for citizenship. Studies have shown that naturalized citizens often experience a boost in their incomes and purchasing power, and are more likely to access credit and financial services that help start small businesses and create jobs for U.S.-born workers. All this in turn contributes to broader community wealth and to the overall economy.

“To show that new Americans are job creators, they are starting businesses, buying homes, opening stores, hiring workers,... these stories go far and people really pick those up. It goes beyond self-sufficiency and into concepts like creating a lasting legacy.”

– Stephanie Ali, Civic Engagement Manager, New American Pathways, Atlanta

Patriotism and Service

Stories of immigrants and refugees who have served, or want to serve, in the military or security-related jobs can garner the support of community members who may be on the fence about immigration. Similarly, communicating the commitment and level of difficulty it takes to attain citizenship has been helpful.

“What I’ve worked into conversations that people seem receptive to is that citizenship is a choice, and when they make that commitment, they’re working really hard to prepare for it. We serve primarily refugees, and many haven’t had a formal education, so it’s a big learning curve and sometimes can take years to prepare. They do it because they take it seriously and it’s something they really value. It says a lot about their patriotism and dedication to their country.”

– Megan Shepard, Site Director, Immigration and Refugee Program, Church World Service, Greensboro

ENGAGING LOCAL LEADERSHIP

Involving local leaders in citizenship work serves two purposes: It helps them better understand and appreciate their newest community members, and it sends important signals to the larger receiving community that a culture of welcoming is important. The following examples illustrate the advantages of having the support of local leadership—whether elected officials, the business community, faith institutions, and even local sports teams—to not only encourage a broad welcoming community, but to validate citizenship “beyond the choir” in receiving communities.

Leveraging Elected Officials and Local Governments

Having vocal and visible support from public officials was cited as crucial for many local communities, in particular, mayors and city/county council members. While building these relationships, especially in newer gateway communities, can take a significant amount time and legwork, the payoff can be substantial. In Seattle and San Francisco, city council members, the mayor’s chief of staff, and county supervisors created public service announcements in support of citizenship and upcoming naturalization events. In Hartford, the mayor sang “This Land is Your Land” at a swearing-in ceremony, and they also engaged spokespersons from the state Department of Labor to help overcome perceptions of economic competition between the U.S.-born and migrants.



Alan Alabastro

“There’s no better spokesperson than the Mayor himself. He’s using his role and leadership to communicate to a much broader community than we would be able to.”

– Mary (Liz) Cedillo-Pereira, Director, Office of Welcoming Communities and Immigrant Affairs, City of Dallas

When it comes to leveraging local and social media, having city government leverage their media relationships or share upcoming events on their own platforms with large followings can reach more individuals in receiving communities. This was the case in Seattle, where the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs used its own social and traditional media resources to validate and amplify the reach of citizenship communications efforts, in partnership with the Seattle New Americans Campaign co-Site Leaders.

Local government offices have also leveraged existing networks and internal relationships to promote citizenship awareness and recruit city employees in various departments to serve as volunteers. The City of

Dallas Office of Welcoming Communities and Immigrant Affairs met with the citywide human resources department to help spread the word about citizenship events, and had its Citizenship Mega Workshop approved by the City of Dallas to be an official volunteer activity for city employees. The city then sent an email with the workshop postcard to all 13,000 city employees, which received a sizable volunteer response.

Working with Local Libraries

Local libraries, as accessible public institutions and gathering places that draw a wide array of community members, play an important role in raising awareness about citizenship and can be leveraged in a variety of ways, such as recruiting volunteers, holding citizenship events, and reinforcing a welcoming environment and inclusive culture.

After a New Americans Campaign Conference in 2015, which was hosted by the Dallas Public Library, the City of Dallas Office of Welcoming Communities and Immigrant Affairs and Catholic Charities

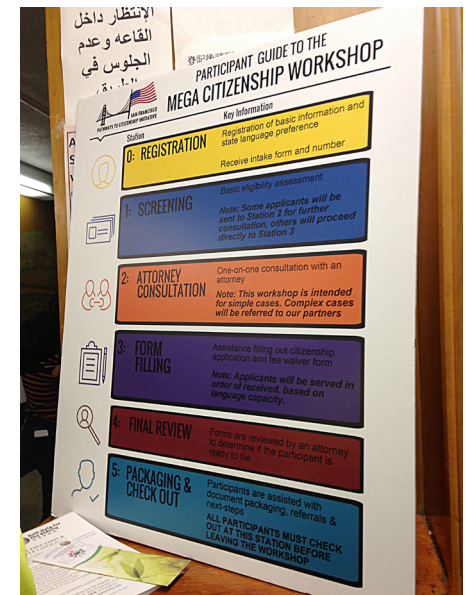


Alan Alabastro

(Dallas New Americans Campaign site lead), began a more formal partnership with the Dallas Public Library, which led to the Library increasing its collaboration with citizenship service providers and providing volunteer recruitment and training for the city's citizenship events. The library distributes flyers and posts on the VolunteerMatch.org platform to recruit volunteers for the city's citizenship events. It hosts volunteer trainings at library branches, asks its own library staff to volunteer and fill gaps during citizenship workshop shifts that are at risk of being short-staffed, and conducts outreach at various library events.

"We [recruit volunteers at] events already in existence, like the Dallas Library Book Fair, to reach a wider scope of Dallas residents," says Liz Cedillo-Pereira.

Other city departments, like San Francisco's Office of Civic Engagement and Immigrant Affairs, also partner with their local library system to find venues to host citizenship events.



Sarah Lelison

San Francisco Pathways to Citizenship Initiative, San Francisco New Americans Campaign site lead, group processing workshop participant overview.

The Hartford Public Library initiated a partnership with other libraries across the state of Connecticut, through which they share toolkits and peer learnings (including how to guide library visitors to citizenship services), and which has grown into participating branches hosting simultaneous naturalization ceremonies during Library Week. These ceremonies also help reemphasize the message that libraries are a welcoming place for all.

There are also Citizenship Corners in more than 9,000 libraries across the country, where local libraries create a dedicated space to provide information, educational resources, and test prep materials about naturalization—and often partner with USCIS to host information sessions and oath ceremonies. To learn more about starting a Citizenship Corner at a local library in your community, see the resource section at the end of this toolkit.



Sarah Letson

Engaging Educational Institutions

Many local governments and organizations benefit from relationships with local colleges and universities, which can be utilized to lend space, provide institutional support, and recruit student volunteers. The San Francisco Office of Civic Engagement and Immigrant Affairs targeted deans of colleges who are naturalized immigrants and keen to champion citizenship within their institutions, host workshops, or provide access to volunteer law students. Church World Service in Greensboro built relationships with university departments and professors. Through this partnership, the universities help send newsletters, announcements and volunteer opportunities at the beginning of each semester, as well as speak to classes and attend campus career fairs and volunteer fairs. Students recruited from local colleges have been able to assist with everything from screenings and applications to follow-ups for biometrics and interview notices.

Engaging the Business Community

Cultivating champions and partners within the local business community has also helped engage receiving community members in citizenship work. Employee affinity groups of corporations can be a great source of volunteers, including pro bono lawyers, who can often be in high demand. Business partners can also provide space and funding for workshops or food, drink, and other supplies for events. Seattle's Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs has capitalized on increased interest from employees of local tech corporations, legal firms, and other local businesses to support immigrant and refugee communities. These volunteers have then become repeat partners, and continued to provide their time and expertise at major city-sponsored citizenship events. Some city government agencies have also partnered with New American Workforce (at the National Immigration Forum), which works with businesses to assist their eligible immigrant employees with the citizenship process and English language learning so they can become full participants in the workplace, community, and economy.

Engaging the Faith Community

Partnering with faith leaders and their congregants has been a widespread practice among many local citizenship providers, and has proven exceptionally helpful for both uplifting welcoming messages and providing human and other resources. The Dallas Office of Welcoming Communities and Immigrant Affairs reaches out to leaders of faith institutions that already have English language courses and other programs for refugees and immigrants, and will provide them with materials to promote citizenship services and volunteer opportunities among their congregants. In Greensboro, Church World Service hosts a citizenship class at a local church, which in addition to providing space, invites Church World Service to do outreach with their congregation. Many refugee resettlement agencies are affiliated with national organizations that are faith-based, and New American Pathways in Atlanta frequently engages local churches they have had longstanding relationships with in other programs areas to co-sponsor and donate space, chairs, tables, and supplies for citizenship events.

Engaging Diverse Civic and Social Organizations

Often, local organizations will garner support from a broader array of receiving communities by thinking outside the immigrant field and looking to other allies and civic groups with shared values and experiences. This has been the case in Atlanta, where immigrant service organizations partner with a range of non-immigrant organizations, from the League of Women Voters to the NAACP to labor unions, in representing issues such as racial equity, reproductive justice, and worker rights. Forging and sustaining these partnerships can not only bring in new and diverse volunteers, but reinforce a culture of welcoming and solidarity across a more extensive cross section of the receiving community.

“Don’t limit your scope to only working with immigrant service organizations or Latino or Asian American advocacy groups. We can expand our reach much further. There’s a good understanding in the South among marginalized groups that what’s bad for one is bad for all of us, and we can all work together for positive change.”

—Stephanie Ali, Civic Engagement Manager, New American Pathways, Atlanta

Other Successes: Professional Sports Teams

The Detroit New Americans Campaign has partnered with the Detroit Tigers—for example, at the team’s annual ¡Fiesta Tigres! celebration. The Detroit New Americans Campaign distributed information about



Wojciech Zolnowski



Diego Bonesatti

and became a naturalized U.S. citizen on the Comerica Park field in 2008. In San Francisco, the Office of Civic Engagement & Immigrant Affairs helped facilitate a relationship between the Bay Area New Americans Campaign sites and the San Francisco Giants, which resulted in local organizations setting up tables at games to share information about upcoming citizenship events. Information about the New Americans Campaign was also displayed on the Jumbotron between innings.



Yoshi Mendez

citizenship at the event, and a public service announcement encouraging attendees to apply for citizenship was aired on the Comerica Park Jumbotron before the start of the game, reaching tens of thousands of fans. The celebration also honored current and former Tigers players, including Placido Polanco, who was born in the Dominican Republic

NATURALIZATION CEREMONIES

Citizenship oath ceremonies that are presented as community celebrations are an effective way to communicate inspiring messages of inclusivity and expose new audiences to welcoming work. The emotional pull of individuals finally achieving their dreams of becoming American citizens—and sharing with the receiving community the culmination of an often long and arduous process—can help humanize the dialogue around immigration.

› **TIP: Hold oath ceremonies in public and high-traffic areas, easily witnessed by passersby. The Hartford Library announces when a ceremony is about to occur, and found that moving the ceremony from the auditorium to the atrium proved much more effective for exposing and engaging library patrons who might not have otherwise attended. Likewise, Atlanta holds a ceremony on the state capitol grounds every year, with remarks and enthusiastic support from both lawmakers from both sides of the aisle. Partnering with the local USCIS’s Community Relations Officers to help organize a ceremony in a community setting can also provide access to additional spaces, resources, and media exposure. “Think of ceremonies strategically. If a ceremony is done in a public setting where people are automatically exposed to it, like a park or open area, it’s much more advantageous.”**

—Homa Naficy, Executive Director, The American Place, Adult Education & Immigration Services, Hartford Public Library



When naturalizing citizens can share personal stories and information, such as who they are, where they migrated from, and why they want to become a citizen, it can make the event even more meaningful and compelling. Sharing photos, video, and stories from ceremonies on social media can carry the positive messages even further. Church World Service in Greensboro found that these posts generate the most likes and comments. Oath ceremonies are also an effective way to recruit new volunteers who are moved by the experience, and organizations have found these settings helpful for attracting new volunteers and ambassadors from the receiving community.

› **TIP: Invite speakers, local businesses, and co-sponsors that are beyond “the usual suspects” or who have influence over those who are on the fence about immigrant and refugee issues. For New American Pathways in Atlanta, a partnership with a corporate bank helped expose bank staff to the process of becoming a citizen. “Most of the bank’s staff had never seen a ceremony. We wanted to show it to them, and to show them that these newly naturalized citizens are the people they serve.”**

—Stephanie Ali, Atlanta



› **TIP: Organize oath ceremonies that correspond with other holidays—such as Mother’s Day, Veterans Day, and, of course, Citizenship Day. This will reinforce messaging around shared values such as family, patriotism, and civic engagement. For example, Veterans Day ceremonies have been used as an opportunity to naturalize and celebrate immigrants and refugees who have already served or are currently serving in the U.S. armed forces.**



OTHER BEST PRACTICES

Partnering with Local New Americans Campaign Organizations

Partnering with a local New Americans Campaign site or affiliate, where possible, can help catalyze the work of a welcoming government office or entity. The New Americans Campaign is a nonpartisan national network of immigration services organizations that collaborate to provide citizenship-eligible residents with trusted naturalization assistance. The New Americans Campaign currently has 18 sites in metropolitan areas and affiliates in even more places across the country that are experts in providing citizenship services. New Americans Campaign partners have built local expertise on how to best provide citizenship services to their local communities, including many of the tips listed in this toolkit. For more information, visit www.newamericanscampaign.org.

Conclusion

The lessons and promising practices shared in this toolkit by nonprofit and public sector practitioners demonstrate that there is no shortage of proactive, collaborative, and creative ways to engage receiving community members in promoting citizenship and cultivating welcoming cities. Through fostering meaningful interaction and common goals, engaging a broad array of champions and partners, and communicating the shared benefits and successes of citizenship, cities across the country can realize more inclusive, safe, and healthy environments for residents both long-standing and new. We look forward to hearing about effective strategies and successes in your own welcoming community.

This toolkit was developed through a partnership between Welcoming America and the New Americans Campaign.

Welcoming America leads a movement of inclusive communities becoming more prosperous by making everyone feel like they belong.

We believe that all people, including immigrants, are valued contributors who are vital to the success of our communities and shared future. Today, a growing number of places recognize that being welcoming leads to prosperity. Welcoming America provides the road map and support they need to become more welcoming toward immigrants and all residents. More information is available at www.welcomingamerica.org.



Sarah Letson

The New Americans Campaign, led by the Immigrant Legal Resource Center, is a diverse nonpartisan national network of respected immigration organizations, legal services providers, faith-based organizations, immigrant rights groups, foundations, and community leaders. The Campaign transforms the way aspiring citizens navigate the path to becoming new Americans. It is committed to connecting lawful permanent residents (LPRs) to trusted legal assistance and critical information that simplifies the naturalization process. The New Americans Campaign rests on five pillars: achieving measurable impact on naturalization; working collaboratively; Infusion innovation into service delivery models; reaching a diverse population of aspiring citizens; and providing the highest quality naturalization services. Currently, its partners are located in 18 metropolitan areas across the U.S. and comprise more than 140 organizations. More information can be found at www.newamericanscampaign.org.

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Stephanie Ali, Civic Engagement Manager, New American Pathways*

Mary (Liz) Cedillo-Pereira, Director, Office of Welcoming Communities and Immigrant Affairs, City of Dallas+*

Christina Guros, Citizenship Program and Policy Specialist, Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs, City of Seattle+*

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Richard Whipple, Deputy Director–Programs, Office of Civic Engagement & Immigrant Affairs, City & County of San Francisco+*

Wojciech Zolnowski, Executive Director, International Institute of Metropolitan Detroit*#

+ Welcoming America Member

* New Americans Campaign Partner

New Americans Campaign Site Leader

Sample Templates/Forms

Please go to www.welcomingamerica.org/resources for an appendix of welcoming and citizenship sample templates, forms, and guides.

Additional Resources/Links

More on Creating Welcoming Communities:

1. Receiving Communities Initiative Toolkit. Provides an overview and promising practices around the three-pronged approach to engaging receiving communities. www.welcomingamerica.org/content/receiving-communities-initiative-toolkit
2. Community Planning Process Guide. An overview of how to conduct a local, cross-sectoral planning process to create a more welcoming community. www.welcomingamerica.org/content/community-planning-process-guide
3. Stand Together: Messaging to Support Muslims and Refugees in Challenging Times. This communications toolkit shares winning messages, the power of stories, and ways to approach tough questions in order to create greater welcome. www.welcomingamerica.org/content/stand-together-toolkit

More on Citizenship Best Practices:

1. Learn About More Best Practices in Naturalization and Download Free Toolkits: www.newamericanscampaign.org/about/best-practices-in-naturalization
2. From New Americans. Collecting and Sharing stories of Naturalized Citizens. www.newamericanscampaign.org/from-new-americans
3. Working with Local Libraries to Support Citizenship:
 - a) How to set up a Citizenship Corner at your library: www.uscis.gov/citizenship/organizations/libraries/citizenship-corners
 - b) Dallas Public Library Supports Citizenship: www.newamericanscampaign.org/dallas-public-library-supports-citizenship

- c) Prepare for U.S. Citizenship at Brooklyn Public Library: www.bklynlibrary.org/learn/immigrants/citizenship
- d) The City of Nashville Teams Up With USCIS to Promote Citizenship: www.newamericanscampaign.org/city-nashville-teams-uscis-promote-citizenship
- e) NYC Expands Promotion of Citizenship with NYCitizenship: www.newamericanscampaign.org/nyc-expands-promotion-of-citizenship-with-nycitizenship
- 4. Using Volunteers in Naturalization Workshops. A best practices toolkit. www.newamericanscampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Best-Practices-Toolkit-Volunteers.pdf
- 5. Engaging Pro Bono Attorneys in Naturalization Workshops. A best practices toolkit with online training resources for pro bono attorneys and lay volunteers. See page 18 (“Online On-Demand Volunteer Training”): www.newamericanscampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Best-Practices-Toolkit-ProBono-final.pdf
- 6. Celebrating Citizenship for Members of the Armed Forces. www.newamericanscampaign.org/celebrating-citizenship-for-members-of-the-armed-forces

This toolkit can also be found online at www.welcomingamerica.org/resources.

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Welcoming America

Welcoming America is a nonpartisan, national nonprofit that leads a growing movement of inclusive communities becoming more prosperous by helping everyone know they belong. We provide a road map and support for places to reduce barriers to full participation and build bridges between immigrants and longtime residents through direct contact and dialogue. Welcoming America believes that all people, including immigrants and refugees, are valued contributors who are vital to our shared future. Learn more at www.welcomingamerica.org.

The New Americans Campaign

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#NewAmericans
info@newamericanscampaign.org

newamericanscampaign.org



BUILDING A NATION OF NEIGHBORS

info@welcomingamerica.org
404-631-6593

welcomingamerica.org

