

BECOMING A CITIZEN

The Naturalization Process

General Requirements

As a legal permanent resident, you are eligible to file to become a citizen of the United States if you meet the following general requirements:

- You must be at least 18 years old.
- You must have lived in the U.S. as a lawful permanent resident for at least five years (or three years if married to and living with the same U.S. citizen who has been a citizen for the last 3 years).
- You must have been physically present in the U.S. for at least 30 months out of the past five years (or 18 months out of the past three years if married to a U.S. citizen).
- You must not have been absent from the U.S. for more than six months at a time.
- You must have lived within the state or district from which you are applying for at least three months.
- You must have behaved in a legal and acceptable manner (demonstrate “good moral character”). You must disclose your entire criminal history on your application. **If you have had contact with any law enforcement officers, please speak to an immigration attorney about your specific situation.** Examples of some things that may not be considered “good moral character”:
 - being convicted of two or more offenses with a combined sentence of five years or more or spending more than 180 days total in jail;
 - drug offenses;
 - illegal gambling;
 - prostitution;
 - smuggling “illegal aliens” into U.S.;
 - being a habitual drunkard;
 - practicing polygamy;
 - failing or refusing to support dependants;
 - giving false testimony under oath to receive immigration benefits.
- You must be able to read, write, speak, and understand English.
- You must know information about U.S. history and government (civics).
- You must understand and accept the principles of the U.S. Constitution (demonstrate “attachment to the Constitution”).

There are some additional waivers, exceptions, and special cases, including naturalization for a child, which may apply to your specific situation. Please consult an experienced immigration attorney for more details.

Costs & Application Process

Once determining that you are eligible, you must complete the Application for Naturalization, N-400 to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). The fee to submit the application is currently \$595 with an additional required fee of \$80 for biometrics (fingerprinting).

You may also need to submit additional documentation described in the application instructions to USCIS. Processing time for this application is currently between 8-12 months, depending on where you apply. Once USCIS has received your application, you will receive a letter in the mail telling you where and when you will need to have your fingerprints taken.

Interview

Next, USCIS will schedule you for an interview and send you a letter telling you where and when that interview will take place. At this interview, a USCIS officer will ask you questions about your application, test your English, and give you a civics test on U.S. history and government. Sample questions from these tests are available for you to review and practice with before your interview and we can provide these for you upon request.

What Happens Next?

At the end of the interview, you will be informed as to whether your application has been granted, continued, or denied. If it was granted, you will then receive a letter in the mail giving you a date for your oath ceremony when you will officially be sworn in as a citizen. Some applications are continued or put on hold (usually for failing the English and civics tests or for incomplete documentation) and in that case you will either be asked to come back for a second interview or to provide additional documentation. If your application was denied, you will receive a written notice informing you why your application was denied. There is an appeal process if you feel your application was wrongly denied.

Oath Ceremony

To complete the naturalization process after your application is granted, you must attend an oath ceremony. At the ceremony, you will take an oath of allegiance to the U.S. after which you will receive your Certificate of Naturalization (your proof that you are now a U.S. citizen).

PLEASE REMEMBER...

The above information is being provided to you for informational purposes only. It is not legal advice, but simply an overview of the naturalization process. Before applying for citizenship, we urge you to speak to an experienced immigration attorney. *Applying for citizenship and being denied could lead to removal (deportation), so please see an immigration attorney before acting on this information.* For more information, you may also consult the USCIS website at www.uscis.gov.

To apply for free legal help, contact Legal Aid Line:



TOLL-FREE
(888) 534-1432



ONLINE
www.LegalAidLine.org

Legal Aid Line is a project of Legal Aid of Western Ohio, Inc. (LAWO) in collaboration with Advocates for Basic Legal Equality, Inc. (ABLE). LAWO and ABLE are law firms that provide free legal help in civil legal aid matters to eligible individuals and groups that do not have access to the legal system and cannot afford a private attorney.



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