

# Remote Legal Support Guide

## Project Profile: GMHC



## Project Profile: GMHC, Inc.

### Organizational Overview

GMHC is a New York City–based non-profit organization that delivers a broad range of services to individuals and communities affected by HIV and AIDS. Its volunteer-supported and community-based model includes immigration legal services.

Immigration Legal Services are available to all individuals of low income residing in the New York City area regardless of health status. Naturalization Services are available to individuals in all 50 states.

### Project Process and Tools

GMHC uses a live remote review model for citizenship applicants who have started their own N-400 applications on the Citizenshipworks online tool. The applicant completes the guided interview at their convenience; legal staff reviews and gives feedback via the tool or the applicant's preferred communication medium. Additionally, community-based partner organizations (e.g., libraries, unions, etc.) guide applicants on Citizenshipworks and refer them to GMHC for legal review.

For clients who arrived at their offices, GMHC previously used a heavily in-person model. Like many organizations, their client community had varying levels of access to technology. As GMHC shifted to remote operations, they developed a bilateral structure. Clients who are comfortable with technology and have a computer or smartphone use Citizenshipworks on their own. A GMHC volunteer or staff person engages others by phone and manually inputs their answers in Citizenshipworks.

In the wake of the pandemic, GMHC sought to provide the same range of services with little interruption. The main challenge for immigration services was obtaining documents and signatures from clients. To avoid delays, GMHC has used photos of documents, though they are lower quality than a scanned document. In other situations, they use FedEx to send documents back and forth with the client.

### Working with Pro Bonos

With the widespread introduction of remote work, GMHC considered the advantages for remote volunteers. In the past, GMHC had to accommodate individual volunteers who came into the office as often as one to four times a week. Remote service would eliminate the problem of maintaining space and equipment for volunteer service providers—an issue in New York City.

These days, GMHC assigns a remote volunteer to a client, then the volunteer contacts the client to figure out a meeting time that works for both parties. If they are working together on a Citizenshipworks case, all parties can access the tool and application remotely, or the volunteer

can go through the questions with the client by phone. When a client's application reaches its final stages, the GMHC staff reviews it alongside the volunteer.

This approach has had varying levels of pros and cons: On one hand, GHMC can employ more volunteers remotely than in person. On the other hand, there's an increased risk of a disconnect or communication break-downs between volunteers and the parent organization. GMHC is strengthening its volunteer vetting process and monitoring volunteers who may be over-extended. As remote services continue, GMHC will check in on volunteers periodically for progress reports and seeks to better spell out expectations during recruiting to retain more dedicated volunteers.

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