

# The Complete Steps to Becoming a United States (U.S.A.) Citizen



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## **The Complete Steps to Becoming a United States (U.S.A.) Citizen**

### **Free Legal Advice Immigration USA- United States**

Coming to the USA is exciting -- new people, new places, new opportunities, new customs and new laws! Whether you are considering working for an American employer or pursuing a business investment venture in the United States arena, there are key issues that need to be addressed for your goals to be reached. Unfortunately, all this novelty can seem overwhelming, especially when it comes to immigration law. To ensure that you are afforded all of the rights of residency or citizenship in USA, follow these [immigration tips](#).

### **HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE:**

Becoming a U.S. citizen gives you new rights and privileges: it shows your patriotism, allows you to vote, you obtain government benefits, and you are able to become a permanent resident of the United States. Being a citizen also carries with it new responsibilities. This guide will inform the reader of how to become a U.S. citizen, and answer some frequently asked questions. This guide is not meant as a substitute for legal advice. Should you have any questions or concerns you should contact legal counsel.

### **DO I NEED A LAWYER TO BECOME A UNITED STATES CITIZEN?**

Many people navigate the citizenship process successfully without an attorney. This is impossible to answer without knowing your sophistication and education level. There is more to the process than just reading and answering the form but of course this is important as well. In theory you could read the same laws and regulations that attorneys do and educate yourself but by hiring an attorney you be buying this expertise. The advantage of an attorney is usually to get everything on file correctly the first time -- errors in filing location and procedure will result in a rejected case and a delayed filing but would not prevent you filing again; it just loses time in the process -- knowledge of what to do if your case is not proceeding as it should, and of course advising you on any potential land mines that could come up at the interview, and issues of good moral character, selective service, voting, taxes, child support or any of the other ancillary issues that are increasingly raised at naturalization interviews..

Unless you have a complex set of circumstances, you should be able to apply for citizenship without aid of a lawyer. That said the [U.S. immigration laws](#) are complex. While there are numerous resources to educate yourself and obtain the appropriate forms, there is a lot to navigate through. Should you have any questions you should contact legal counsel.

If one is represented by an attorney who is a member of the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA), the USCIS-AILA Liaison process may be used to solve some of these problems.

Here is an example of a screw-up by the USCIS not caused by anything the applicant did wrong:

*Last week someone who applied without an attorney told me that his case was denied because he told the officer at the interview his father had become U.S. citizens while he was a Permanent Resident under age 18; the officer told him he was already a U.S. citizen by operation of law, and he should file an application for a Certificate of Citizenship; he then filed the requested application, but it too was denied because he could not prove that his father had a custody order or that he actually resided with his father during the required time. Purely because of the officer's error, this person will have to file a new case, resulting in an enormous amount of wasted time and effort, and a very large amount of filing fees.*

### **HOW DO I FIND A REPUTABLE LAWYER?**

If you have decided to retain a lawyer, you will want to find a firm and lawyer with plenty of experience and a great track record. Make sure that you find a lawyer that specializes in immigration. The legal field is vast, and a lawyer needs to be specialized in a particular field. Some lawyers may take any type of case just to keep the money coming in, but they are not necessarily well versed in one particular subject.

Check your phone book, the internet, your local bar association or word of mouth to get the names of a few good lawyers. Most will meet for you the first time for fiancée. Use this time to interview them. What is their experience, how much do they charge, and what can you expect to get for your money by hiring them?

### **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:**

#### **Why should I become a United States citizen?**

There are many benefits to becoming a U.S. citizen. Some benefits include being able to live and work permanently in the United States, without concern of being deported or denied entry into the country. If you are a U.S. citizen you are able to vote, to hold a federal job: and come and go from the country without fear over immigration regulations.

#### **How Long is the Process to Obtain U.S. Citizenship?**

The length of the citizenship process is dependent upon where the applicant is located within the United States. Generally speaking, an application for citizenship takes about six to seven months to process. To find out how long applications are taking in your region of the United States, please visit the [USCIS's list of field office processing times](#).

#### **How Long must I be a Permanent Resident in the United States before I Apply for Citizenship?**

In most instances, a person must be a lawful permanent resident for five years before becoming a citizenship. However, ***spouses of U.S. Citizens can become a U.S. citizen after three years of being a lawful permanent resident.*** In special circumstances, the period might also be shorter than five years (i.e. being a member of the armed forces).

### **Do I have to wait until the five-year or three-year mark before applying for citizenship?**

No, you do not have to wait until the five or three year mark. You can apply up to 90 days before you become eligible for Citizenship.

### **Is there any age limitation on becoming a U.S. Citizen?**

In most instances, a person must be 18 before they can become a naturalized U.S. citizen. There is no upper limit to becoming a U.S. citizen.

### **Does the United States allow for dual citizenship with other countries?**

Yes, the United States allows individuals to possess dual citizenship. Although the United States is not fond of dual citizenship, it realizes that it is a part of long established international law. A person interested in dual citizenship must ensure that the other country also allows for dual citizenship.

### **Who must be registered with the Selective Service?**

Only males who are between the ages of 18 and 26 are required to register with the Selective Service. Additionally, a person need not register if he is outside of the United States or a lawful nonimmigrant resident. Not registering with the Selective Service does not permanently bar an applicant from becoming a naturalized citizen, but it may cause problems and should be handled delicately.

### **What does Good Moral Character Mean and Why is it Important?**

To be eligible for citizenship, a person must demonstrate that they have good moral character. Good Moral Character can be demonstrated by NOT doing the following:

1. committing a crime involving moral turpitude
2. committing two or more offenses which result in conviction and the aggregate sentence imposed exceeds five years
3. violating a controlled substance law
4. admitting to have committed a crime described above, but never being formally charged, indicted, arrested or convicted
5. being confined to a penal institution (jailed) for an aggregate of 180 days pursuant to a conviction
6. giving false testimony to gain immigration benefit
7. being involved in prostitution
8. being involved in smuggling a person or persons into the U.S.
9. practicing polygamy

10. committing two or more gambling offenses
11. having earned income principally from illegal gambling activities
12. having been a habitual drunkard
13. by willfully failing to support dependent family members
14. committing adultery causing break-up of a family
15. failing to register for Selective Service
16. failing to file or pay income taxes

**Are there any individuals who are barred from becoming Citizens?**

Yes, including:

1. deserters of the armed forces
2. advocates of anarchy
3. advocates of communism within past ten years
4. individuals facing a removal order, except in certain military service naturalization

**Must the applicant be able to speak, read and write English?**

In most cases, the applicant must speak, read and write English. However, exemptions to this requirement include if the applicant has a physical disability or mental impairment, if the applicant is over 50 years old and has resided in the United States as a permanent resident for over 20 years, or if the applicant is over 55 years old and has resided in the U.S. as a permanent resident for over 15 years.

**What type of questions should I expect on the Civics and Government part of the Naturalization Test?**

The USCIS has developed [extensive study guides for the naturalization exam](#). Generally applicants do not need to buy or use any additional study guides besides those provided by the USCIS.

Buy these books at Amazon.com. It has secret tips and detailed explanations and solution on problems you might encounter on your application process. It is highly recommended by immigration lawyers if you are not hiring one.

- (a) [Becoming a U.S. Citizen: A Guide to the Law, Exam & Interview- 2013](#)
- (b) [How to Become a United States Citizen 6 Ed: A Step-by-Step Guidebook for Self-Instruction- 2013](#)

**How do you become a U.S. citizen?**

You can become a U.S. citizen two ways: either by birth or through naturalization. The general criteria for becoming a citizen are:

1. You have been admitted for permanent residence for 5 years (3 years is your green card is obtained through marriage);
2. You are over 18 years old;

3. You have been a continuous resident for 5 years (3 years if you are married to a citizen);
4. You have been a person of good moral character for 5 years;
5. You must have elementary level English skills;
6. You must understand the basics regarding the history and government of the United States.

### **Are there any exceptions to these requirements?**

Exceptions are available for people that are disabled military, veterans, spouses of U.S. citizens working overseas and permanent residents that work for particular organizations. There are exceptions to the English requirement for people over the age of 5 and you have lived in the U.S. for over 15 years: or you are 50 years old and have lived in the U.S. for 20 years. For more information on these exceptions refer to the US Immigration Support Office.

### **What does naturalization mean?**

Naturalization is process where a foreign national applies for and obtains citizenship for the United States. Only legal permanent residents can apply, and only after they have had a green card for 5 years (spouses of U.S. citizens have a shorter waiting period).

### **What are the requirements to file apply for naturalization?**

1. You have been a resident for five years;
2. You have been a resident for three years, and been married to a U.S. citizen for those three years and are still married;
3. You a child of resident parents who are U.S. citizens;
4. You have qualifying military service.

### **What about my child after I have been naturalized?**

If you are naturalized, and your children are permanent residents, they are considered naturalized through the parents. They will still need to file a form called "*Application for a Certificate of Citizenship*". In most cases they will be a citizen if:

1. Both parents are naturalized;
2. Or the other parent is deceased;
3. The parent has legal custody;

4. The child was under 18 years old when the parents were naturalized;
5. The child was not married at the time the parents were naturalized;
6. And the child was a permanent resident when the parents were naturalized

### **How long does the naturalization process take?**

The process to naturalization is a long one, usually taking two years or more.

### **What is a green card?**

A green card is proof that a person is a lawful permanent resident of the United States. A green card holder has the right to live and work permanently in the U.S. It also shows that the person is registered in the U.S. in accordance with U.S. immigration law.

### **What are the eligibility requirements for a green card?**

You can apply for a green card through a job, family, refugee or asylum status, self petition or have a record created for permanent residence on your behalf.

In order to meet the requirements to be a permanent resident you need to meet the following criteria:

1. Have a qualifying immigrant petition filed and approved;
2. Have an immigrant [visa](#) immediately available;
3. Be eligible for on the immigrant categories established under the Immigration and Nationality Act;
4. Be admissible in the United States.

### **Family based eligibility:**

Relatives of U.S. citizens do not have to wait for visas. Immediate family is defined as either your spouse is a citizen, or if your parents are citizen, or unmarried children under the age of 21 are citizens.

### **Employment based eligibility:**

You can become obtain a green card bases on your employment or job offer.

### **Refugee or Asylum eligibility:**

If you were admitted into the U.S. as a refugee or you are the spouse of child of a refugee you are required to apply for a green card within one year.

## **How do I get a green card?**

There are many ways you can obtain a green card. Immigrants in most categories will need an immigrant petition form. There are several specific varieties of the petition, so the applicant should check with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to determine which particular form is appropriate.

## **What is a visa?**

While a green card means you have permanent residence in the U.S., a visa signifies the right to enter the United States for a specified period of time. This would be used by a student, for example, and is temporary in nature.

## **How do I get a visa?**

[Visas are always available for relatives](#) of U.S. citizens. If you in the family or employment bases category, the availability of visas is determined by: your priority date, the category you are immigrating under, what country you are coming from. The Department of State controls the issuance of visas, and limits the amount issued every year. You will need to file an Immigrant Petition, which places you on a waiting list for a visa number. When a number becomes available you need to file an Application to Register Permanent Residence or Adjust Status.

## **What prohibits my admissibility into the U.S.?**

Anyone applying for immigration into the U.S. must be "admissible." There are numerous grounds in inadmissibility, but the most common are health related, criminal and security reasons.

## **What do I do after my green card is granted?**

A green card is proof that you are authorized to live and work in the U.S. You are required to keep the card on you at all times. A green card is valid for 10 years, or two years in the case of a conditional resident. The cards must be renewed before they expire. You can use your green card to apply for social security card and state driver's license.

You will also use the card as regain entry into the U.S. if you travel abroad. If however you leave the country for more than one year, additional documentation will be required. You will need to apply for a reentry permit.

## **STEPS TO BECOMING A U.S. CITIZEN**

Obtain a green card and wait for the 5 year period (or three years if you are married to a citizen).



Familiarize yourself with the U.S. government immigration and naturalization requirements, as they are rather complex. A broad understanding of the rules will help you move forward and avoid confusion.

Fill out form N-400 which can be found on the U.S. government immigration and naturalization website. **Keep in mind that in order to apply for citizenship you must be a permanent resident before applying.** Send your completed form, with a filing fee of \$675.00 to the USCIS (United States Citizenship and Immigration). Check it a good idea to check their website or contact them by phone to determine which office to send you application to. Depending on what state you are sending it from you will have a different office to send it to.

Determine if you qualify for the citizenship test. If so begin preparing by studying basic U.S. history and civics. You also have to be proficient in English. There are resources available not only online, but through your community and local library to assist you in preparing for the test.

You will be interviewed and asked various questions from 100 possibilities. You will be required to answer the questions both orally and in writing.

Once you become a citizen, it is a good idea to register to vote and obtain your passport.

If you want to pass the citizenship exams and learn more secret tips about your application process, download these iPhone or iPad apps.

- (a) [Citizenship Test](#)
- (b) [U.S. Citizenship for iPad](#)
- (c) [U.S. Citizenship for iPad](#)
- (d) [U.S. Immigration FAQ](#)
- (e) [U.S.A. Citizenship Test](#)

### **FILING FEES AND COSTS:**

**Application for naturalization: \$675.00**

### **ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES:**

1. U.S. citizens have the right to vote;
2. You will have the right to hold federal jobs;
3. You will have the right to leave and re-enter the country freely
4. You are protected when traveling abroad;
5. Your family members will have the right to citizenship;

6. You will be eligible for social security.

**Disadvantages:**

1. Property ownership in native country might be problematic;
2. May need a work permit to work in native country;
3. Must pass basic English and history tests;
4. May lose the right to vote in your native country;
5. May lose citizenship in your native country;
6. The process of becoming a U.S. citizen takes a long time.

To learn more about the details please watch the video, **How to Become a U.S. Citizen** and **Applying for United States Citizenship**.

*How to Become a U.S. Citizen- Complete Videos*



Please watch this video at <http://blog.buraga.org/2013/01/free-legal-advice-immigration-usa.html>

*Applying for United States Citizenship- Complete Videos*



Please watch this video at <http://blog.buraga.org/2013/01/free-legal-advice-immigration-usa.html>

*References:*

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services: Welcome to the United States - A Guide for New Immigrants <http://www.uscis.gov/files/nativedocuments/M-618.pdf>

U.S. Department of State: Immigrants to the United States [http://travel.state.gov/visa/immigrants/immigrants\\_1340.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/immigrants/immigrants_1340.html)

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If you have problems you can also read this guide at  
<http://blog.buraga.org/2013/01/free-legal-advice-immigration-usa.html>