

VOTER REGISTRATION INFORMATION for Administrative Naturalization Ceremonies

The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services' (USCIS) Policy Manual requires that all newly naturalized citizens have the opportunity to receive a voter registration application at administrative naturalization ceremonies, and it permits approved non-governmental organizations to help with voter registration at these ceremonies to ensure that this opportunity occurs.¹ This document provides background information about the process of requesting approval to be one of the non-governmental organizations that offers voter registration at these ceremonies.

WHAT IS AN ADMINISTRATIVE NATURALIZATION CEREMONY?

USCIS field offices conduct administrative naturalization ceremonies to confer United States citizenship upon the participants.² The ceremony includes, among other things, the administration of the Oath of Allegiance, the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance, and the presentation of a Certificate of Naturalization.

WHERE AND WHEN DO ADMINISTRATIVE NATURALIZATION CEREMONIES HAPPEN?

There are USCIS field offices in 45 states and 4 territories. They conduct administrative naturalization ceremonies with varying frequencies; some offices do not conduct any, while others conduct multiple each week. To find your local field office and how frequently it conducts administrative naturalization ceremonies, use the USCIS Field Locator at <http://www.uscis.gov/about-us/find-uscis-office/field-offices>. Depending on the field office, ceremonies may be conducted at the field office or at an off-site location.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Naturalized citizens have undergone a lengthy process to earn the right to vote, but they may need assistance in understanding how to register and exercise this exciting new right.

WHEN IS VOTER REGISTRATION OFFERED DURING THE CEREMONY?

Voter registration may only be offered after the conclusion of the ceremony.

WHO MAY OFFER VOTER REGISTRATION?

Per its policy manual, USCIS has stated a preference for voter registration at the ceremony to be conducted by state or local election offices. But, if election officials do not, non-governmental organizations that are both non-profit and non-partisan may receive approval from USCIS to distribute and collect voter registration applications at these ceremonies.

HOW DO I GET PERMISSION FOR MY ORGANIZATION TO OFFER VOTER REGISTRATION?

You should submit a request in writing to the local USCIS Field Office Director to be considered. When you find your local field office at <http://www.uscis.gov/about-us/find-uscis-office/field-offices>, your office's webpage will list the Field Office Director and address at the top. USCIS will respond in writing within 60 days of receiving your request. If your organization is selected, you will receive a letter with more information, and will be contacted to determine your availability to participate in scheduled ceremonies.

1. See section E at [http://www.uscis.gov/policymanual/HTML/PolicyManual-Volume I 2-Part-Chapter5.html](http://www.uscis.gov/policymanual/HTML/PolicyManual-Volume%20I-2-Part-Chapter5.html).

2. Administrative ceremonies are one of three different kinds of naturalization ceremonies. The other two are judicial ceremonies—when the Oath of Allegiance is administered by a court rather than USCIS—and expedited ceremonies. The USCIS policy manual does not contemplate an offer of voter registration by non-governmental organizations during judicial and expedited ceremonies, though it may be possible to arrange something through the court. Judicial ceremonies may be conducted by federal district courts and certain state courts. To determine which court in your region provides judicial naturalization ceremonies, contact your local USCIS field office.

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WHAT RULES MUST AN ORGANIZATION COMPLY WITH WHILE OFFERING VOTER REGISTRATION?

Participating non-governmental organizations and their representatives **MUST**:

- safeguard all personal information new citizens provide for voter registration, and are prohibited from using this information for any purpose other than voter registration;
- follow scheduling and logistical requirements set forth by USCIS field leadership;
- wear professional attire and represent themselves and their organization professionally;
- have received proper training on how to register voters;
- receive an on-site briefing from field leadership regarding rules for that particular venue; and
- wear name tags that include the name of the organization while registering voters (no other identification of the organization may be worn or displayed).

Participating non-governmental organizations **MUST NOT**:

- participate in any political activity, partisan or otherwise, while participating in voter registration activities during administrative naturalization ceremonies, regardless of whether the ceremonies take place on federal or non-federal property;
- engage in commercial or religious solicitation or promotion of any kind; or
- discriminate on the basis of race, color, gender, religion, age, sexual orientation, national or ethnic origin, disability, marital status, or veteran status.

CAN AN ORGANIZATION'S PERMISSION TO OFFER VOTER REGISTRATION BE REVOKED?

Yes. Permission may be revoked if the non-governmental organization fails to comply with USCIS' requirements for participation, or if USCIS receives a complaint regarding an entity's inappropriate behavior or lack of ability to properly provide voter registration services.

WARNING

When collecting completed voter registration applications for submission to election officials, you must comply with any applicable voter registration laws of the state in which the ceremonies occur, as well as with the USCIS guidelines. The penalties for not following voter registration laws include monetary and criminal penalties in some states. Do not collect completed voter registration applications unless you are familiar with the specifics of voter registration laws in your state. ProjectVote can help with training. To determine what laws apply in your state, read ProjectVote's state-by-state voter registration guides, available at <http://www.projectvote.org/component/content/article/251-Voter%Registration/781-state-voter-registration-guides.html>, and talk to your local election official.

FURTHER QUESTIONS

To learn more about USCIS administrative naturalization ceremonies and policies, visit <http://www.uscis.gov>. To learn more about voter registration, including your state's laws and regulations about distributing and collecting completed voter registration applications, you should contact your local or state election officials. Contact information for state election officials can be found here: http://www.eac.gov/voter_resources/contact_your_state.aspx.

You can also contact ProjectVote with any questions:

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