



Why Your Library Should Consider Offering Immigration Legal Services

Modern-day public libraries are no longer solely story keepers, they are community and culture centers. They are where people, young and old, go to learn something new and get ordinary things done, which could include a variety of immigration legal services such as applying for naturalization. A library's decision to become recognized by the Department of Justice to provide these services builds upon the institution's long legacy as a knowledge provider, while offering hope to a community in great need. Several library systems are blossoming as DOJ recognized organizations. Here is why this idea deserves your consideration.

Libraries are already trusted in vulnerable communities

Libraries are the ultimate safe space. They provide classes that connect people and programs that fill a community need, such as the Addison Public Library's free lunch program during the summer in Addison, Illinois. These initiatives thrive because staff and volunteers build relationships with residents. Considering the fact that gaining, and honoring, a person's trust is a prime characteristic of quality legal services providers, librarians are already prepared.

Legal services increase the library's value to a community. Immigration legal services are in high demand across the country. New policies have made long-time residents afraid to live their normal lives. A report by the American Immigration Council shows immigrants are five times more likely to apply for legal status if they have a professional to represent them. In the Southeast alone, there is one service provider for every 11,582 undocumented immigrants. Librarians can help fill this void. Furthermore, becoming authorized by the DOJ allows sites to expand upon services they already offer, such as ESL classes and citizenship workshops. Accredited librarians working at recognized libraries can see immigration cases through from beginning to end.

There is a thin line between being helpful and giving legal advice

Your patrons can't afford blurred lines. They need help on which they can depend. To avoid having simple immigration questions lead immigrants to unscrupulous providers (such as notarios), libraries can provide accredited legal representation. Comprehensive training, much of which CLINIC offers, then empowers a library to serve families in a new way, while lessening the potential for errors when families are referred elsewhere.

What is Department of Justice Recognition and Accreditation?

Recognition and accreditation is the Department of Justice's certification of charitable agencies (including libraries) and staff. It allows non-attorney staff to practice immigration law before the Department of Homeland Security and the immigration courts. To apply for R&A, a library must demonstrate broad knowledge and adequate experience in immigration law and its staff must meet fitness requirements. Visit [cliniclegal.org/issues/recognition-and-accreditation](https://www.cliniclegal.org/issues/recognition-and-accreditation) to learn more.

For more information on how your library can become DOJ recognized, contact CLINIC at national@cliniclegal.org.