Tip Sheet: Strategies for Improving Post-Test Rates in a Citizenship Program

Introduction

Post-testing is a crucial component of any federally funded program. In fact, the USCIS Grant Program mandates that at least 80% of students be post-tested. All students must be pre- and post-tested with a normed English as a Second Language (ESL) assessment and the Assessment for Adult Citizenship Education (AACE). However, one of the most common problems citizenship programs face is how to ensure students remain in the course long enough to post-test, or return to post-test. This tip sheet discusses some ways programs can encourage and incentivize the post-testing process.

It is important to incorporate the post-testing message into every part of your program's framework from orientation, to intake, to instruction, and beyond. The first step is to get to know your students and address any possible barriers to education that they may face (work conflicts, transportation, childcare aspect, etc.). When creating your program structure, always remember the need for pre-and post-testing and design the program with the need for both in mind.
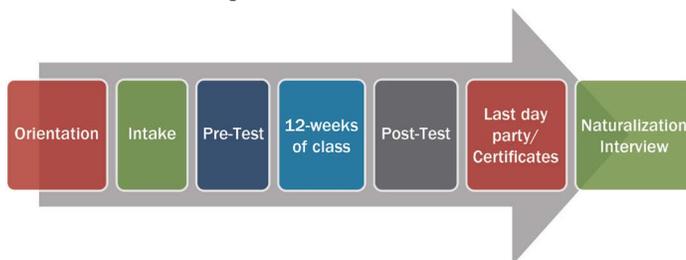
Programmatic Structure and Schedule Tips for Administrators

1. **Pre–testing:** Make the pre-test environment as low-stress and enjoyable as possible. If students feel like the pre-test environment is a negative or unpleasant experience, they will be less likely to remain in the course for or return for the post-test. Explain that there is no passing or failing - the pre-test simply shows us where you are.

2. **Student Retention:** Make student retention a priority in staff meetings so that the importance of completing the course and post-testing is made known to program staff, education specialists, and students. Share attendance rosters with staff and discuss why students may not be attending class.

3. **Know your learners:** Perform a needs assessment of your student population. If childcare or transportation presents challenges, your assistance can go a long way. Think about how you can use a portion of your grant money to provide transportation cards or offer on-site childcare. Work closely with your grants Point of Contact (POC) to get approval and ensure fiscal compliance.

4. **Student Contract:** Consider writing a student contract that includes the expectation of pre- and post-testing (including coming to classes on time, participating, etc.) and having students sign it at the start of class.

5. **Refundable Fees:** Consider charging the students a small book deposit ($10-15) at the start of class and return it once they have taken their post-tests. Make sure you are very clear with students concerning the circumstances under which they will be returned their fees. Explain this using simple English or in your students' native languages, and have students sign that they understand. Note: This can be included with the student contract.

6. **Application Services:** Consider tying application services to pre- and post-testing. For example, let students know that they will only receive application services if they complete the items of the student contract (including pre- and post-testing).

7. **Drop Outs:** If a student does drop out, make sure that he or she is always welcomed back in the program the following cycle. Reach out and tell the students not to be embarrassed and that he or she is always welcome to return to the course. If the student does return, pre-testing may not be necessary, as the previous test results are already on file.

Course Structure and Schedule Tips for Teachers

1. **Creating a Culture in the Classroom:** From the beginning of the course, emphasize that the post-test is as fundamental to completing the course as daily attendance, in-class participation, and completing assignments. For example:

- **Set Expectations:** From the beginning of the cycle, set the expectation that students will be pre- and post-tested and discuss the importance of doing so (some teachers openly tell students that continued funding for these free courses and services depends on it!). This is an important part of a course overview that can be covered during orientation.

- **Daily Activities:** Early in the cycle, do a calendar activity. Pass out blank calendars and ask students to fill in course dates, including pre- and post-testing days. This activity helps students with vocabulary used during interviews and the writing test.

- **Identify Teachable Moments:** Take advantage of natural opportunities that occur when teaching to address the importance of post-testing. For instance, a lesson on the rights and responsibilities of citizens is an opportune time to discuss the responsibility of students to complete the post-test.

- **Student Flow Charts:** Most students like structure. They like to see a beginning and end point. Create a large poster or series of posters for the classroom wall and make a smaller copy so that each student can have their own. The flow chart should include a space for the teacher to mark off milestones on the poster, and for students to mark off milestones on their individual copies.

Orientation | Intake | Pre-Test | 12-weeks of class | Post-Test | Last day party/ Certificates | Naturalization Interview

2. **Emphasize Completion Over Passing:** Remind students that the most important point is that they complete the post-test, not that they pass or achieve a specific score. Most students are already anxious enough about their naturalization interview; adding extra pressure by setting the post-test up to be something they should "pass" could make them more apt to disengage from the class or drop out.

3. **Student–Teacher Conferences:** One-on-one student teacher conferences during the mid-point of the cycle are a great way to share student progress and address any issues.

4. **Communicating with Students:** Call, text, or use social media to communicate with students regularly, especially if they are missing classes.

5. **Potlucks/Parties:** Consider throwing a potluck or a party near the end of the cycle to keep students coming back.

6. **Former Students:** Invite former students who have completed the course and have been naturalized to speak to students about the importance of finishing the class in order to prepare for their interview.

7. **Give Students a Choice:** Provide at least two testing times and dates along with a make-up date, which can be the last week of class. Create a poster or write on your white board the names of the students who have chosen date X, and who have chosen date Y. If students see that they have committed and their classmates see that they have committed, they will be more likely to follow through.

8. **Make the Test Time "Official":** Make appointment cards and send them to your students at least a week before the test date and time. The appointment card should state that, "You have an appointment for post-testing on [date], at [time], at [location]." Let students know on the appointment card that if they cannot make the appointment, they can call to reschedule.

9. **Personal Reminder Texts and Calls:** One day prior to post-testing, the morning of, or both, personally text or call students to remind them of their appointments. That last word of encouragement from the teacher might be all they need to help them make the decision to take the post-test.

To find additional citizenship education materials and instructional resources, visit the USCIS Citizenship Resource Center at www.uscis.gov/citizenship.

U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

www.uscis.gov/citizenship