Prepping New New Yorkers

A museum tutors immigrants for their big test | PAGE 4
The New York Community Trust supports vital nonprofits working to make a healthy, equitable, and thriving community for all, through the generosity of past, present, and future New Yorkers.

Join us.

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**OUR VIEW | Marie D’Costa**

The New Tax Law and You

*We can help with life and estate planning*

At The Trust, we’re committed to giving you practical information so you can make a difference on the issues you care about. We’ve revamped our website to feature clearer information about giving as well as inspiring stories about our donors. Take a look at nycommunitytrust.org.

By the way, we know it’s confusing to understand the nuances of the new legislation. Here’s a glimpse at what’s changed as the 2017 federal tax law takes effect:

- Most individual tax rates decrease: The maximum is now 37%, down from 39.6%.
- Adjusted gross income limit for cash charitable contributions rises to 60%, from 50%, retaining the five-year carryover.
- Corporate tax rates drop to 21%, from 35%, and the estate tax is now triggered at $11.2 million for individuals.
- Standard deduction increases to $12,000 for individuals, $24,000 for joint filers. Personal exemptions are eliminated.
- The new limit for itemized deductions for state and local taxes: $10,000.

What does this mean? Because of budget cuts and lower tax revenue, we expect government spending on social services to tighten, and nonprofits may need to rely more on charitable donations. We can help you with tax-smart strategies to ensure that your philanthropic priorities continue.

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**TAX BRIEFING:** Jeff Hamond and Robert Greenstein, tax experts from Washington, D.C., explain changes in tax law to Trust donors.

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**5 TIPS TO HELP YOU PLAN FOR THE FUTURE**

1. Use our free Document Inventory Toolkit for smart estate planning.
2. Discuss your vision for a legacy with family members.
3. Update essential documents annually, including your will or revocable trust.
4. To ensure your estate plan fits your needs, consult a professional advisor.
5. Designate someone to take over any online accounts you may have, such as social media or banking.

For more information or our Document Inventory Toolkit, contact Marie D’Costa, our director of leadership and legacy giving, at (212) 686-2461. Or email md@nyct-cfi.org.
ARTISTS AT WORK

Making a Living at Making Art
Program for Latinx artists builds confidence and community

Being an artist means running a small business—selling, budgeting, and financial planning. That’s why The Trust supports Creative Capital, a nonprofit that helps artists manage businesses and careers.

Media artist Ela Troyano received funding from the organization, but got much more. “Creative Capital doesn’t simply give money to artists,” Troyano says. “Their staff helped me set up a sustainable, lifelong art practice.”

Now, in addition to making art, Troyano runs Creative Capital workshops around the country. At a session in Miami a few years ago, she realized many other Spanish-speaking artists need help.

With $100,000 from The Trust, Creative Capital has started a program in Spanish for Latinx artists in the Bronx, Harlem, and the Lower East Side.

Troyano acknowledges that some painters, poets, and singers see business as antithetical to their art: “I tell artists that Jay Z had a business plan early on, selling cassette tapes on the street.” Figuring out the business side allows artists to control the ideas, as well as the making and distribution of their work.
On a chilly spring day, Soodabeh Saeidnia takes three subways from her apartment in Queens to the New-York Historical Society on Manhattan’s Upper West Side. She is eager to become an American citizen—so she is learning about U.S. history.

Saeidnia, 45, enters a third-floor gallery with her husband, Ahmad Gohari, 49, and eight men and women from Albania, Argentina, Australia, Ghana, Guatemala, Japan, Mexico, and Turkey. They gaze at an 1859 oil painting of a slave family, and soon they’re discussing the equal-protection clause of the 14th Amendment.

This is not casual conversation. It’s a free class to prepare for the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services’ Naturalization Test, the last hurdle to becoming an American citizen. The Trust helps fund 12 two-hour classes.

For Saeidnia, the test will be the culmination of years of agonizing decisions about leaving Iran. In high school, administrators made her wear a hijab. They also scolded her because she had an ear piercing—an affront to fundamentalist clerics. A few years later, she tried to publish a book of poems. Censors changed the title, threw out several poems, and altered others.

“One poem was about possibilities for our country after the Iran-Iraq war,” she says, “but they added a line to make it about Israel interfering in Palestinian territories.”

Saeidnia and Gohari taught pharmacy courses at a medical college in Tehran. “We lived a comfortable life, with everything we needed,” Saeidnia says. But they wanted their seven-year-old son to have a high-quality education and freedom of expression. Five years ago, they immigrated to the U.S. and moved in with an uncle in Kew Gardens. Then Saeidnia won the green card lottery, signifying permanent residency.

As the class members get acquainted, they share reasons why they want to become citizens. “The U.S. administration put a travel ban on everyone from Iran, even those of us who disagreed with the regime there,” says Saeidnia, “and by becoming American citizens, we’ll be able to travel back and forth to visit our parents.”

Another morning, the class focuses on the European settlement of America. As students walk the marble corridors, it quickly becomes clear what sets the program apart. The instructor, Jennifer Young, asks: “Why did Europeans come to the United States?” Rather than spoon-feed an answer, Young directs the class to a piece of history—a stark, 1867 oil painting titled “Pilgrims Going to Church.” While examining the work, the students discuss
Hands-on Lessons in American History

NEW AMERICANS: With our funding, the New-York Historical Society offers free classes to help green card holders prepare for the exam to become citizens. On the cover: Jennifer Young leads Ahmad Gohari, Soodabeh Saeidnia, and Anastas Syko in a class.

American History

for crucial citizenship test

why the Puritans fled to North America, what they left behind, and what challenges they met.

Young says the secret to passing the naturalization test is intensive studying. The oral exam includes 10 civics questions randomly drawn from a list of 100 that spans topics from American history and geography to the Bill of Rights. This year-old course, called the Citizenship Project, has served students from 71 countries, speaking 35 languages. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg was so moved after reading about the program that she came to the museum to preside over a naturalization ceremony.

In coming weeks, the class will visit galleries for more memorable lessons. A stain left by a wine glass on a Louisiana Purchase document will inspire a discussion about Manifest Destiny. A railing from the original Federal Hall in Lower Manhattan, where George Washington delivered his first inaugural address, will help participants visualize America’s first president. And a beaver pelt helps them understand European interest in 17th century North America.

“By looking at pieces of history,” Gohari says, “we can sense what happened in America more than by simply reading a textbook.”

Can you answer these questions from the Naturalization Test?

1. We elect a U.S. Senator for how many years?

2. Name one of the nation’s two longest rivers.

3. How many amendments does the Constitution have?

4. Name one of the writers of the Federalist Papers.

“Passionate, Hard-Working Group Seeks Energetic, Accomplished Professional”

Online matchmaker pairs nonprofits with volunteers

Skilled professionals want to volunteer their time. Nonprofits need help with marketing strategies, designing websites, and managing resources. But how to bring the two together?

Enter Catchafire, a matchmaking service for professionals and the organizations that need pro bono expertise.

The Trust is unusual because it puts a priority on helping nonprofits hire consultants to assist behind-the-scenes, teaching groups how to create strategic plans, refine budgets, and become sustainable. But such consulting work can be expensive. Catchafire is more efficient and affordable.

Catchafire traces its origins to 2009, when Rachael Chong, an investment banker and would-be volunteer, became frustrated searching for a nonprofit that could use her skills. This led to her “Aha!” moment: She decided to create a web platform where professionals can offer their services and nonprofits can choose the best-qualified volunteers.

Beyond the project, Chong sees long-term benefits: “Catchafire volunteers often build such strong relationships with nonprofits that they continue giving back, or even join as board members.”

Starting in 2016, The Trust paid Catchafire to make its matchmaking service available to our grantees. In all, 165 nonprofits have saved more than $850,000 on projects. Two examples: New York Immigration Coalition, based in Manhattan, and Central Nassau Guidance and Counseling Services, on Long Island, have worked with volunteers whose expertise ranges from graphic design to communications strategy.

“As a community foundation, we want to go beyond making grants to good groups,” says Patricia Jenny, The Trust’s vice president for grants. “We also want to connect nonprofits to the legions of skilled volunteers, ensuring the groups we work with have the support they need.”

Jenny says she’s heard from many groups supported by The Trust that appreciate the extra pro-bono boost from Catchafire participants. Some of the volunteers live or work close to the nonprofit groups; but most are miles, even hundreds of miles, away.

In general, the groups never even meet the volunteers face-to-face because these projects can be done online. That means professionals can pitch in at their convenience, at night, on the weekend, or whenever they have spare time.

At New York Immigration Coalition, the past year was especially busy because of the changes in federal immigration policy. The staff was stretched thin, and yet the group needed to tell funders about its progress.

“We were having trouble presenting the information on a single page, so we turned to Catchafire,” says Christina Samuels, the Coalition’s development manager. “We found a professional who took over and helped us show a year’s worth of accomplishments on a single poster.”
for decades, people addicted to drugs have filled New York’s jails and prisons—an estimated 65% of inmates struggle with substance abuse. Now, New York State is trying to help them when they get out.

Thanks to several groups we support, including the Legal Action Center, inmates get counseling and a Medicaid card as they leave, so they can seek immediate treatment.

In the first couple weeks of freedom, most people are overwhelmed by simply finding a job and a place to live. For some, however, a job also means trading Medicaid for private insurance, and that brings a surprise: Not all insurance companies cover such things as addiction treatment.

Those companies might be violating federal and state parity laws that require equitable insurance coverage to treat addiction and mental illness the same as physical health problems.

With support from The Trust, the Legal Action Center is helping newly released prisoners and their care providers understand the laws and file complaints. The Center also is pushing to better enforce laws on insurance coverage.

“We want to decrease stigma, criminalization, and incarceration for the many people whose criminal records are linked to addictions or mental illness,” says Tracie Gardner, Legal Action Center’s associate director.

Adds Irfan Hasan, The Trust’s healthy lives program director, “Our funding lets the Legal Action Center help New Yorkers recover from addiction, disentangle themselves from the criminal justice system, hold jobs, and become full members of their communities.”
Enders Voorhees graduated from Dartmouth in 1914 and went on to become a top executive at U.S. Steel Corporation.

When he died 45 years ago, he created an unrestricted fund in The Trust in his will, asking us to figure out how to respond to the needs of New Yorkers.

We recently used his fund to support JustFix.nyc, a nonprofit group that developed an app to deal with landlord problems.

In just two years, the app has helped thousands of tenants, organizers, and attorneys file complaints, join with neighbors, fight evictions, and get repairs done. We think Mr. Voorhees would be pleased.

You, too, can help others.

Leave a legacy of kindness that stands the test of time.

Contact Jane Wilton at (212) 686-2563 or giving@nyct-cfi.org

Please visit our NEW website: nycommunitytrust.org