

Citizenship & Naturalization

Introduction

Legal Permanent residents have most of the rights of U.S. citizens. But there are many important reasons to consider becoming a U.S. citizen. These include:

- **Showing your patriotism.** Becoming a citizen is a way to demonstrate your commitment to your new country.
- **Voting.** Only citizens can vote in federal elections.
- **Serving on a jury.** Only U.S. citizens can serve on a jury. Serving on a jury is an important responsibility for U.S. citizens.
- **Traveling with a U.S. passport.** A U.S. passport enables you to get assistance from the U.S. government when overseas, if necessary.
- **Bringing family members to the U.S.** U.S. citizens generally get priority when petitioning to bring family members permanently to this country.
- **Obtaining citizenship for children born abroad.** In most cases, a child born abroad to a U.S. citizen is automatically a U.S. citizen.
- **Becoming eligible for federal jobs.** Certain jobs with government agencies require U.S. citizenship.
- **Becoming an elected official.** Many elected offices in this country require U.S. citizenship.
- **Meeting tax requirements.** Tax requirements may be different for U.S. citizens and permanent residents.
- **Keeping your residency.** A U.S. citizen's right to remain in the United States cannot be taken away.
- **Becoming eligible for federal grants and scholarships.** Many financial aid grants, including college scholarships and funds given by the government for specific purposes, are available only to U.S. citizens.
- **Obtaining government benefits.** Some government benefits are available only to U.S. citizens.



Naturalization: Becoming a U.S. Citizen

The process of becoming a U.S. citizen is called “naturalization.” You can apply for naturalization once you meet the following requirements:

Live in the U.S. for at least 5 years as a permanent resident (or 3 years if married to and living with a U.S. citizen).

Be present in the U.S. for at least 30 months out of the past 5 years (or 18 months out of the past 3 years if married to and living with a U.S. citizen).

Live within a state or district for at least 3 months before you apply.

You may have to follow different rules if:

- You, or your deceased parent, spouse, or child, have served in the U.S. Armed Forces.
- You are a U.S. national.
- You obtained permanent residence through the 1986 amnesty law.
- You are a refugee or asylee.

GETTING NATURALIZATION INFORMATION

People 18 years or older who want to become citizens should get Form M-476, [A Guide to Naturalization](#). This guide has important information on the requirements for naturalization. It also describes the forms you will need to begin the naturalization process.

To see if you are eligible to apply for naturalization, see Form M-480, Naturalization Eligibility Worksheet at the end of [A Guide to Naturalization](#).

- You have a U.S. citizen spouse who is regularly stationed abroad.
- You lost U.S. citizenship under prior law because of marriage to a non-citizen.
- You are an employee of certain types of companies or nonprofit organizations.

MAINTAINING CONTINUOUS RESIDENCE (CR) AS A PERMANENT RESIDENT

If you leave the U.S. for:	Your CR status is:	To keep your status you must:
More than 6 months	Possibly broken	Prove that you continued to live, work, and/or have ties to the U.S. (e.g. paid taxes) while you were away.
More than 1 year	Broken	In most cases, you must begin your continuous residence over. Apply for a re-entry permit before you leave if you plan to return to the U.S. as a

permanent resident.

Requirements for Naturalization

The general requirements for naturalization are:

1. Live in the U.S. as a permanent resident for a specific amount of time (Continuous Residence).
2. Be present in the U.S. for specific time periods (Physical Presence).
3. Spend specific amounts of time in your state or district (Time in District or State).
4. Behave in a legal and acceptable manner (Good Moral Character).
5. Know English and information about U.S. history and government (English and Civics).
6. Understand and accept the principles of the U.S. Constitution (Attachment to the Constitution).

PRESERVING YOUR RESIDENCE FOR NATURALIZATION PURPOSES: EXEMPTIONS FOR 1-YEAR ABSENCES

If you work for the U.S. government, a recognized U.S. research institution, or certain U.S. corporations, or if you are a member of the clergy serving abroad, you may be able to preserve your continuous residence if you:

1. Have been physically present and living in the U.S. without leaving for at least one year after becoming a permanent resident.
2. Submit Form N-470, Application to Preserve Residence for Naturalization Purposes, before you have been outside the U.S. for one year. There is a fee to file Form N-470.

TIP: A re-entry permit (Form I-131) and the Application to Preserve Residence for Naturalization Purposes (Form N-470) are not the same. A re-entry permit lets you re-enter the U.S. as a permanent resident if you have been outside of the U.S. for more than 12 months. Form N-470 lets certain people maintain their continuous residence for naturalization purposes if they will be outside the U.S. for more than 12 months.

1. Continuous Residence

“Continuous residence” means that you must live in the U.S. as a permanent resident for a certain period of time. Most people must be permanent residents in continuous residence for 5 years (or 3 years if married to a U.S. citizen) before they can begin the naturalization process. For refugees, this means 5 years from the date you arrived in the U.S., which is usually the date you obtained permanent resident status. For those granted asylum status in the U.S., this period begins one year before you got permanent resident status. The date on your Permanent Resident Card is the date your 5 years begins. If you leave the United States for a long period of time, usually 6 months or more, you may “break” your continuous residence.

If you leave the United States for 1 year or longer, you may be able to return if you have a re-entry permit. You should apply for this re-entry permit before you depart the United

States. In most cases, none of the time you were in the United States before you left the country will count toward your time in continuous residence. This means that you will need to begin your continuous residence again after you return to the United States, and you may have to wait up to 4 years and 1 day before you can apply for naturalization.

Be aware that absences from the United States while your naturalization application is pending could cause problems with your eligibility, especially if you accept employment abroad.

EXEMPTIONS FOR MILITARY PERSONNEL

If you are on active-duty status or were recently discharged from the U.S. Armed Forces, the continuous residence and physical presence requirements may not apply to you. You can find more information in the M-599 Naturalization Information for Military Personnel brochure. Every military base should have a point-of-contact to handle your naturalization application and certify a Form N-426, Request for Certification of Military or Naval Service. You must submit Form N-426 with your application forms. To get the forms you need, call the USCIS Forms Line at: 1-800-870-3676 and ask for the Military Packet. You can find the M-599 and Form N-426 at <http://www.uscis.gov/graphics/services/natz/militarybrochurev7.htm>.

2. Physical Presence in the United States

“Physical presence” means that you actually have been present in the United States. If you are a permanent resident at least 18 years old, you must be physically present in the United States for at least 30 months during the last 5 years (or 18 months during the last 3 years, if married to a U.S. citizen) before you apply for naturalization.

3. Time as a Resident in District or State

Most people must live in the district or state where they apply for naturalization for at least 3 months. Students can apply for naturalization either where they go to school or where their family lives (if they depend on their parents for support).

“PHYSICAL PRESENCE”

Q: What is the difference between “physical presence” and “continuous residence”?

A: “Physical presence” is the total days you were inside the United States and does not include the time you spend outside the U.S. Each day you spend outside the U.S. takes away from your “physical presence” total. If you are away from the U.S. for long periods of time or if you take many short trips outside the U.S., you may not meet your “physical presence” requirement. To count your “physical presence” time, you should add together all the time you have been in the United States. Then subtract all trips you have taken outside the United States. This includes short trips to Canada and Mexico. For example, if you go to Mexico for a weekend, you must include the trip when counting how many days you spent out of the country.

“Continuous residence” is the total time you have resided as a permanent resident in the United States before applying for naturalization. If you spend too much time outside the United States during a single trip, you may break your “continuous residence.”

4. Good Moral Character

To be eligible for naturalization, you must be a person of good moral character. A person is

not considered to be of "good moral character" if they commit certain crimes during the 5 years before they apply for naturalization or if they lie during their naturalization interview.

If you commit some specific crimes, you can never become a U.S. citizen and will probably be removed from the country. These crimes are called "bars" to naturalization. Crimes called "aggravated felonies" (if committed on or after November 29, 1990), including: murder, rape, sexual abuse of a child, violent assault, treason, and trafficking in drugs, firearms, or people are some examples of permanent bars to naturalization. In most cases, immigrants who were exempted or discharged from serving in the U.S. Armed Forces because they were immigrants and immigrants who deserted from the U.S. Armed Forces are also permanently barred from U.S. citizenship.

BEHAVIORS THAT MIGHT SHOW A LACK OF GOOD MORAL CHARACTER

- Drunk driving or being drunk most of the time.
- Illegal gambling.
- Prostitution.
- Lying to gain immigration benefits.
- Failing to pay court-ordered child support.
- Committing terrorist acts.
- Persecuting someone because of race, religion, national origin, political opinion, or social group.

You also may be denied citizenship if you behave in other ways that show you lack good moral character.

Other crimes are temporary bars to naturalization. Temporary bars usually prevent you from becoming a citizen for up to 5 years after you commit the crime. These include:

- Any crime against a person with intent to harm.
- Any crime against property or the government involving fraud.
- 2 or more crimes with combined sentences of 5 years or more.
- Violating controlled substance laws (e.g., using or selling illegal drugs).
- Spending 180 days or more during the past 5 years in jail or prison.

Report any crimes that you committed when you apply for naturalization. This includes crimes removed from your record or committed before your 18th birthday. If you do not tell USCIS about them, you may be denied citizenship and you could be prosecuted.

5. English and Civics

In general, you must show that you can read, write, and speak basic English. You also must have a basic knowledge of U.S. history and government (also known as "civics"). You will be

required to pass a test of English and a test of civics to prove your knowledge.

Many schools and community organizations help people prepare for their citizenship tests. You can find examples of test questions in *A Guide to Naturalization*. You can get materials to help you study for these tests and practice tests on the USCIS website at <http://uscis.gov/graphics/services/natz/require.htm>.

6. Attachment to the Constitution

You must be willing to support and defend the United States and its Constitution. You declare your "attachment" or loyalty to the United States and the Constitution when you take the Oath of Allegiance. You become a U.S. citizen when you take the Oath of Allegiance.

People who show they have a physical or developmental disability that makes them unable to understand the meaning of the oath do not have to take the Oath of Allegiance.

If you have a pending naturalization application and you move, you must notify USCIS of your new address. You can call 1-800-375-5283 to report your new address. You must also file Form AR-11 with DHS (see "Give Your New Address to DHS" in the [Your Rights and Responsibilities as a Permanent Resident](#) section for instructions).

EXEMPTIONS TO THE ENGLISH AND CIVICS REQUIREMENTS

Some people who apply for naturalization have different test requirements because of their age and the length of time they have lived in the U.S.

If you are	Lived as permanent resident in the U.S. for	You do not take the	You must take the
Over age 50	20 years	English test	civics test in your language
Over age 55	15 years	English test	civics test in your language
Over age 65	20 years	English test	simplified civics test in your language

If you do not have to take the English test, you must bring your own translator for the civics test. If you have a physical or mental disability, you may not have to take either test.

Naturalization Ceremonies

If USCIS approves your application for naturalization, you must attend a ceremony and take the Oath of Allegiance. USCIS will send you a Form N-445, Notice of Naturalization Oath Ceremony, to tell you the time and date of your ceremony. You must complete this form and bring it to your ceremony.

If you cannot go to your ceremony, you can reschedule your ceremony. To reschedule, you must return Form N-445 to your local USCIS office along with a letter explaining why you cannot attend the ceremony.

You will return your Permanent Resident Card to USCIS when you check in at the Oath ceremony. You will no longer need your card because you will get a Certificate of Naturalization at the ceremony.

You are not a citizen until you have taken the Oath of Allegiance. An official will read each part of the Oath slowly and ask you to repeat the words. After you take the Oath, you will receive your Certificate of Naturalization. This certificate proves that you are a U.S. citizen.

The Oath of Allegiance ceremony is a public event. Many communities hold special ceremonies on Independence Day, July 4th, of each year. Check to see if your community holds a special July 4th citizenship ceremony and how you can participate. Many people bring their families and celebrate after the ceremony.

Additional Information

Federal Holidays

The federal government observes the following official holidays. Most federal offices are closed on these days. If a holiday falls on a Saturday, it is observed on the preceding Friday. If a holiday falls on a Sunday, it is observed on the following Monday. Many employers also give their employees a holiday on these days.

New Year's Day	January 1
Birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr.	3rd Monday in January
Presidents' Day	3rd Monday in February
Memorial Day	Last Monday in May
Independence Day	July 4
Labor Day	1st Monday in September
Columbus Day	2nd Monday in October
Veterans Day	November 11
Thanksgiving Day	4th Thursday in November
Christmas Day	December 25

Federal Departments and Agencies

If you are not sure which department to call about a question, start by calling 1-800-FED-INFO (or 1-800-333-4636) to ask where to call. People who have difficulty hearing can call 1-800-326-2996. You can also visit <http://www.FirstGov.gov> for general

information about federal departments and agencies.

Department of Education (ED)

U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20202
Phone: 1-800-872-5327
For hearing impaired: 1-800-437-0833
<http://www.ed.gov>

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
1801 L Street NW
Washington, DC 20507
Phone: 1-800-669-4000
For hearing impaired: 1-800-669-6820
<http://www.eeoc.gov>

Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20201
Phone: 1-877-696-6775
<http://www.hhs.gov>

Department of Homeland Security (DHS)

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528
<http://www.dhs.gov>

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Phone: 1-800-375-5283
For hearing impaired: 1-800-767-1833
<http://www.uscis.gov>

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP)

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Phone: 202-354-1000
<http://www.cbp.gov>

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
<http://www.ice.gov>

Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th Street SW
Washington, DC 20410
Phone: 202-708-1112
For hearing impaired: 202-708-1455
<http://www.hud.gov>

Department of Justice (DOJ)

U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20530
Phone: 202-514-2000
<http://www.usdoj.gov>

Internal Revenue Service (IRS)

Phone: 1-800-829-1040
For hearing impaired: 1-800-829-4059
<http://www.irs.gov>

Selective Service System (SSS)

Registration Information Office
PO Box 94638
Palatine, IL 60094
Phone: 1-847-688-6888
For hearing impaired: 1-847-688-2567
<http://www.sss.gov>

Social Security Administration (SSA)

Office of Public Inquiries
6401 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, MD 21235
Phone: 1-800-772-1213
For hearing impaired: 1-800-325-0778
<http://www.socialsecurity.gov>

Department of State (DOS)

U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520
Phone: 202-647-1000
<http://www.state.gov>