

Research: New citizens and civic engagement

What works for outreach to communities with low English proficiency and low civics literacy

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This report summarizes the findings from ethnographic research about the experience of new citizens in civic life in the U.S. conducted in 2019.

Providing access to information about voting and elections in languages other than English is bigger than delivering good translations of printed materials. A good language access program can help people with low English proficiency acculturate and integrate, and ultimately, become engaged, well-informed citizens.

There's a lot of talk of "integration" and "engagement" of immigrants in the academic literature, but in reality, immigrants are largely on their own to find their way through learning and using the larger system. America doesn't make it easy to figure out how to take part in city and town activities, let alone learn where to get help with basic services like school and healthcare. The facts about history and government that people learn to pass the civics test in their naturalization interview don't come close to what you need to know to become an informed, active voter.

Elections happen in counties in most of the U.S., but the most robust language access planning is done in cities and by courts. When local election offices connect to nearby experts in cities, courts, and universities, voters with low English proficiency should see more options for getting more information in languages they use and understand.

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Highlights

“Civic engagement” means different things in different countries.

New citizens bring experiences from their culture that influence engagement in civic life. They might fear authority or crime or feel frustration with competition and lack of security. New citizens also come with expectations around the American dream. Most of our study participants came to the U.S for a better life. They were willing to work hard for safety and security.

New citizens who arrive with privilege and English have more interaction with civic groups and advocates sooner. For those who arrive poor, it takes time to integrate. Only after you reach a comfortable living situation can you have the mind space to take part in civic life.

Negative interactions with government officials linger after immigrants become citizens and deter them from getting involved. Positive interactions, however, motivate and accelerate acculturation.

Immigrants are largely on their own to find their way through learning how America works, which natural born citizens learn to navigate through by growing up in it. Because of this, having information available in multiple media in language about voting and elections is essential for many new citizens to becoming and staying engaged in civic life. Language access is a gateway to learning more English and becoming better informed voters.

Background

As we know from our long work in voting and elections, all citizens face significant barriers to taking part in that civic activity. We also know from the work of others that civic engagement is reflexive: voting can be a catalyst for becoming more deeply involved in civic life, and being connected to community (in practically any sense of the word) makes it more likely that a person will be engaged in civic life, including voting.

In 2016, according to the [Census Bureau's Current Population Survey Voting and Registration Supplement](#), of 19.8 million naturalized citizens, 61.7% (12.25 million) reported being registered to vote. Nearly a quarter (22.6%—4.5 million) of eligible naturalized citizens reported not being registered. Of registered naturalized citizens, 10.8 million (54.3%) reported voting, but just over 6 million (30.6%) reported not voting.

Almost 11 million naturalized citizens are not exercising their franchise. This research project set out to ask why not. What is civic life like for new citizens outside of voting? What are the barriers and motivations to taking part in community and civic life? How important is language to civic engagement?

Definitions

First, a few definitions. We mention “civic engagement” above, but it’s important to separate civic activity from political activity. Excerpted from *Civic Hopes and Political Realities: Immigrants, community organizations, and political engagement* (S. Karthick Ramakrishnan and Irene Bloemraad, editors) are a few definitions we found useful:

Civic engagement: involvement in communal activities that have some purpose or benefit beyond a single individual or family’s self-interest.

Political engagement: involvement in activities related to the formal political system, often with the intention of influencing government policies and practices.

Engagement: involvement that goes beyond the individual level, giving a more explicit role to government and organizational actors in producing engaged communities.

Communities: entities denoted by geography and political jurisdiction with independent decision-making structures that control resources or rules in their jurisdiction so people can share public goods, compete over resources, and abide by similar policies. They may be made up of individuals, ethnic groups, and organizations.

We also don't assume that all readers of this report will be familiar with citizenship statuses in the United States:

Natural-born citizen: someone who was a U.S. citizen at birth with no need to go through a naturalization proceeding at some later time.¹

Naturalized citizen: Naturalization is the process by which U.S. citizenship is granted to a foreign citizen or national after he or she fulfills the requirements established by Congress in the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA).²

Lawful permanent resident: non-citizen who has been granted authorization to live and work in the United States on a permanent basis. As proof of that status, a person is granted a permanent resident card, commonly called a "Green Card."³

¹ Katyal, Neal and Paul Clement, "On the Meaning of "Natural Born Citizen," Harvard Law Review March 11, 2015.

² Retrieved from <https://www.uscis.gov/us-citizenship/citizenship-through-naturalization> on August 27,

³ Retrieved from https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/lawful_permanent_resident_%28lpr%29. By the way, a "Green Card" isn't actually green.

Methods

We conducted **stakeholder interviews** with:

- organizations that work with and support immigrants and new citizens.
- leaders in formal and informal communities where there is a high density of naturalized citizens

We drafted a **journey map** to visualize the experience of a new citizen after taking the oath. Participants walking between conference sessions at the [Welcoming Economies](#) conference added points along the map and confirmed or refined our observations and assumptions.

We used light **ethnographic methods** to collect stories of the lived experiences of naturalized U.S. citizens. We did this in 3 ways.

- We conducted 20 short individual ethnographic interviews online and in person.
- We partnered with a community organization near Washington, D.C. to conduct 3 small group interviews of 5-6 new citizens each.
- We partnered with community organizations in Detroit and New York to host storytelling events, where new citizens told us, one another, and a small audience about their experiences coming to the U.S., attaining citizenship, and what it was like to be a new American. The format of the events borrowed elements of collective story harvest techniques to elicit stories and engage the group.

The table below provides a snapshot of our participants for the ethnographic interviews.

To learn about related work that had already been done, we conducted **desk research and a literature review** (published separately from this report).

| Participant # | Country | Age range | Location | How we connected with them |
|----------------------|----------------|------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 | Cameroon | 41-50 | Michigan | Freedom House |
| 2 | Cameroon | 41-50 | Michigan | Freedom House |
| 3 | Iraq | 41-50 | Michigan | Chaldean Community Foundation |
| 4 | Iraq | 71-80 | Michigan | Chaldean Community Foundation |
| 5 | Ukraine | 31-40 | Virginia | Twitter |
| 6 | Sri Lanka | 21-30 | Virginia | Twitter |
| 7 | Canada | 41-50 | Massachusetts | Twitter |
| 8 | Canada | 51-60 | California | Twitter |
| 9 | Italy | 31-40 | Michigan | Ford Resource and Engagement Center |
| 10 | Mexico | 41-50 | Michigan | Ford Resource and Engagement Center |
| 11 | Spain | 41-50 | New York | Twitter |
| 12 | Australia | 51-60 | Illinois | Personal connection |
| 13 | Egypt | 71-80 | Maryland | Gilchrist Immigrant Resource Center |
| 14 | Venezuela | 41-50 | New York | Twitter |
| 15 | China | 21-30 | New York | YMCA of Greater New York |

| Participant # | Country | Age range | Location | How we connected with them |
|----------------------|----------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|
| 16 | Philippines | 31-40 | New York | YMCA of Greater New York |
| 17 | Taiwan | 41-50 | New York | YMCA of Greater New York |
| 18 | Columbia | 41-50 | New York | YMCA of Greater New York |
| 19 | Niger | 31-40 | North Carolina | City of Greensboro |
| 20 | Sudan | 31-40 | North Carolina | City of Greensboro |

The table below provides a snapshot of our participants for the small group ethnographic interviews. They were all residents of Maryland. We connected to them through the [Gilchrist Immigrant Resource Center](#).

| Participant # | Country | Age range |
|----------------------|----------------|------------------|
| 1 | Mexico | 31-40 |
| 2 | El Salvador | 31-40 |
| 3 | Cambodia | 61-70 |
| 4 | Japan | unknown |
| 5 | India | 61-70 |
| 6 | El Salvador | 61-70 |
| 7 | El Salvador | 61-70 |
| 8 | Mexico | 71-80 |
| 9 | Bolivia | 61-70 |

| Participant # | Country | Age range |
|----------------------|----------------|------------------|
| 10 | El Salvador | 61-70 |
| 11 | South Korea | 71-80 |
| 12 | Vietnam | 71-80 |
| 13 | Iran | 31-40 |
| 14 | Nigeria | 71-80 |
| 15 | El Salvador | 31-40 |
| 16 | El Salvador | 61-70 |

As we mentioned above, we also heard from new citizens in events that included up to 35-40 participants. The first event, held in collaboration with the Chaldean Community Foundation in Detroit, was made up of participants from Arabic-speaking countries. There were 3 storytellers from Iraq. Others in the group has immigrated from Iraq, Syria, Jordan, and Iran.

The second large event, organized with the New American Voter Association in Queens, included participants from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Guyana. There were 6 featured storytellers at this event and a curious and interactive audience from an even wider range of countries.

Experiences of new citizens in American civic life

The participants in our study revealed that acculturation is as important as language access, and that includes levels of civic literacy that natural born citizens often don't think of. Here are the key insights we learned.

(Most participants gave us permission to use their real names. You can read their stories in a separate report on civicdesign.org.)

Relationship status: it's complicated.

Many of the participants we talked to spoke about the concept of giving something up in order to participate in civic life. Sometimes this meant giving up a passport or citizenship in their home country, but other times it meant making the choice to build friendships outside their cultural network.

- "You have to choose to embrace a different community. Immigrants who truly embrace being American get rid of some of these old beliefs." (Kit)
- A formerly Canadian citizen said he felt like becoming an American was like "joining the other side" because he had grown up thinking the U.S. was a bully. "I was concerned that they would be skeptical or disappointed or something. My family is Jewish and if I had announced I was going to become Christian that would be very stressing. I saw this as a parallel." (Steve)
- A participant from China said that after he learned English, he could make friends who weren't Chinese and pursue an education. He said it would have been easy to never learn English and become an Uber driver, but he did want that. (Chunmiao).
- Some participants described having to think carefully about what they would give up if they became Americans. "I made a conscious decision that I wanted more order and civility in my life. I had to ask myself the question if Ukraine was going to become a better place to live in my lifetime." (Kit)

You have to believe in the idea of the “American dream” to participate in civic life.

The concept of the “American dream” appeared in many of our conversations with new citizens. Some believed in it, some didn’t trust it, and some said you had to buy into the myth when you become a citizen.

- At least one participant had friends in their home country who said they were sorry the participant became American after the 2016 election. A few participants said they felt regret and confusion after naturalizing. (Sachini)
- “As a child growing up in the Philippines, I saw democracy at work and had the idea that in the U.S. it must be so much better. I expected the U.S. to be tenfold that. That hasn’t been the case.” (Joanne)
- “if you subscribe to these [American] ideas (working hard, remaking yourself), there is this romantic idea you subscribe to when you apply for American citizenship that you don’t get when you apply for French or Italian citizenship.” (Ben)

While new citizens felt safer and more secure, most didn’t trust government.

Participants we interviewed brought fears and distrust in government from their home countries, but also had similar experiences here. Many had negative interactions with government officials.

- Participants from countries in which upper classes controlled government doubted that their participation in elections would ever make a difference. (Fernanda)
- Participants who had access to financial resources and education said they don’t trust the government because of what they had to watch others go through, like being interrogated when crossing the border. (Rosa)

- An immigration officer asked a new citizen from Mexico why he was flying first class. He was a successful restaurant owner who could afford it, but felt he was judged because of his accent and skin color. (Eric)

Becoming a citizen let some use their political voices.

Freedom to express a political opinion was very special for many of the participants we interviewed. Some became citizens for this reason alone.

- “I used to avoid protesting and politics. I was afraid that if was arrested it could revoke my Green Card. I wanted to be sure I have the rights of a citizen. I wanted to stand in solidarity with others that didn’t have the privileges.” (Marja)
- Some participants believed it’s their responsibility to give a voice to those who aren’t able to vote. (Rosalba)
- “As an immigrant I understand the opportunities you’re given and how hard it is to get through it. I was fortunate because I have the resources. I feel I have a responsibility to explain to people how things work and what it means to be an immigrant. I want to help others be more engaged. As an immigrant you see “different sides.” (Rosa)

Learning to navigate new rights and responsibilities can be overwhelming.

There is a wide gap between what immigrants need to learn to pass the civics test at their naturalization interview and what they need to be informed voters. Participants had to figure out a new set of logistics and systems after they took the oath. Participants told us that it took time before they felt ready to participate in elections.

- We asked most of our participants what they would include in a “Guide to Being an American.” Many of them designed checklists that would tell them what they needed to know in their first 90 days of becoming a citizen.

- “Culture shock is a real thing. I didn’t know how to ask for help because I was so afraid [that] they wouldn’t understand my questions.” (Sachini)
- “After you become a citizen you have a lot of logistics to figure out and voting or participating in politics might not be the first thing on someone’s mind.” (Joanne)

People who are struggling to get established don’t have time or resources to learn how the system works or what the issues are.

Many participants in our study were not well off or well-connected when they arrived in the U.S. For them, the need to gain financial footing was a higher priority than participating in community, politics, and civic life.

- One participant thought their degree from Bangladesh, which was from a good school, would transfer here. She was frustrated that she had to go back to school and spend more money just to get a degree in the U.S.
- A participant who was blind struggled for more than a year to find an ESL class that would accommodate people with his disability. He told us that he became frustrated and depressed, which made it harder to find resources and connect with community. (Mike)
- People who came from places where there was a lot of corruption felt the need to protect their families first. (Sachini)

Positive experiences with government help people feel motivated. Negative experiences do not.

Participants who had good experiences when obtaining their citizenship were motivated to integrate and acculturate. Those who had bad experiences struggled with feeling invited and included.

- During the citizenship test, the immigration officer let one participant use gestures to explain her responses and was patient with her poor English. She passed the test and said that that experience was so encouraging that it motivated her to learn English. (Lucie)
- One participant who understood English (but not the American accent) asked the immigration officer administering her test to slow down. The officer became angry and yelled at her to go home. It took her two more tries to complete the exam. (Rosalba)

They expected elections and government functions to be similar to where they came from.

Many new citizens were surprised at how government processes work in the U.S. Sometimes their expectations didn't align with reality.

- "Political activities in Nigeria are do-or-die affairs. If you are not sure of yourself you dare not get involved in politics or else you can easily lose your life with the mafia." (Ibiyinka)
- "Back home in Sri Lanka, talking about politics was taboo, especially in good company." (Sachini)
- In their home country, one participant said that "people go to vote in groups and it's a fun thing. Here it's more formal and it looks like a serious exercise that is overwhelming and stressful. People also aren't used to using the machines because they used only paper and simple marks where they came from." (Adamou)
- One participant said she became frustrated at having to wait in line for elections and getting a driver's license. She said she wasn't used to it. (Lucie)

Enough English for a naturalization interview isn't enough to take an active part in community and civic life.

Participants said they wanted to listen and watch the news, make friends, and meet their neighbors. But they needed more than basic English. Many of our participants said they needed to focus on work and financial stability before they could make becoming fluent in English a priority.

- Learning English takes time, and some participants said it requires them to understand the American accent. Often this isn't possible in ESL classes where everyone is a foreigner and there's no way to practice with an American. (Mona)
- Some participants told us that they started in the U.S. at jobs that did not require them to have fluent, American English. With basic English, they could function.
- Government-provided interpreters often don't speak dialects that immigrants use. A participant from Cameroon who spoke French, for example, described doing double to work to make sure an interpreter who speaks European French didn't make errors. There are differences between Parisian and Cameroonian French.
- For one participant, learning English was the single most important factor in being "civically engaged." He said "I couldn't express myself because I felt so isolated." (Chunmiao) Others echoed this feeling.

Participating in civic life and community means different things in different countries.

Concepts like "civic engagement" are not meaningful to immigrants who come from countries where civic and political life are very different from the U.S. When some participants came to the US, they brought assumptions

with them about whether they were allowed or invited to be involved in political and civic life.

- In some countries, participants told us, the idea of taking care of community is different from how Americans behave, and is largely limited to financial donations where they came from. (Sachini)
- One participant from Nigeria noted that the emphasis on charity really impressed him when he came here. Many others agreed. (Ibiyinka)

Recommendations

Based on what we learned, we identified some ways election officials can remove barriers to new citizens participating in civic life. Each of the following recommendations are called out in more detail on our Language Access Workbook, available at civicdesign.org.

Demystify the process

New citizens took a civics test to become naturalized. But those historical and government facts don't come close to closing civic literacy gaps. New citizens need help knowing what to expect (just like young, first time voters do) and how our systems of voting and elections work.

Provide materials in languages other than English for how to prepare to vote.

The information ecosystem around U.S. elections is massive and difficult to sort out, even for native English speakers. People voting for the first time often don't even know what questions to ask. Providing an easy-to-read, translated voter guide that includes basic information about the mechanics of voting, what to expect in the process, and what's on the ballot is a good place to start.

CCD has developed 2 types of voter guides. One is a "pocket" edition that we have translated into Spanish, Chinese, and Arabic. It's a template meant to be tailored for local jurisdictions.

The other is a template for more extensive voter guides. It includes sample pages in English and Spanish and is meant to include a sample ballot. Customize it for your local election information to explain:

- Ways to vote
- How to mark a ballot
- Information about accessibility
- Key deadlines

Make information available across channels and media

Go to where new citizen voters are paying attention. Plan to reach voters across audio, video, and social media. If you have information in print in language, be ready to have interpreters available at live events and in polling places.

Seek out ethnic media outlets in your area.

A Russian immigrant living in Detroit might read a newspaper that was written in Moscow. Placing an ad about an upcoming election here might be a longshot, but chances are you have local newsletters, papers, television stations, podcasts, and radio stations that serve a particular language community. Here's where you can begin to find them:

- Ethnic food groceries, restaurants, and cafes often have stacks of their community's print news. You might find a Lebanese newspaper at a Middle Eastern restaurant, for example. Some of these places also have bulletin boards that highlight local events.
- Churches, mosques, or other religious institutions convey news in language and hold study groups or other meetings.
- Some local YMCA branches work with new citizens and immigrant communities.

Decide what messages are most important.

After you've had the chance to meet a few new citizens and the organizations that work with them, develop a set of messages you can target to the media outlets you identified. To help you get started, we have a list of messages you can edit at civicdesign.org. After you've created a list of what to say, share the list with your contacts and get feedback.

Develop a communications plan.

After you've tested your messaging as suggested above, decide how you want to roll it out. We've built a template that maps messages along an

election timeline. Use it to get started. When deciding what media source to use when, here are a few pointers:

- Taking out ads in newspapers may be expensive, so be sure to check what the fees are.
- The Ad Council donates media space to non-profits at free or reduced rates.
- Use Facebook to tell stories and share photos of past events. See how the [Detroit Immigration Task Force uses Facebook](#).
- Use Twitter and Instagram for short, urgent messages. Check out the NYC Mayor's office of Immigrant Affairs Twitter page to see how they use it.

Don't forget kids.

In many immigrant families, children learning English in school often translate for the entire family. Working with schools might be a great way to reach parents and even grandparents.

Help people feel seen and respected

U.S. elections are unique in the world. Even if a new citizen came from a democratic country, those electoral systems are different from ours. For example, we vote on a lot more local offices. Things that might be okay (or normal) in other places might not be legal in this country. Help new citizens know what the rules are here and how things might be different.

Visit heritage events and introduce yourself.

Visit local events that highlight immigrant communities, like street fairs and festivals. Meet the people who organize them. Attend these events to show that you care and want them to show up at your election. Our research showed that positive experiences with government officials influenced how new citizens felt about integrating and acculturating.

Create a language access plan.

A language access plan can provide a framework for how your election department designs everything from an official translated vocabulary list to a specific translation process. There are lots of examples to borrow from. Our comprehensive [language access guide](#) will walk you through each step. You might use the Web to look for examples, too. Most medium to large cities have extensive language plans and language access programs.

Find trusted intermediaries (like cultural and heritage community organizations)

There is no substitute for a personal introduction. Find cultural and language advisors in your community. They can help you reach new citizens. And you might find a new source of poll workers, as well.

Start by saying hello.

Set up a meeting with cultural or heritage organizations to show you're interested in reaching their clients or community. Letting them know that someone from Elections cares goes a long way.

Invite some new citizens to tell you their stories.

After you've established connections with local cultural or heritage organizations, run a listening session with some of the people they work with to hear their stories. It will give you great ideas for messaging and increasing turnout and you'll start to establish relationships for your office.

Run a mock election so people can practice.

We know that understanding elections here is confusing. Hold mock elections with cultural or heritage organizations. This way, the new citizens they work with can ask questions in a safe, relaxed situation, practice voting, and learn about American elections.

Take sensitivity and diversity training and train your poll workers, too

Whether it's people with disabilities or new citizens who don't speak English, it's easy to make assumptions about what voters need. Sensitivity training can help you ask the right questions of the wide range of voters in your jurisdiction so you can support them becoming informed, active voters.

Look at what other cities and townships have done.

Election departments in many states have developed [training guides](#) and videos for poll workers that help them prepare for voters with disabilities.

Develop your own training and roll it out to your poll workers.

Use what you learn to design a short, interactive session that meets the needs of your particular community. Most importantly, test your training with the connections you've made in various community and heritage centers. Their feedback will only make it better.

From one election official to another: What to do when you're just starting out with language access

In 1993, Grace Wachlarowicz, who goes by Grace W, was working as a store manager for Marshalls when she applied for the position of Supervisor of Licensing and Elections for the City of White Bear Lake, Minnesota. The person doing the hiring wanted someone with customer service experience. She got the job.

She wore many hats, and elections was just one piece of the puzzle. She administered city business licenses, and even ran the DMV. She came to know elections, she said, like the back of her hand.

In May of 2012 Grace started her role as Director of Elections & Voter Services for the City of Minneapolis. It was right before a presidential election. She had come from a similar role in a small city, and when asked what it felt like to assume such a big role, her response was to burst into laughter.

"I mean, the train was already gone. Quite honestly, it was very intimidating. When you're thrown into such a large-scale operation with so many new nuances, I had to become very humble. I wasn't the expert anymore."

Soon after she began her new role, Grace began running debriefs after every general election. The debriefs included the entire staff and poll workers; focusing on what worked and what didn't. It was here that she first learned of the need for more language access in various precincts.

Depending on what the census data reveals in 2020 about who lives where and what languages they speak, some election officials may similarly find themselves in this situation. Where do you turn if you have no language access precedent in your jurisdiction to reference? Here are Grace's tips.

Build trust and relationships with poll workers. Implementing anything new with your poll workers requires trust. Start getting their feedback, and

show how that feedback is considered and implemented. “Everyone wants to be recognized and seem important. This fosters that.”

Language access programs take time to build. Today, Grace’s team has been able to move beyond language to tackle microaggressions in the polling place. Getting to this point, however, took 8 years.

Don’t be afraid to contact another jurisdiction that might have the same makeup as yours. “I’m a firm believer that in the election world it’s not necessary to reinvent the wheel. You can cherry pick various programs and tweak them to meet your various needs.”

Consider this part of the Voting Rights Act to provide support to all voters who need assistance. With language access, you’re providing access to the ballot just like anyone else who has barriers. This doesn’t just mean physical disabilities.

Investigate what resources exist in other departments or agencies. In Minneapolis, the city council is ward-based, so Grace’s team used council members to help reach out to communities. You never know who might know someone or have connections. You don’t know until you ask.

Engage students as poll workers. Many students can help fulfill language requirements in polling places, but it’s important to see them as equals to other election staff. “I pay them the same and treat them just like the rest of our poll workers.”

Project roadblocks and lessons learned

We designed this research project with the assumption that it would be easy to find new citizens for interviews and storytelling sessions. After all, American has millions of immigrants. Instead, it was hard to reach participants. About 10% of the organizations we talked to were able to connect us with new citizens. We have some reflections on why.

Some people simply didn't want to talk. There are always people who are shy about sharing their experiences. The political atmosphere in 2019 when we conducted this research made it more challenging to reach people we wanted to hear from. But there were other reasons, too. For example, some people mentioned dealing with depression after becoming a citizen and having to figure out life logistics that made them unavailable. One community center in Dearborn said that people “just weren't interested” in talking to us.

Funding in cities can create competition, and sometimes silos. At one event we attended, we saw two community groups that focus on the same community on a panel. Their discussion dissolved into an argument about who should have been on the panel. Resource scarcity does not build incentives for organizations to collaborate or share responsibility for their work.

Organizations have to focus on emergencies first. Some immigration-focused organizations were so overwhelmed by the work they had to do because of the administration's policies on immigration that they had not time to even have a conversation with us about challenges their constituents experienced.

Organizations that work with immigration don't always keep in touch with their clients after they become citizens. The immigration nonprofit ecosystem is optimized for getting people naturalized. And, while many cities have offices for immigrant services, leadership is distant from the actual

clients. Mayors' offices tend to work with nonprofits as proxies for immigrant populations rather than serving individual immigrants.

Refugee resettlement agencies and other immigrant-focused nonprofits often have to shift their focus onto new clients after getting others naturalized. Most organizations that help people naturalize don't keep track of folks after the ceremony is over.

Messaging mattered in ways we didn't predict. We changed our messaging about this project many times throughout the process, and offered it in multiple languages. Using messaging that talked about elections scared some people and, we think, might have deterred some from participating in our study. In Hamtramck, we learned about an election fraud incident that had occurred recently. We believe some participants were leery of speaking with us because they were afraid of our possible connection with the fraud case.

Based on these experiences, we developed a list of tactics we plan to use in future studies:

- Plan for a greater lead time in connecting with a niche group, like new citizens.
- Pay an organization that has access to new citizens to do the recruiting. CCD then performs the research.
- Cold calling organizations doesn't usually lead to good connections. Personal referrals are necessary.
- Even when using personal connections, expect about a 1 in 10 success rate.
- When working with community groups, expect decisions to be made at the last minute. Remember, however, that people care and will help you if they can.
- If you're hosting an event, plan for unexpected guests and additions to the agenda. Unexpected guests may be important to the partner for reasons you might not understand, and you can learn from those changes and additions, too.

