

Path to Citizenship Program
Friends House Retirement Community, Inc.
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\$41,555 grant request

Citizenship is the common thread that connects all Americans. We are a nation bound not by race or religion, but by the shared values of freedom, liberty, and equality. (US Citizenship and Immigration Services website)

Summary Description

The Friends House *Path to Citizenship Program* is a newly developed initiative aimed at supporting eligible employees meet the challenges of seeking U.S. citizenship. The program is structured around financial assistance, educational support, and community engagement. As of January 2025, 47 Friends House employees qualify for the program. With implementation targeted for June 1, 2025, these front-line workers in nursing, maintenance, housekeeping, and culinary departments may be helped to stabilize their positions in our community while growing closer to many independent living residents.

Background:

With ongoing immigration policy changes, foreign-born staff at Friends House are increasingly aware of new legal risks, higher costs, and the stigma of being a migrant. Though Friends House has achieved a relatively low turnover rate for our front-line staff, we are cognizant of the hardships they face even as they remain loyal to our community.

The Path to Citizenship program will help our qualified employees take the steps needed to finish the citizenship process. At the same time, the program offers Friends House independent living residents a concrete way to express their care for hard-working staff. This community has tremendous expertise among its residents, and many could become effective citizenship mentors. *Path to Citizenship* will build a sense of belonging for both staff and residents that is deeply consistent with the Friends House mission of Community Through Caring.

Similar programs were developed and implemented at Friendsview in Newberg, Oregon and Goodwin Living in Alexandria Virginia. Friends House is replicating the principles of these programs.

Proposal/Program

The *Path to Citizenship Program* at Friends House aims to provide financial and educational resources to help eligible employees obtain U.S. citizenship. Central to this mission is the hiring of a part-time Program Coordinator to recruit volunteers and administer the training curriculum. The *Path to Citizenship Program* will support employees in two critical areas: 1) English language proficiency and 2) preparation for the Citizenship exam. At the same time,

we can reduce financial barriers to citizenship by funding most citizenship application fees. Even more important, we will draw on the large pool of skilled Friends House residents, many of whom are retired teachers, to provide tutoring and exam preparation support.

The program will roll out in the following steps, to be managed by HR and the newly hired program coordinator:

Program structure

- The Path to Citizenship Program will be led by a Program Coordinator. The program coordinator will divide their time between The Path to Citizenship program and various team supporting responsibilities.
- The Program Coordinator will match employees with volunteer tutors. The tutors will work with employees preparing them one to one for their citizenship tests.

Communicating with employees

- Inform employees about the program, its benefits, and participation steps.
- Distribute information through staff newsletters, emails, and bulletin boards.
- Promote the program in employee benefits fairs and onboarding materials.
- Develop outreach materials (posters, flyers, social media).
- Conduct informational sessions.

Clarify participant criteria

- Participants must have been employed at least one year at Friends House.
- Prioritization is based on length of service (seniority), not position level.
- We believe that all 47 employees identified as candidates for the program are now or soon will be eligible to apply for citizenship.
- There is no requirement for employees to remain at Friends House post-citizenship

Advise and manage application processes

- Assist with the process of applying for citizenship fee waivers.
- Assist with the citizenship application
- Require a Citizenship Fee Recipient Questionnaire and the first page of Form N-400 (naturalization application).

Tutoring to prepare for the citizenship exam and interview.

- Participants in the program are cleared to train with a tutor up to 2 hours per week while on the clock.
- Application fees to US Citizenship and Immigration Services are paid for by Friends House.
- The Program coordinator will recruit resident and staff volunteers to serve as tutors. They will pair each employee with a tutor for one-on-one intensive tutoring, subject to availability and learning needs.
- Friends House will provide training materials, including materials on American history, government, and English as a second language.
- Resident Tutors gain the satisfaction of knowing their time has made a difference for an employee seeking to become a citizen of the United States.
- Resident Volunteers are not paid but we expect enthusiastic participation. Citizenship and freedom were fought for and won by many of our residents; Friends House volunteers take human rights and egalitarian values very seriously. Many of the

Friends House residents are retired educators and are eager to re-engage in teaching. Sharing their teaching skills with their Friends House family is a dream come true.

Possible problems and solutions:

- English is not the first language for most. Ideally tutors will be appropriately bilingual. But TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) skills can be included in the training for resident and staff volunteers. Language training is critical in the English writing and reading portion of the citizenship test.
- Program costs are high. Friends House has committed to supplementing grant-supported salary and subsidies for the first year and fully supporting the continuation of the program into subsequent years.
- Anxieties about stating immigration status in the current political climate. Program confidentiality has been assured by the Friends House Human Resources department.

Timeline:

The *Path to Citizenship Program* will fully execute over a 12-month time frame.

- April 2025: Hire a program coordinator.
- April: publicize the program among employees.
- April-May: request volunteers from residents
- May- June: train volunteers
- June: match mentors with employee trainees.
- June 2025-February 2026: participants take citizenship exam.

Feasibility:

We have no doubts about the feasibility of this plan. Many residents have already expressed an eagerness to support the program with their time, effort, and investment. Human Resources has indicated that participating employees could devote several work hours each week to the program. Training spaces are available. Friends House will be responsible for funding and administering the program after the initial funding year.

Metrics for evaluation:

Metrics are expected to be recorded in three key areas:

- Numbers of participants in the program
- Number of volunteer tutors
- Number of new citizens celebrated.

Program evaluation surveys are also planned to measure Participate satisfaction.

Friends House is grateful for the past partnerships with Friends Foundation for the Aging. This can be yet another way for FFA to help Friends House act on the deeply shared values for service and social connection that are the hallmark of our community. We look forward to partnering with FFA to make the *Path to Citizenship* a reality in the region.

Budget

Item	Total Cost	Requested from FFA	Major Donors and additional Foundations
Education Materials	\$3,000	\$2,555	\$1,000
Dedicated Staff (part-time coordinator)	\$55,000	\$35,000	\$20,000
Application Fees	\$50,000	\$4,000	\$46,000
Printing Promotional Materials	\$500		\$500
Total	\$109,055	\$41,555	\$67,500