

USCIS Citizenship and Integration Grant Program

Promising Practices

Organization Name:	International Rescue Committee
Location:	Phoenix, AZ
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

Visit from a U.S. Representative

The civics portion of the naturalization test addresses many aspects of the U.S. system of government, including the role of the House of Representatives and its elected members. As part of the Citizenship and Integration Grant Program, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Phoenix, Arizona offers students a unique opportunity to learn about the U.S. House of Representatives. The IRC in Phoenix invites U.S. Representatives to visit citizenship education classes and speak to program participants. A visit from a congressional leader is both engaging and meaningful for students and encourages active civic involvement after naturalization.



U.S. Representative speaking to program participants.

Purpose

The IRC in Phoenix invites U.S. Representatives to visit citizenship classes in order to help students better understand the civic principles taught in the classroom. Specifically, a visit from a U.S. Representative relates to the following USCIS naturalization test questions:

- Question 16: Who makes federal laws?
- Question 17: What are the two parts of the U.S. Congress?
- Question 21: The House of Representatives has how many voting members?

- Question 22: We elect a U.S Representative for how many years?
- Question 23: Name your U.S. Representative.
- Question 25: Why do some states have more Representatives than other states?

Process

As part of general outreach efforts, IRC staff members visit the local offices of U.S. Representatives. During these visits, IRC staff members share information about their programs and invite U.S. Representatives to visit citizenship classes. Once a U.S. Representative accepts an invitation to visit, the IRC in Phoenix coordinates logistics with the U.S. Representative's local staff. IRC also invites current and past program participants to the event.

In preparation for the visit, IRC's citizenship instructors provide students with an educational background about Congress and the role of U.S. Representatives. Specifically, citizenship instructors introduce students to civics content related to naturalization test questions 16, 17, 21-23, and 25.

During class time, citizenship instructors use an overhead projector to show students how to access the "Find Your Representative" tool online at

www.house.gov/representatives/find/. This tool allows students to search for and identify their local U.S. Representative. After identifying local members of Congress, citizenship instructors use the overhead projector to view maps of congressional districts. As a class, students also view U.S. Representatives' web sites and decide on potential questions to ask during the visit.

On the day of the visit, IRC staff members welcome the U.S. Representative into the citizenship classroom. The U.S. Representative provides students with an overview of his or her official responsibilities and explains his or her typical day as a member of Congress. The U.S. Representative spends about an hour and a half visiting with students and answering their questions. At the end of the event, students pose for photos with the U.S. Representative.

Challenges

IRC staff members sometimes find it challenging to schedule a visit with a U.S. Representative. A U.S. Representative's in-district time is limited because they must often be in Washington, DC to fulfill their official duties. A U.S. Representative's visit may also not

align with the "Congress" portion of the citizenship curriculum. If the visit is scheduled early in the course of the class, citizenship instructors may find it challenging to adjust lesson plans.

Overcoming Obstacles

Advance planning is the key to overcoming scheduling challenges. The IRC in Phoenix works with the U.S. Representative's staff members to schedule the visit several months in advance. This ensures that students have sufficient time to learn about Congress and prepare

questions for the U.S. Representative. Scheduling the visit well in advance also gives students time to make adjustments to work and personal schedules so they can attend the event.

Outcomes

Most recently, the U.S. Representative from the Third Congressional District of Arizona visited the IRC in Phoenix. In total, more than 50 current and past program participants attended the event. Students

enjoyed the opportunity to meet an elected official and ask questions. Most importantly, the event fostered a greater understanding of, and appreciation for, the role and duties of U.S. Representatives.

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