

CITIZENSHIP

\$1 million project aims to smooth path to citizenship

Goal is 2,000 new citizens in three years

23 HOURS AGO • [HOWARD YUNE](#)

A new team effort among Napa County community groups aims to remove the roadblocks standing between thousands of immigrants and U.S. citizenship, beginning by month's end.

With funding from the Napa Valley Community Foundation, a group of local nonprofits is preparing to offer services to legal permanent residents in the county who wish to become citizens.

More than 80 individuals, families, companies and foundations have contributed \$1 million to the Community Foundation in recent months to make this project possible. The foundation still needs to raise \$100,000 to fully fund the three-year effort and is welcoming contributions of any size.

The campaign is a joint effort of the Puertas Abiertas Community Resource Center, the McPherson Family Resource Center, Legal Aid of Napa Valley and the International Institute of the Bay Area. The group will offer its programs under the name Citizenship Legal Services.

The first citizenship workshop will take place July 30 at 4 p.m. in the McPherson Elementary School's Multi-Use Room.

Workshop guests will begin with screenings to check residents' eligibility to take the citizenship examination, according to Laura Lopez, outreach coordinator for the McPherson Family Resource Center, a program partner.

The session also will cover checking for exemptions from the \$680 naturalization fee, providing records of entries and exits from the U.S., and reviews by Citizenship Legal Services staff and an immigration attorney.

While a lack of English proficiency stands in the way of many immigrants' citizenship, money and even a lack of exam study time also can frustrate applicants, Lopez said.

"I think even people able to communicate in English day to day may not feel comfortable with learning history" for the naturalization test, she said. "People who work multiple jobs, even if they feel comfortable with the language, it's hard to find time to study."

Citizenship Legal Services is readying a weekly Napa class to help immigrants prepare for the exams, as well as providing study materials to review at home or work, said Lopez.

There are nearly 9,000 legal permanent residents in Napa County who are eligible to become citizens. If a comprehensive immigration bill is passed, the pool of citizenship-eligible residents could expand by an additional 10,000 people, the foundation said.

“Our goal is to help up to 2,000 people become citizens in the next three years,” Madeline Feldon, lead immigration attorney for Citizenship Legal Services, said in a statement. “One lawyer sitting alone in an office can't do that. But group processing workshops, where you invite several dozen people to the church hall or the school auditorium, and pair an immigration attorney like me with volunteers and (Board of Immigration Appeals)-accredited representatives, definitely can.”

Citizenship workshop

To reserve a spot at the citizenship workshop, contact either Puertas Abiertas Community Resource Center, Blanca Huijon, intake specialist/case mentor, at 707-224-1786, or McPherson Family Resource Center, Fabiola Osorio, parent leadership coordinator, at 707-363-3798.

- The seminar costs \$50 and walk-ins are welcome.

Seniors 60 and older are directed to contact Legal Aid of Napa Valley at 707-259-0579 for free one-to-one assistance.

More information

- To learn more or make a gift to the Napa Valley Community Federation, call 707-254-9565 or visit napavalleycf.org.