

USCIS Citizenship and Integration Grant Program

Promising Practices

Organization Name:	Hogar Immigrant Services, Catholic Charities Diocese of Arlington Inc.
Location:	Falls Church, VA
USCIS Grant Program:	FY 2010 Citizenship and Integration Direct Services Grant Program FY 2011 Citizenship and Integration Direct Services Grant Program— Citizenship Instruction and Naturalization Application Services

Classroom Naturalization Celebrations

Becoming a naturalized U.S. citizen is a significant milestone that deserves celebration and recognition. Hogar Immigrant Services (Hogar), a recipient of fiscal year 2010 and 2011 USCIS funding, recognizes the success of its citizenship students by holding special naturalization celebrations in the classroom. These events provide recently naturalized citizens with an opportunity to share their experience with fellow classmates and encourage them to achieve similar success. Hogar’s classroom naturalization celebrations also offer a way to congratulate those who have been successful in the naturalization process.



Hogar Immigrant Services Intern Jean Larkai with program participant.

Purpose

Hogar holds classroom naturalization celebrations in order to recognize the success of recently naturalized program participants. These events are also intended

to encourage students to pursue naturalization by providing them with the opportunity to learn from a fellow classmate’s experience.

Process

Hogar citizenship instructors keep track of each upcoming naturalization interview on a classroom

calendar. By displaying upcoming naturalization interviews on a calendar, instructors draw attention

to the significance of each milestone. When students learn of a fellow classmate's upcoming interview from the calendar, they often provide that individual with encouragement and support.

In the weeks leading up to a student's naturalization interview, instructors make tentative plans for the celebration. Once instructors learn that the student successfully passed his or her interview, they finalize the date of the celebration. Students then invite family, friends, and mentors to attend their naturalization celebration.

On the day of the celebration, instructors, students, family, and friends gather together and enjoy refreshments in an informal classroom setting. Hogar instructors and staff present the recently naturalized student with a congratulatory card. Students also take

photos with their teachers and fellow classmates during the event.

Before the end of the celebration, instructors provide the recently naturalized student with an opportunity to present to the group. During the presentation, the recently naturalized student shares his or her recollection of the naturalization interview and remarks on any challenges they faced. At the end of the presentation, students who have not yet naturalized ask questions and seek clarification about the interview process. Hearing a first-hand account of a peer's experience provides invaluable information and encouragement to students who have not yet naturalized. The account provides students with personal insight about the naturalization process that cannot be replaced with videos, mock interviews, or lectures.

Challenges

Hogar's main challenge is ensuring that recently naturalized students return for the classroom celebration. Attending a citizenship class is a significant time commitment for many students, who often have

multiple work and family responsibilities. If a student is unable to return to class for the celebration, the instructor must make last-minute adjustments to lesson plans.

Overcoming Obstacles

Hogar instructors take a number of steps to proactively encourage recently naturalized program participants to attend the celebration. Instructors appeal to the bonds that students have developed with their classmates and stress that their participation in the celebration will significantly help their peers. Instructors have also

found it effective to hold the celebration during the class immediately following the naturalization interview because it leaves less time for schedule changes. Finally, instructors confirm a student's plans to attend the celebration by contacting them after their naturalization interview.

Outcomes

Hogar's naturalization celebrations are festive events that honor the achievements of recently naturalized students. The celebrations recognize the effort and dedication that it takes to complete the naturalization process. At the same time, the celebration provides an opportunity for students who have not yet naturalized to learn from

their peers' experiences and gather helpful insight about the naturalization interview. Hogar's classroom celebrations offer a way to encourage permanent residents as they navigate through the naturalization process.

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