



**International
Institute of
New England**

Overcoming Barriers to Naturalization



Introduction: Who is IINE?

- Refugee Resettlement Agency
- Affiliate of USCRI
- Services provided:
 - Case management (R&P and Community Services)
 - English for Employment
 - Employment services
 - Legal Immigration Forms Services
- The Mission of the International Institute of New England is to invest in the future of our cities and towns by preparing immigrants and refugees for participation in the social, economic, and political richness of American life through active citizenship.



Overview

- Financial
 - Fee waivers (I-912, I-942)
- English Language Requirement
 - English exemption
 - Literacy
- Civics Exam
- Medical Certification for Disability Exceptions (N-648)
- Good Moral Character
- Complexity and Awareness



Financial Barriers

- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) = Funded by user fees
- Congress does not appropriate funding to USCIS
- Fee for Application for Naturalization (N-400) = \$725 (\$640 filing fee + \$85 biometric fee)
 - Applicants 75 years of age or older = \$640
- No refund if application is denied
- No Family cap
- ESL classes, citizenship classes, legal assistance and transportation

Year	1983	2003	2006	2007	2018
N-400 Cost	\$35	\$260	\$330	\$675	\$725



Financial Barriers: Fee Waiver

- Fee waivers available
 - Full fee waiver (I-912, \$0)
 - Partial fee waiver (I-942, \$320 application fee + \$85 biometrics fee = \$405)
- How to qualify:
 - Receive a means-tested public benefit (eg. SNAP, TAFDC, SSI, ect)
 - Income at or below 150% of the Federal Poverty Level (full waiver)
 - Income between 150% and 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (partial waiver)
 - Financial hardship (eg. medical bills)



Financial Barriers: Fee Waiver

For the 48 Contiguous States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands:

<u>Household Size</u>	<u>150% of HHS Poverty Guidelines*</u>	<u>200% of HHS Poverty Guidelines*</u>
1	\$18,210	\$24,280
2	\$24,690	\$32,920
3	\$31,170	\$41,560
4	\$37,650	\$50,200
5	\$44,130	\$58,840
6	\$50,610	\$67,480
7	\$57,090	\$76,120
8	\$63,570	\$84,760
+8	Add \$6,480 for each additional person.	Add \$8,640 for each additional person.



English Language Requirement

- Basic English required for English language test, civics exam and interview
- English language test:
 - Reading: Must read one of three sentences correctly
 - Writing: Must write one of three sentences correctly
 - Speaking: Determined by USCIS officer during interview
- Civics Exam
 - Test will be in English, applicant must respond in English
- Interview
 - USCIS officer will interview applicant in English and applicant must respond in English.



English Language Requirement

- Illiteracy = no waiver or exemption available
 - Extremely difficult to satisfy English language requirements (reading & writing)
 - Most ESOL/Citizenship classes are not designed for students who are illiterate in native language
 - Impacts many refugees/clients without access to education
- Automatic exemption:
 - “50/20” rule
 - “55/15” rule
- If you qualify for exemption, you must:
 - Bring your own interpreter to the interview
 - Take the civics exam in native language (with interpreter)



Civics Exam

- Must pass the civics exam in order to become a citizen
- 100 questions to study, 10 are chosen, must answer 6 correctly
- Applicants intimidated by perceived difficulty
 - 91% pass rate
- 2 chances to pass civics exam
- “65/20” rule
 - Simplified civics exam: study 20 of the 100 questions



Waiver for Civics Exam and English Requirement

- N-648, Certification of Medical Disability
 - Application for a waiver of the English and civics requirements and oath waiver (optional)
- Who is eligible for a disability waiver?
 - Applicants with a medically determinable physical or developmental disability or mental impairment that causes the applicant to be unable to learn English and/or U.S. history and civics.
 - The disability is expected to last at least 12 months
 - The disability is not the result of illegal drug use
- Age and/or illiteracy alone will not qualify an applicant for the N-648.



Waiver for Civics Exam and English Requirement

Challenges

- Must be filled out by medical doctors, doctors of osteopathy, or clinical psychologists licensed to practice in the United States.
 - Many medical professionals are unfamiliar with this form and how to fill it out to USCIS's standards
 - Impairment must be directly connected to inability to learn English/pass civics exam.
- Adjudicated by interviewing officer at time of appointment, not a medical professional
 - Applicants do not know if waiver was approved beforehand.
 - USCIS officer may not understand medical terminology



Good Moral Character

- Applicant bears burden of demonstrating they are a person of “good moral character”
 - Covers a number of criminal and other matters during and beyond the 3/5 year residency period
- State and Federal laws may differ → crime may not be a considered a conviction in MA, but is considered a conviction in immigration law
 - Barrier to access legal assistance
 - Applicants may be reluctant to admit criminal history or may assume their record is sealed
- High stakes when applying for citizenship
 - Deportable offenses/Permanently banned from citizenship
 - If deportable, there is no waiver you can file



Complexity and Awareness

- Complex and intimidating process
- No federal integration program
- Lack of awareness of:
 - Eligibility requirements
 - Legal assistance
 - Free/low-cost ESOL/Citizenship classes
 - Benefits of Citizenship
- We are all here to help!



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Questions?

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