

# Naturalization: Frequently Asked Questions

*updated 12.17.2019*

## 1. Benefits of U.S. Citizenship

United States citizens have certain protections and benefits beyond those given to lawful permanent residents (LPRs). These are the primary reasons why we encourage LPRs to naturalize, or become U.S. citizens.



1. You'll be protected from being deported, and won't have to worry about losing LPR or visa status.
2. Your children under 18 who live with you in the U.S. will automatically become citizens when you naturalize.
3. If you have family abroad, you may be able to bring them to live in the U.S. more quickly.
4. You can apply for government jobs that require U.S. citizenship.
5. You'll be eligible for a U.S. passport, making international travel easy.
6. You can VOTE and run for elected office.

These points are only the most basic privileges afforded to U.S. citizens. In addition, naturalized individuals contribute more to society, including the right to serve on juries and become officers in the military. Naturalization has also proven to boost individual earnings by 8 to 11 percent, and citizens have greater access to education and employment opportunities. Naturalization promotes more stable, cohesive families and communities because citizens are protected from deportation and family reunification is much easier to achieve.

## 2. Basic Eligibility Requirements

You are likely eligible to naturalize if you meet the following criteria:

- A. You are at least 18 years old.
- B. You have lived in the U.S. as a lawful permanent resident, commonly referred to as a "green card holder," for more than 5 years (3 years if you are married to a U.S. citizen).
- C. You have been physically present in the U.S. for more than 2.5 of the last 5 years (1.5 years if you are married to a U.S. citizen).

- D. You have good moral character.
- E. You can speak, read, and write basic English.
- F. You can pass a 10 question test on U.S. government and history.

If you have questions or concerns about your eligibility, please contact one of the organizations that are part of the D.C. New Americans Campaign collaborative.

**3. What assistance can I expect at a Citizenship Workshop? What will I need to prepare for my naturalization application?**

The D.C. New Americans Campaign collaborative is made up of nine organizations:

- Asian Americans Advancing Justice – AAJC
- Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center
- CARECEN
- CASA
- Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Arlington, Hogar Immigrant Services
- Catholic Charities of Baltimore, Esperanza Center
- Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington, Immigration Legal Services
- International Rescue Committee
- NAKASEC VA

Contact information for all D.C. NAC partners is listed on the last page of this booklet.

D.C. New Americans Campaign partners are committed to making the naturalization process more accessible. We regularly hold workshops to provide citizenship application assistance. At these workshops, trained volunteers assist applicants to complete the naturalization application, the Form N-400. Attorneys and accredited immigration representatives are available to answer questions and review applications completed during the workshop. In addition, many of our volunteers are bilingual and able to offer assistance in other languages.

While applicants will have to pay the fees associated with applying for naturalization to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, the services provided at the workshops are offered at a low cost and in some cases free-of-charge.

For more information about upcoming workshops, go to the “Citizenship Events” calendar on the New Americans Campaign website: [www.newamericanscampaign.org](http://www.newamericanscampaign.org). You can also check out our postings on the D.C. New Americans Campaign page on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/DCNewAmericans/>

The naturalization application, Form N-400, is 20 pages long and requires a fair amount of information. It can take several hours to complete your application at one of our workshops, sometimes longer. You can help make the process more efficient by having all of your documents ready and preparing the key information for your application.

### What to Bring

In order to complete the N-400, you will need to provide information on:

- A. Home addresses (and dates) for the last 5 years
- B. Employment or educational history (addresses and dates) for the last 5 years
- C. All travel outside of the U.S. for the last 5 years
- D. Your spouse and children: their full names, birth dates, A-numbers, and addresses
- E. Marital history

In addition, you will need to provide the following documents:

- A. Permanent Resident Card, or “Green Card”
- B. Driver’s License or other state-issued ID
- C. Social Security Card
- D. Proof of current marital status
- E. All passports since you obtained your green card

Depending on your specific situation, additional information and/or documentation may be required. For example, if you have a criminal record, we will need to see the court disposition of all charges filed against you. You will find more information about specific concerns or barriers to naturalization below.

#### **4. Concern: English Language Requirements**

The requirement is that one must be proficient, not fluent, in English. You just need to be able to speak, read and write in basic English.

Some older individuals are exempt from the English language requirement.

50+ years old and have lived in the U.S. as a permanent resident for 20 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No English test</li><li>• Civics test in language of choice</li></ul>
55+ years old and have lived in the U.S. as a permanent resident for 15 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No English test</li><li>• Civics test in language of choice</li></ul>
65+ years old and have lived in the U.S. as a permanent resident for 20 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No English test</li><li>• Simplified civics test in language of choice</li></ul>

An exemption to the English language requirement means that you can do the interview and be tested in your preferred language. You will need to bring your own interpreter to your interview.

If you do not qualify for one of the exemptions described above and feel that you will need to improve your English language skills, we can provide information about English classes offered in our area.

## 5. Concern: Fees

The filing fee to apply for naturalization is currently \$725 (\$640 application fee + \$85 biometrics fee).

NOTE: In November 2019, USCIS announced proposed changes to many immigration fees, including the naturalization application fee, which could go up to \$1,170. The proposed changes would also eliminate the fee waiver and reduced fee for naturalization.

It is unclear at this time when these changes might take effect. We encourage all who are considering naturalization to act soon and submit your application while the current rules are still in place.

### Fee Waivers

Fee waivers are available for low-income individuals, specifically:

- A. Households with [income below 150% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines](#), and
- B. Individuals who are able to demonstrate financial hardship.

NOTE: USCIS made changes to its Request for Fee Waiver form (I-912) that went into effect on December 2, 2019. Where before individuals who received benefits like Medicaid, food stamps (now part of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or Supplemental Security Income, could use their receipt of means-tested benefits to demonstrate eligibility for an immigration fee waiver, the revised Fee Waiver Request Form did not list means-tested benefits as one of the bases for requesting a fee waiver.

This change is being challenged through litigation. On December 9, 2019, a federal district court judge in California issued an injunction blocking USCIS from using the revised I-912. As a result of the ruling in *City of Seattle v. DHS*, USCIS has reverted back to the earlier version of the I-912 and continues to accept fee waiver applications based on receipt of means-tested benefits. The government has appealed the judge's decision, however, so this could change again.

If you are eligible for a fee waiver because you receive means-tested benefits, we encourage you to act quickly to submit your naturalization application and fee waiver request while the temporary injunction is still in place. If you have questions, please contact one of the organizations in the D.C. New Americans Campaign Collaborative.

### Reduced Filing Fee for Naturalization

A reduced filing fee of \$405 (\$320 application fee + \$85 biometrics fee) is available for naturalization applicants with family incomes between [150%-200% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines](#). The Request for Reduced Fee is the Form I-942.

In addition, some of our partners are working with local credit unions that provide loans for the application fee.

Finally, as noted above, the services at Citizenship Workshops are provided at a low cost or, in some cases, free-of-charge.

## **6. Concern: Good Moral Character**

It is a requirement of U.S. citizenship that one must demonstrate “good moral character.” Generally, this means that one does not have an extensive criminal history. If you have any convictions, criminal charges, or even arrests on your record, we will need to see documents for each in order to advise you on what risks you may face in applying for naturalization.

Records that have been sealed or removed from your record are still taken into consideration by USCIS, so you will need to disclose juvenile records as well as any convictions that may have been “vacated, set aside, sealed, expunged or otherwise removed from your record.”

If you have ever been arrested or detained by any law enforcement officer for any reason, even if no charges were filed, please contact one of our NAC partners to get more information about what records you will need.

Finally, parking tickets are not considered criminal offenses. Applicants should disclose citations for moving violations so that we can determine whether these may be problematic. Documentation is generally not required for citations for moving violations that were resolved through payment of a fine, unless that fine exceeded \$500.

## **7. Concern: Paying Taxes**

Since everyone in the United States is required by law to pay taxes, non-payment of taxes or outstanding overdue taxes may be problematic for your naturalization application.

If you have overdue taxes but have worked things out with the IRS or your state or local tax office and are currently in a repayment program, you can include documentation of your repayment status with your naturalization application.

If you have unresolved tax issues, we can connect you with organizations that assist with tax preparation.

## **8. Concern: Public Charge**

*The public charge rule does not apply to individuals applying for naturalization. The legal use of government benefits and programs does not disqualify a lawful permanent resident from naturalization.*

The public charge rule is applied to individuals seeking admission to the United States or applying for adjustment of status. The eligibility requirements for U.S. citizenship do not include a public charge test.

Under immigration law, a person is inadmissible if they are likely to become a “public charge.” This is currently interpreted as becoming “primarily dependent on the government for subsistence.” New rules were slated to go into effect in October 2019 that would expand the types of government assistance and negative factors that would count against immigrants for the public charge determination. Lawsuits challenging these changes have blocked the public charge rule from taking effect. This could change, however, so please contact one of the organizations in the D.C. New Americans Campaign Collaborative if you have questions.

It is important to note, however, that public charge concerns may be triggered in situations where you have *traveled outside of the U.S. for a period of six months or more*. If this applies to you, seek legal advice before applying for naturalization.

### Fee Waiver & Public Charge

A lawful permanent resident who is applying to naturalize is *not* subject to a public charge bar for using a naturalization fee waiver.

Once naturalized, if the new U.S. citizen wishes to sponsor relatives to immigrate, the new citizen’s use of a fee waiver to apply for naturalization will *not* hinder his or her ability to sponsor a relative. The sponsor will have to demonstrate sufficient resources to file an affidavit of support for the family member they are petitioning, which may be difficult if the sponsor’s income and assets were low enough to qualify for a fee waiver.

If you have concerns related to public charge, contact one of our D.C. NAC partners or come to a Citizenship Workshop, so that you can speak with an immigration attorney.

## **9. Concern: Changing Policies of the Trump Administration**

The current Administration has been making changes to immigration policy and has proposed additional changes that are causing great anxiety for immigrant communities. It is difficult to keep track of which changes have already taken effect and may cause problems for your naturalization application. We recommend that you make an appointment with one of our NAC partners or come to one of our Citizenship Workshops, so that you can discuss your concerns with an experienced immigration attorney. The attorney will be able to provide advice based on your particular situation and discuss what risks you may face in moving forward with an application for naturalization.

## 10. What can I expect after I submit my application?

The timeline for USCIS to process naturalization applications varies across the country, and processing times have been fluctuating. As of November 2019, the estimated case processing time for the N-400 for the Washington D.C. area is 10.5 to 14 months. For the Baltimore area it is 9 to 22 months. To access information on current processing times, see: <https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times/>

*Approximately 2 weeks after submission:* You can expect to receive the “I-797 Notice of Action” confirming that USCIS received your application.

*Approximately 1 month after submission:* You can expect to receive a Biometrics Appointment Notice. This is when you will have your fingerprints taken.

**\*\*You can expect a long wait between the Biometrics Appointment and the next step, your Naturalization Exam and Interview.\*\***

*Approximately 9 to 10.5 months, likely longer:* You can expect to receive a notice to attend your Naturalization Exam and Interview about 9 months after you submitted your application. In some cases, it may take longer before you are scheduled for your exam and interview.

If you pass the exam and interview,\* you will be given a date to attend your Oath Ceremony.

*Shortly after your exam and interview:* Your Oath Ceremony will be scheduled within a few days or a few weeks of your exam and interview. You will be expected to turn in your Permanent Resident Card and Form N-445 “Notice of Naturalization Oath Ceremony.” Once the oath is administered, you will be a United States Citizen.

Note: The processing times listed are averages. We have assisted people whose applications moved more quickly and some whose applications moved more slowly, so you should be prepared for either scenario. You can track the status of your case online: <https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus>

**Now more than ever, it is important to get advice on your specific situation from an experienced immigration attorney. If you have concerns, we recommend that you get your questions answered by an experienced immigration attorney.**

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\* If you do not pass the U.S. Civics and History test or the English test, you will have another chance. USCIS will give you another exam and interview date within 90 days. If you do not pass the second time, you will need to re-start the application process, including paying the application fee again.



The New Americans Campaign is a diverse nonpartisan national network of respected immigration organizations, legal service providers, faith-based organizations, immigrant rights groups, foundations, and community leaders. The Campaign transforms the way aspiring citizens navigate the path to becoming new Americans. It is committed to connecting lawful permanent residents to trusted legal assistance and critical information that simplifies the naturalization process.

### **Washington D.C. New Americans Campaign Collaborative**

- Asian Americans Advancing Justice – AAJC  
[www.advancingjustice-aajc.org](http://www.advancingjustice-aajc.org), (202) 296-2300, ext. 0120
- Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center  
[www.apalrc.org](http://www.apalrc.org), (202) 393-3572
- CARECEN  
[www.carecencdc.org](http://www.carecencdc.org), (202) 328-9799
- CASA  
[www.wearecasa.org](http://www.wearecasa.org), (240) 560-2272 in Maryland, (571) 421-2211 in Virginia
- Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Arlington, Hogar Immigrant Services  
[www.cdda.net](http://www.cdda.net), (703) 534-9805, ext. 252
- Catholic Charities of Baltimore, Esperanza Center  
[www.catholiccharities-md.org](http://www.catholiccharities-md.org), (667) 600-2941
- Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington, Immigration Legal Services  
[www.catholiccharitiesdc.org](http://www.catholiccharitiesdc.org), (202) 772-4352
- International Rescue Committee  
[www.rescue.org](http://www.rescue.org), (301) 562-8633
- NAKASEC VA  
[www.nakasec.org](http://www.nakasec.org), (703) 256-2208

As a new U.S. Citizen, we encourage you to **REGISTER TO VOTE!**  
Several of our D.C. NAC partners, CARECEN, CASA, and NAKASEC VA, also provide assistance with voter registration.