

## Citizenship and Integration Grant Program

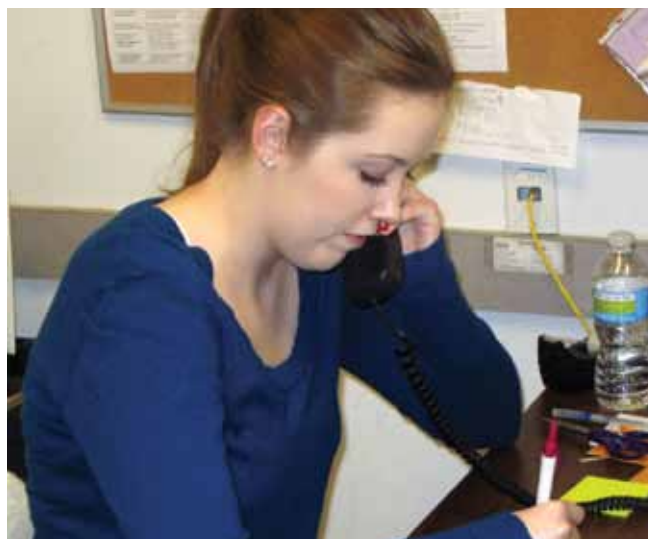
# Promising Practices

<b>Organization Name:</b>	International Institute of St. Louis
<b>Location:</b>	St. Louis, MO
<b>USCIS Grant Program:</b>	FY 2009 Citizenship Grant Program FY 2011 Citizenship and Integration Direct Services Grant Program— Citizenship Instruction and Naturalization Application Services

### Telephone Conversation Partners Program

During the naturalization interview, naturalization applicants must demonstrate an ability to speak, read, write, and understand English and demonstrate knowledge of U.S. history and government (civics) to pass the naturalization test. With USCIS funding, the International Institute of St. Louis developed an interview preparation program that bolsters the ability of English language learners to practice these skills. The Telephone Conversation Partners Program consists of a series of lessons that enable students to practice their interview skills with volunteers over the telephone. These telephone conversations provide students with the additional practice they need to prepare for the naturalization interview.

*Kate Durkin with the International Institute of St. Louis' Telephone Conversation Partners Program.*



### Purpose

The Telephone Conversation Partners Program is intended to prepare students for the naturalization interview through individualized practice in four core areas, including comprehending and responding to:

- Questions and commands in English
- Questions about the Oath of Allegiance
- Questions found on Form N-400, Application for Naturalization
- Questions regarding U.S. history and government (civics)

## Process

The International Institute of St. Louis developed the Telephone Conversation Partners Program for intermediate to advanced-level students. First, the program matches students with available volunteer tutors. The organization provides tutors with an initial training and orientation to the program along with a booklet of lessons, instructional tips, and reporting procedures. Similarly, the International Institute of St. Louis provides students with an orientation and booklet as well.

Each Telephone Conversation Partners Program booklet contains written instructions on how to complete the lessons in the program. The twelve lessons in the booklet cover topics including early U.S. history, the legislative branch, and citizenship rights and responsibilities. Each lesson contains four sections:

- Warm-up questions
- Oath of Allegiance
- Form N-400, *Application for Naturalization* questions
- U.S. history and government (civics) questions

Each week, students and tutors spend at least 30 minutes together over the telephone working on the practice lessons. Tutors ask students questions such as, “How have you been since we last spoke?” and “What promises do you make when you take the Oath of Allegiance?” During the last week of the program, students complete a mock interview during which they are asked to respond to at least ten questions from Form N-400, *Application for Naturalization*, answer ten U.S. history and government (civics) questions, and read the Oath of Allegiance.

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## Challenges

The Telephone Conversation Partners Program experiences three main challenges. First, the International Institute of St. Louis often finds it difficult to recruit and retain volunteers. Second, the program

struggles to maintain regular student attendance. Finally, the organization has difficulty ensuring that tutors follow the program’s reporting requirements, which can have a negative effect on overall program evaluation.

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## Overcoming Obstacles

The International Institute of St. Louis takes measured steps to ensure the success of the Telephone Conversation Partners Program. First, the program manager constantly refines the volunteer recruitment process and seeks out new recruitment methods. The program manager also reaches out to experienced volunteers and asks for their continued participation with the organization. While waiting for a tutor to become available, students practice for the naturalization interview using online USCIS resources, which can be found on the [Citizenship Resource Center](#).

The International Institute of St. Louis responds to attendance issues by creating additional participation requirements. The program manager makes it a policy to discontinue a student’s participation in the program

once they miss consecutive scheduled telephone conversations. This ensures that students understand the value of the tutor’s volunteer time and prompts them to better communicate with their tutor about schedule changes.

Finally, the program manager works proactively with tutors to ensure that they understand the importance of reporting requirements. The manager asks tutors to email their reports to the organization within 48 hours of the telephone practice. As an additional reminder, the program manager follows up with tutors by email and telephone. This additional effort by the program manager brings an increased adherence to program reporting requirements.

## Outcomes

Through the Telephone Conversation Partners Program students strengthen their understanding of English and their knowledge of U.S. history and government (civics). In particular, they become familiar with

the Oath of Allegiance and the questions found on Form N-400, *Application for Naturalization*. After receiving individualized tutoring, students report feeling more prepared for the naturalization interview.

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