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From Permanent Resident to Citizen, There's an App for That

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Immigration reform has focused mostly on the status of illegal immigrants and whether or not to provide them with a pathway to citizenship. But what about the millions of lawful permanent residents who are already here and aren't sure how to become naturalized citizens?

Well, now there's an app for that.

Developed by attorneys at [Pro Bono Net](#) and the [Immigration Advocates Network](#), the [CitizenshipWorks](#) immigration app is a free [iPhone](#) and [Android app](#) that provides green card holders with information guiding them through the often complicated and convoluted immigration process. Released on July 4, the app, which is available in Spanish and English, describes the steps lawful permanent residents must undergo in order to be naturalized, and is designed to try and streamline the process as much as possible. The app features a questionnaire to determine whether users are eligible for citizenship, as well as a time calculator to see if they've fulfilled the residency requirement. The app also tells users what documents they'll need in order to naturalize, and provides them with a directory of non-profit immigration lawyers and organizations in case they need advice. The app also contains sample tests and flash card study aids for immigrants to prepare for the citizenship test (sample question: "[Who was the father of our country?](#)").

Mark O'Brien, executive director of Pro Bono Net, says that he saw many lawful immigrants fall through the cracks and fail to get citizenship, simply because they lacked understanding of the process. According to O'Brien, the information and functions in the app were already available on the CitizenshipWorks website. "We felt a mobile app was a better vehicle to reach these immigrants than the [CitizenshipWorks] website," says O'Brien in an interview with LTN. "Mobile access to internet is increasing at higher rates than the population overall. Plus, for lower income people, the only way they can access the internet is through a mobile device."

According to Tony Lu, an immigration attorney and project coordinator at CitizenshipWorks, the app was developed by the [Immigrant Legal Resource Center](#), while he and Immigrant Advocates Network staff attorney Patricia Malone contributed to the informational sections of the app. "While we found many mobile apps that help individuals study for the naturalization civics test, we didn't find any apps that provided tools and resources to guide a lawful permanent resident through the application process itself," says Lu. He says that the legal directory tool was loosely inspired by location-based directory apps such as [Yelp!](#), but that most of the features were designed in response to feedback from CitizenshipWorks' national partners, which include [Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Los Angeles](#), [Catholic Legal](#)

[Immigration Network, Inc. \(CLINIC\)](#); and [National Partnership for New Americans \(NPNA\)](#) .

The app's main goal is to inform users about the naturalization process and to cut down on the amount of time it takes them to file their naturalization forms with USCIS. Reasons for delay in filing include not having all of the requisite documentation, not being able to account for all trips overseas, not being able to figure out the number of days an immigrant has been physically present in the country, and not being able to pass the civics test. "Sometimes not being prepared means lawyers have to send people home," says Lu. "That's not only a wasted trip, it's wasted time for both the attorney and the client. The app makes sure every step of the process is complete in the sequence so that users can be better prepared when they speak with an legal services provider."

Lu also says that the app follows strict mobile platform guidelines on security and data collection and that personal information, including the amount of time the user has been physically present in the United States, does not get transmitted unless the user chooses to do so.

Matthew Burnett, director of the Immigration Advocates Network, says that the app will also be valuable to attorneys. "For lawyers, the calculator tool is what they're interested in," says Burnett. Another valuable tool, according to Burnett, is a feature that allows immigration lawyers to determine whether clients are eligible for an English language waiver on the civics test.

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