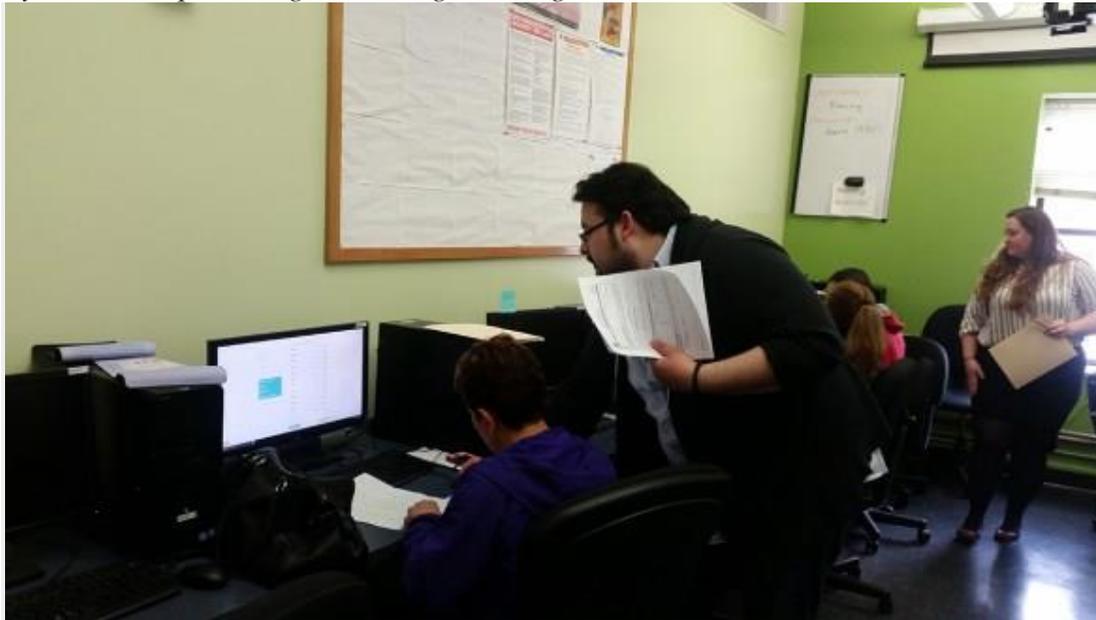




# An Age-Old Story Meets 21st Century Technology

Posted on [June 13, 2017](#) by [nclrblog](#)

By [Laura Vazquez](#), Program Manager, Immigration Initiatives, NCLR

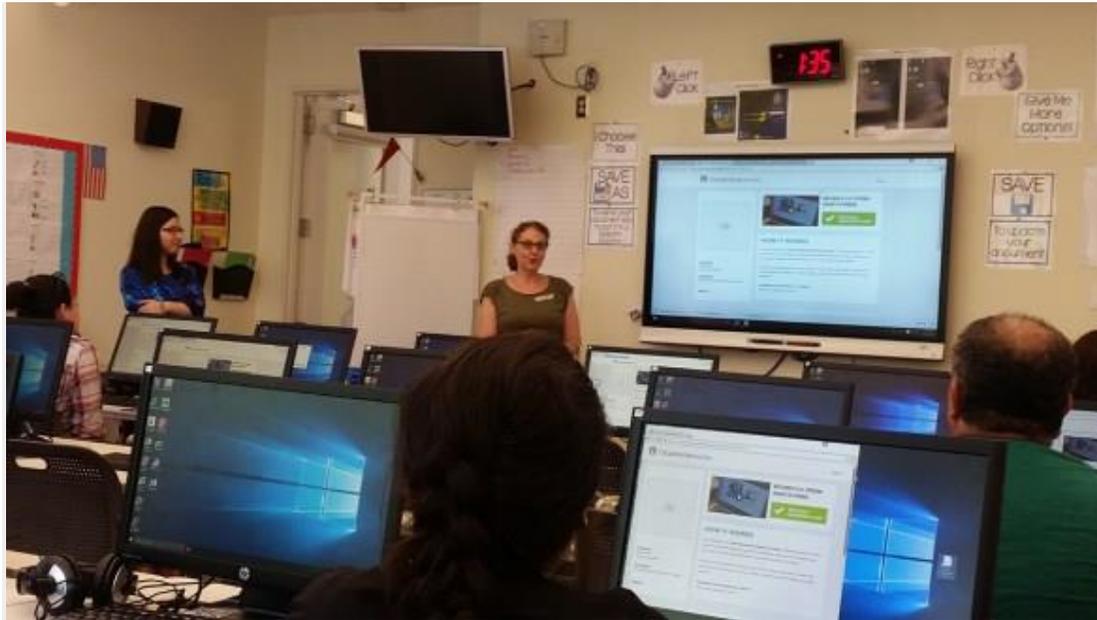


Erie Neighborhood House has a long history of helping immigrants get integrated into American society.

NCLR Affiliates have a long history of assisting eligible permanent residents in applying for citizenship. For decades, our Affiliates have worked to integrate America's newcomers by helping them learn English, apply for citizenship, and then assisting them with registering to vote so that they can fully participate in our democracy.

One such Affiliate is [Erie Neighborhood House](#). Erie was originally founded in 1870 as a settlement house that served immigrants in Chicago. When Erie's work began, Chicago's immigrant communities were mostly Dutch, Norwegian, Swedish, and German. Fast forward to 2017 and Erie is still working to incorporate immigrants into the strong communities that contribute to the vibrancy of Chicago. Its English classes are now made up of immigrants mainly

from Latin America who came to Chicago for a better life as previous groups of immigrants have done.



Carlos Rosario provides trainings to help immigrants with the citizenship process.

In Erie's English classes, students not only study language, but they also learn about the requirements to apply for U.S. citizenship and are encouraged to apply with the help of the organization's immigration legal services team.

Students today can receive assistance in completing their citizenship application at a monthly clinic that Erie hosts in their computer lab. Students are guided through the application using the [Citizenshipworks](#) platform, an online tool that allows eligible permanent residents to complete their application for naturalization and screens for potential legal issues.

At a recent workshop, two staff members walked through the computer lab answering questions as the workshop participants completed their applications online. With each workshop, the staff at Erie use what they have learned to improve their delivery model and provide quality legal services to more eligible immigrants.



Staff time is focused more on reviewing the applications instead of filling out forms, and applicants are more engaged and empowered by the process. At one workshop, a student in the citizenship class sat at a computer station next to her daughter who she brought along to complete her citizenship application as well.

Mother and daughter worked together and were happy to have attended the workshop and completed their applications. Another participant finished her application and said she was going to tell her son to come to a citizenship workshop at Erie Neighborhood House.

Another Affiliate with experience in helping permanent residents become U.S. citizens is the [Central American Resource Center](#) (CARECEN) in Washington, DC. From its history assisting immigrants fleeing civil wars in Central America through today, it has been recognized for its expertise in helping immigrants apply for citizenship.



On a recent Friday afternoon, staff from CARECEN worked with students at the [Carlos Rosario Adult International Charter School](#). Carlos Rosario is an award-winning school that teaches English to adult immigrants to support their journey to achieve the American Dream. The students, ranging in age and country of origin, diligently worked on their applications using Citizenshipworks in the

computer lab and were assisted by the CARECEN staff.

Carlos Rosario’s mission is to “train tomorrow’s diverse workforce, and having staff from CARECEN work with students to fill out citizenship applications was a natural fit. After all, citizenship allows people to have access to better paying jobs, and the skills, talent, and energy that immigrants bring to their new homes are the [basis of a prosperous society](#).

There are more than eight million lawful permanent residents that are eligible for citizenship that have yet to apply. Research by NCLR and other organizations shows that many are deterred by increasingly higher naturalization fees, which have grown from \$80 to \$725 over the past three decades.

Other would-be applicants also need to complete English language and civics courses to prepare them for the naturalization exam, courses that are often oversubscribed. Still others just need a helping hand from a qualified legal service provider—services that are also in short supply.

Innovative tools like Citizenshipworks can raise existing capacity so that NCLR Affiliates like Erie House, CARECEN, and Carlos Rosario Public Charter School can serve many more eligible applicants. NCLR’s partnership with the Immigration Advocates Network, which produced and supports deployment of Citizenshipworks, demonstrates that cutting-edge technology can solve some of our most challenging citizenship and integration issues.

Original: <http://blog.nclr.org/2017/06/13/age-old-story-meets-21st-century-technology/#more-12817>