



Department of Commerce

Washington New Americans Program

Per Laws of 2008, Chapter 329, Section 125(63)

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Report to the Legislature
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Acknowledgements

Washington State Department of Commerce

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Introduction

The Washington New Americans Program was created by legislative proviso in 2008 ([Laws of 2008, Chapter 329, Section 125\(63\)](#)) to help legal permanent residents in the state become naturalized U.S. citizens. For State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2016, the Legislature appropriated \$396,000, of state general funds for the program.

Naturalization is the legal process that a foreign national can use to become a U.S. citizen. To qualify for naturalization, an applicant must have held legal, permanent U.S. residency (a green card holder) for three to five years. The first step of naturalization is submission of a federal N-400 Application for Naturalization form (N-400) to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. After the application is approved, the applicant must complete an interview, pass an English language test, and pass a civics test. The applicant is then qualified to take the oath of loyalty and become a U.S. citizen. Completing the naturalization process often takes several years.

The Washington State Department of Commerce (Commerce) administers the New Americans Program through a contract with OneAmerica. This report provides a summary of the program's SFY 2016 activities, performance measures and program outcomes.

Program Performance and Outcomes

The New Americans Program met all of the service delivery goals developed between Commerce and OneAmerica. OneAmerica subcontracted with seven partner agencies. One subcontractor focused on outreach and education while the others provided outreach, education and naturalization services.

Table 1: New Americans Program SFY 2016 Goals and Results

Goal	Target	Outcome
Help legal permanent residents make progress toward naturalization	Assist 1,300 individuals	2,562 individuals assisted
Use Citizenship Day events to assist legal permanent residents with naturalization	Hold two Citizenship Day events at six statewide locations and five roving clinics at various statewide locations	Six Citizenship Day events were conducted over two days at six sites across the state; five roving attorney clinics were held at five sites
Alert qualified legal permanent residents of New Americans Program	Implement the SFY 2016 media campaign	Media campaign launched statewide
Distribute media materials to multiple ethnic media outlets	Distribute information to 28 organizations	Materials distributed to 28 ethnic media outlets
Provide immigrants with the information and tools necessary to earn citizenship and participate actively in civic society	Deliver 24 hours of civics education training	Citizenship and civics curriculum were used to deliver 28 hours of education, serving 222 students
Assist qualified residents to submit applications for citizenship	Assist with the completion of 650 N-400 applications	1,071 individuals assisted with the completion of N-400 applications

Recommendations

Expand Access to Naturalization Support Services

The Pew Charitable Trusts has found that less than 10 percent of the estimated 8.8 million U.S. residents eligible to naturalize, apply for citizenship each year.¹ However, if comprehensive immigration reform or administrative relief for legal residents is announced at the national level, it's unlikely Washington's community-based naturalization support organizations will be able to handle the demand for services. This could result in increased fraudulent activity by so-called "notarios" who victimize Washington residents by illegally pretending to offer legal help with immigration and naturalization.

In light of these findings and potential developments, the Legislature may consider options for expanding access to naturalization support services, and examining solutions to the barriers that eligible applicants face when applying for citizenship.

Tracking Rates of Naturalization for Clients Completing N-400 Forms

In order to better understand the actual impact of New Americans services, and ultimately to improve program performance, Commerce is considering having OneAmerica submit data annually on the rates of naturalization among its clients who complete N-400 applications for naturalization. This and other reporting enhancements to improve program effectiveness are being discussed with the contractor.

¹ The Pew Charitable Trusts. "The State of the States on Naturalization: Highlights from California, Illinois, and Washington." July 14, 2016. Retrieved from: <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2016/07/14/the-state-of-the-states-on-naturalization-highlights-from-california-illinois-and-washington>

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U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. "Naturalization Fact Sheet." November 6, 2015. Retrieved from: <https://www.uscis.gov/news/fact-sheets/naturalization-fact-sheet>