

# Remote Legal Support Guide

## Project Profile: International Rescue Committee



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## Organizational Overview

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) helps people whose lives and livelihoods are shattered by conflict and disaster to survive, recover, and gain control over their future. At work in 24 locations throughout the U.S., the IRC's Asylum and Immigration Legal Services programs provide accessible and critical legal services to immigrants and their families in order to help clients obtain the highest level of immigration status available, keep families together, promote access to full rights, and support successful integration in the U.S.

## Project Process and Tools

Prior to the pandemic, the IRC piloted a range of remote legal service models to streamline and target legal services and better reach underserved areas and populations. IRC staff primarily utilized Citizenshipworks (CW) to provide remote naturalization services. Some of these services were provided one-on-one, while others were in the context of group workshops. Most of the individual referrals came from partners and community organizations, such as adult education schools, libraries, and employers. Most of the applicants at group workshops came from local outreach. The workshops utilized Zoom to create breakout rooms where the applicant would be assisted by volunteers to fill form N-400 (and I-912 as applicable) and then be joined by an experienced DOJ accredited representative or attorney for legal review.

When the pandemic limited in-person services, the IRC first pivoted to providing completely remote services. This increased the types of applications supported remotely and increased the need for additional tools, particularly for applicants who had no online access and/or little comfort with using platforms such as Zoom. IRC offices employed CW, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams when appropriate, as well as telephone and WhatsApp for clients who faced digital barriers.

As restrictions eased and safety increased, IRC programs have experimented with continuing wholly remote services as well as with hybrid models, which utilize both remote and in-person services for different steps in the application process.

Remote legal services have helped:

- Increase efficiency to benefit both applicants and organizations, when applicants are comfortable and familiar with technology and have online access;
- Maximize the legal expertise of DOJ accredited representatives and attorneys by utilizing online tools and volunteers when regular processes for workshops and remote services can be established. There is significant time and effort required to establish remote systems and coordinate workshops;
- Provide quality legal services in isolated and remote areas through good referral partners and outreach.

## Working with Pro Bonos

The IRC has a robust volunteer program that utilizes both regular, in-office interns and occasional, workshop volunteers. The highly trained volunteers supporting remote application workshops are primarily non-legal volunteers who help with coordination and form-filling. Regular volunteer and intern engagement is primarily provided in-person. Remote supervision of volunteers and interns is challenging, but can be successful with a structured training and supervision program.

**Contributed by:**  
Amber Mull  
Deputy Director, Immigration  
International Rescue Committee