



image: azcentral

# Naturalization Information

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# Introduction

## Are you thinking of naturalizing?

Naturalization is the process immigrants go through when they become citizens of the United States. Whether you are interested in voting, don't want to keep paying to renew your green card, or want traveling outside of the U.S. to become easier, choosing to become a U.S. citizen is a big decision that will impact your life in many ways. The naturalization process can seem intimidating and scary. You might be worried about the cost, the citizenship exam, your English skills, or giving up citizenship of your home country. These are all reasonable things to be afraid of, especially with so many details that are hard to keep track of.

You may have heard that there are fee waivers to reduce the cost or that you may not have to take the English test. Additionally, you may be able to be a dual citizen and still maintain citizenship of your home country. We recognize that it is difficult to access information regarding all of these things, so this document serves as a source you can use to find accurate answers to questions you may have. If you have any other questions, you can call or visit Lafayette Urban Ministry and ask for information from the Immigration Clinic.

## Am I eligible to naturalize?

Before we go into details about the naturalization process, it is important to know whether or not you are eligible to apply to become a U.S. citizen. Factors to consider are how long you have been a permanent resident (green card holder), how much time you have spent in and outside of the U.S., and how long you have lived in your U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) district (where you live now and will apply from). The next page will outline the two most common cases, but there are also some special situations, especially related to military service or government work. If you believe you might be a special situation, you can contact LUM or access more information here:

<https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/files/article/chapter4.pdf>

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If you are a typical applicant (over 90% of applicants fit this category)

- You must be at least **18 years old**
- You must be a permanent resident for the past **5 years**
- You can not have **left the U.S. for 6 months** or longer
- You must have spent at least **30 months** of the past 5 years in the U.S.
- You must live in your USCIS district for **3 months**

If you are not a typical applicant, but are **married** to a U.S. citizen:

- You must be at least **18 years old**
- You must be currently **married and living with the citizen**
- You must be married and living with that citizen for **3 years**
- Your spouse must be a U.S. citizen for **3 years**
- You must be a permanent resident for the past **3 years**
- You can not have **left the U.S. for 6 months** or longer
- You must have spent at least **18 months** of the past 3 years in the U.S.
- You must live in you USCIS district for **3 months**

## Can my child sponsor my citizenship?

This is a common and understandable question many immigrants have. Unfortunately, the answer is **no**. Once your child, who must be a U.S. citizen, turns 21, they may sponsor your green card. You still must be a green card holder for 5 years before you can apply for citizenship.

# How much does it cost?

The application for naturalization, called the Form N-400, costs **\$725** to file. This is made up of a \$640 citizenship application fee and an \$85 background check cost.

$$\text{\$640} + \text{\$85} = \text{\$725}$$

The reason this fee exists is because the U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services (USCIS) is self-funded, meaning it does not receive money from the U.S. government. 90% of USCIS operating costs are covered by application fees

## Am I eligible for a discount or fee waiver?

There are many different reasons you might be eligible to save some money on the fee. These are the two most simple:

- If you are over 75 years old, you do not need to pay the fee for the background check (save \$85)
- If you are in the military, your whole filing fee is waived (save \$725)

USCIS gives waivers to those who can not afford the naturalization fees, as well. However, you must request a fee waiver by filing **Form I-912** (called Request for Fee Waiver) along with your citizenship application. You may also submit a written request. You are the most likely to become eligible for the fee waivers if you are receiving benefits, like TANF, SSI, LINK, and Medicaid. You are also likely to become eligible for fee waivers if your family earns less than 150% of the federal poverty level. This has to do with how many people are in your family or household. The table on the following page shows 150% of the 2018 poverty level by family/household size.

Persons in family/household	Annual income
1	\$18,210
2	\$24,690
3	\$31,170
4	\$37,650
5	\$44,130
6	\$50,610
7	\$57,090
8	\$63,570

\*\* For families with more than 8 persons, add \$6,480 per person.

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# The citizenship test

After spending time and money filling out the Form N-400, it is understandable that many immigrants who are thinking of becoming a citizen feel nervous about the citizenship exam. There are two parts to the test: a civics test and an English test. This document will outline each part of the test and whether you are able to take a simpler version of the test.

## The civics test

The civics test contains questions about U.S. history and government. A USCIS officer will ask you 10 questions from a list of 100 questions in English. You must answer 6 correctly. It will not be a multiple choice exam, but the list of 100 possible questions can be found online here: <https://www.uscis.gov/citizenship/teachers/educational-products/100-civics-questions-and-answers-mp3-audio-english-version> .

## The English test

The English test contains three parts: a speaking test, reading test, and writing test. For the speaking test, a USCIS officer will determine your speaking skills during your Form N-400 interview. If you show you generally understand the officer's questions and respond to them in a way that makes sense, you will pass this part. For the reading test, you must read one sentence correctly and show that you understand what the sentence means. You have to read the whole sentence without long pauses and you have to read all important words, but you can skip short words that do not affect the meaning. You will not fail for having an accent and you have three tries. For the writing test, you must write one sentence that is read to you. As long as you have the same meaning as what was read to you, it is okay if you have some grammar, spelling, and punctuation mistakes. You can skip short words that don't affect the meaning and you also have three tries on the writing test. Flashcards to study vocabulary for the reading and writing test can be found here: <https://www.uscis.gov/citizenship/learners/study-test> .

## Am I eligible to not take the English test?

If you are a certain age and have been a permanent resident (green card holder) for a long time, you might be eligible to not have to take the English test.

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- If you are **50 years old** or older and have been a permanent resident for **20 years**, you do not have to take the English test, or
  - If you are **55 years old** or older and have been a permanent resident for **15 years**, you do not have to take the English test.

If you do not have to take the English test for these reasons, you still have to take the civics test. However, you may take the civics test in your native language, as long as you have an interpreter that speaks your native language and English.

## Am I eligible to not take the civics test?

In most cases, you will have to take the civics test. However, if you are **65 years old** or older and have been a permanent resident for **20 years**, you can take an easier version of the civics test in your native language. You will need an interpreter that speaks your native language and English. You still need to answer 6 out of 10 questions correctly, but there are only 20 possible questions you need to study. These questions can be found here:

<https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Office%20of%20Citizenship/Citizenship%20Resource%20Center%20Site/Publications/PDFs/65-20q.pdf>

Additionally, those with physical or developmental disabilities or mental impairments that prevent them from being able to take the tests may be exempt from the English and civic test. For this, people need to submit a Medical Certification for Disability (Form N-648) with their application and have their disability authorized by a medical professional. It is important to note that people are only exempt if they can prove they wouldn't be able to take the tests without accommodations.

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# Can I be a dual citizen?

Many immigrants are concerned that when they become a U.S. citizen, they will have to give up their identity as a citizen of their home country. It is important to realize that laws are different for each country and that they change frequently, but some countries allow you to have dual citizenship. This means you can be a U.S. citizen and maintain citizenship of your home country. The following list tells whether countries with the most immigrants that come to the U.S. allow dual citizenship.

YES – allows dual citizenship	NO – does not allow dual citizenship
Mexico	India
Vietnam	China
Philippines	Korea
Dominican Republic	Cuba
Colombia	Guatemala
Ecuador	Honduras
Haiti	Indonesia
El Salvador	Saudi Arabia
Poland	Iran
Russia	Japan
Iraq	
Pakistan	
Canada	

Keep in mind, you might have to apply for dual citizenship through your home country or maintain a passport from your home country to travel there. Rules are different for each country. If you have any questions or your country was not on the list, please contact LUM for more information.

You may also visit this site for more information:

<https://corpocrat.com/2016/10/06/dualmultiple-citizenship-which-countries-permit-dual-citizenship/>

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# Why should I become a U.S. citizen?

Applying for citizenship can be expensive and time consuming. You are probably wondering why it is worth it for you to spend so much time on this process. Becoming a U.S. citizen has many benefits. This page will outline major benefits.

## Voting

Becoming a U.S. citizen means you are able to vote. This means you will get a say in who writes laws that affect your life in many ways. Many immigrants say they do not want to become citizens because they do not like current politicians, but if you naturalize, you can vote against them!

## Saving money

Although it is expensive to apply for citizenship, it is also expensive to keep renewing your green card! You must renew your green card every 10 years and it costs \$540 each time. This price also always rises. By the time you renew your green card twice, it is already cheaper to become a citizen.

## Traveling

Although you are free to travel as a permanent resident using your green card and passport of your home country, you can not leave the U.S. for long periods of time. If you do this, you might lose your permanent resident status. Once you become a U.S. citizen, you are able to leave the U.S. for extended periods of time without facing consequences as long as you have a passport! Additionally, if you have a U.S. passport, it is easy to travel to almost any country. protected by US embassies abroad

## Helping family members immigrate

Once you become a U.S. citizen, you can help your family members immigrate and obtain green cards. As a permanent resident, you can only sponsor your unmarried children or spouse and the wait time is very long. Citizens can sponsor married or unmarried children, a spouse, a fiancé, their siblings, and their parents and the wait time is much shorter.

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## Security

Once you naturalize, U.S. citizenship is good for life. Unlike your permanent resident status, your citizenship can not be revoked. If you commit a crime, you may be deported or may not be able to renew your green card. Also, if you are traveling as a permanent resident, a Customs and Border Protection Officer has the power to not allow you to enter the U.S. based on something small, like having an old photo on your ID. If you are a citizen, reentry is very easy.

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# Conclusion

We hope that this document has been able to accurately address some of your concerns. Lafayette Urban Ministry's Immigration Clinic strongly encourages you, if you are eligible, to begin your citizenship journey. Although the process is time-consuming, expensive, and intimidating, we are here to support you through every step. Please contact Lafayette Urban Ministry today so we can begin assisting you!

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# Sources

<https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/files/article/chapter4.pdf>

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<https://www.uscis.gov/citizenship/learners/study-test>

<https://www.uscis.gov/policymanual/HTML/PolicyManual-Volume12-PartE-Chapter3.html>

<https://citizenpath.com/practical-benefits-of-us-citizenship/>