

BECOMING A NATURALIZED CITIZEN

Becoming a US citizen is an important decision for immigrants. Naturalized US citizens enjoy many benefits. A few are:

- Able to stop paying immigration fees and no longer have to continually renew one's legal status.
- Can travel freely outside the US. A US citizen can travel abroad as much as they want and not worry about being denied re-entry into the US, like immigrants can.
- Can sponsor certain family members and help them get legal status in the United States. The process can be faster when the sponsor is a US citizen;
- Can't be deported; Immigrants can be deported for even minor offenses.
- Can be a dual citizen, if the immigrant's country of origin allows it.
- Ability to vote in elections;
- Able to run for elective office where citizenship is required;
- Can be on a jury; and
- Become eligible for federal and certain law enforcement jobs.

These are all great benefits immigrants need to take advantage of. So why don't more immigrants become naturalized citizens? Some simply aren't eligible and others may not understand the process.

Who can become a naturalized US citizen?

Generally a person must be:

- 18 years of age or older AND
 - Have a green card for at least 5 years; it can be 3 years if married to a US citizen;
 - Have continually been in the US as a green card holder for the 5 years right before the filing of the application to obtain citizenship;
 - Lived in the US for at least 30 months out of the 5 years right before the filing of the application to obtain citizenship;
 - Lived in the state where filing the application for citizenship for 3 months before the filing;
 - Have good moral character, as defined by immigration law;
 - Be willing to support the US Constitution and follow US laws;
 - Be able to read, write, speak and understand English;
 - Pass a civics exam about US history and government.

There are some exceptions for who has to be able to read, write, speak and understand English, depending on how old the person is and how many years he or she has had a green card. In addition,

there are ways to make the English and civics exam easier, for people who have medical records proving learning disabilities.

Other requirements

Other things United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) requires to become a naturalized US citizen include:

- Security and criminal background checks, including fingerprints being taken and a name check from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI);
- In person interview(s) that may include oral and written testimony;
- A review of the person's entire immigration history;
- Most men when between the ages of 18 to 26 must have registered with the Selective Service.

This list may sound like a lot, but the benefits of becoming a US citizen outweigh continually having to renew legal status, for most people. USCIS breaks all the information down into their guides, including what forms to fill out and how much the fees are. Go here for their guides. <http://www.uscis.gov/us-citizenship/citizenship-through-naturalization>

This is not all the information you need to know about naturalization. For more information visit USCIS's website at: <http://www.uscis.gov/us-citizenship/citizenship-through-naturalization>

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