

Common Questions about Naturalization

What are the requirements for naturalization?

You must:

- Be at least 18 years old
- Have been a lawful permanent resident for at least the last five years, or, if you are married to a U.S. citizen, three years (you will need a "green card:" an I-551 or I-151)
- Have been present in the U.S. for 2 & 1/2 of the past five years (or, if you are married to a U.S. citizen, 1& 1/2 of the past three years), and have not been outside the U.S. for one year or more within the last five years (or, if married to a U.S. citizen, three years)
- Have lived for at least three months in the state where you are filing your application
- Be able to speak, read, and write basic English (see "Do I need to be fluent in English," below)
- Be able to pass a U.S. history and government exam (see "Do I need to be fluent in English," below)
- Be a person of "good moral character" (this will be hard to establish if, for example, you have been convicted of certain crimes or have not paid child support or taxes)
- Take an oath of loyalty to the U.S.

What is the process?

To apply for naturalization, you must submit at least these:

- a Form N-400, Application for Naturalization
- a copy of both sides of your green card
- two color photos of you (face-on)
- a check payable to Department of Homeland Security or money order for \$725 (\$640 plus \$85 for fingerprints) to US CIS, P.O. Box 21251, Phoenix, AZ 85036

❖ The forms you need are on the [US CIS website](https://www.uscis.gov/forms):
<https://www.uscis.gov/forms>.

You can send CIS your application 90 days before you have five years of lawful permanent residence (or three years, if married to a U.S. citizen). You should

- Use certified mail
- Keep copies

After you submit your application, CIS will send you a written notice scheduling you for fingerprints. (They call it "biometrics".) Several months later, CIS will notify you about your interview date. At the interview:

- they will ask about the information on your application
- they will test you for English ability and knowledge of U.S. history and government

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- ❖ If CIS approves your application, they will schedule you to appear at a swearing in ceremony and get your certificate of naturalization.
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What if I cannot pay the fee?

You can send CIS a request for a waiver of the application fee, Form I-912, with your application. You must submit with this form proof that you are low-income (**example:** a copy of your SSI check or TANF grant).

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- ❖ Even if you get the application fee waived, you must still pay the fingerprint fee.
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Do I need to be fluent in English?

No. You should be able to answer questions about your application in English at the interview and answer the U.S. history and government questions in English. The interviewer will dictate an English sentence to you. You must be able to read and write in English.

Am I exempt from the English Requirement?

Yes, if:

- you are over **50** years old and have been a lawful permanent resident for at least **20** years

OR

- you are over **55** years old and have been a lawful permanent resident for at least **15** years by the date of your application

If the exemption applies to you:

- You may have the interview and exam conducted in your own language
- You may bring an interpreter to the interview

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- ❖ A relative cannot serve as your interpreter.
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You may also be exempt if certain physical or mental disabilities keep you from learning or being tested on English language or Civics. Your disability must be properly documented by a medical professional trained to evaluate that type of disability on CIS form N-648. You will submit this with your naturalization application, N-400.

Are the requirements the same for refugees and asylees?

Yes, although refugees and asylees are entitled to a special residence rule when applying to naturalize. **Refugees** are eligible for lawful permanent resident (LPR) status after they have been in the U.S. for a year. **Asylees** can apply for LPR status one year after the grant of their asylum status.

Under **rollback**, refugees can start counting the five years required for citizenship from the date they arrived in the U.S., instead of the date they obtained LPR status. Asylees can start counting from one year before their applications for LPR were approved. Refugees' and asylees' green cards may already list these as the date their lawful permanent resident status was granted.

How do I learn about U.S. history and government?

Many community colleges and some community-based organizations offer citizenship courses that will teach what you need to know for the exam.

If you are 65 or under: the CIS examiner will choose about ten questions from a list of 100 standard ones. This list of questions, and their answers, is available for review.

If you are over 65 and have been a lawful permanent resident for more than 20 years: You are entitled to be asked ten questions out of a list of 25. A list of these 25 questions is available for review.

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- ❖ If you do not pass the history and government exam at your first interview, you may be re-examined once without filing a new application.
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Can I take the history and government test before my interview with CIS?

No.

Does being on welfare or SSI make me ineligible to naturalize?

NO. Receiving public benefits is not, in and of itself, a bar to naturalization. It will get in the way of naturalizing only if CIS finds out that you received them through some kind of fraud. **Example:** you did not disclose all your assets while you were getting benefits.

Do I risk anything by applying for naturalization?

You may risk deportation. Even if you have a green card, the CIS may determine you are deportable, or were excludable the last time you entered the U.S., if they discover you:

- have been convicted of certain crimes
- have been out of the U.S. for too long
- helped someone enter the U.S. illegally
- made fraudulent statements to receive public assistance or immigration benefits

This is not a complete list. Have someone knowledgeable about these issues evaluate your eligibility before you apply.

Do I have to give anything up if I become a U.S. citizen?

If you become a U.S. citizen, you may have to give up citizenship in your native country. You may also have to give up property rights in your native country. Some countries will not allow ownership of property by non-citizens.

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- ❖ Many countries allow dual citizenship.
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Do my children become citizens when I do?

Yes, if they are

- under 18 LPRs
- in your legal and physical custody

Where can I get more info?

This publication has general info only. The [U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services' website, https://www.uscis.gov/](https://www.uscis.gov/), has forms, instructions, and publications.

This publication provides general information concerning your rights and responsibilities. It is not intended as a substitute for specific legal advice. This information is current as of November 2016.

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