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GUIDE TO CITIZENSHIP

NATURALIZATION

Naturalization is the process by which a lawful permanent resident (green card holder) becomes a U.S. citizen. In order to naturalize, a lawful permanent resident has to meet certain requirements.

BENEFITS OF U.S. CITIZENSHIP

- A citizen has the right to vote for elected officials at the federal, state and local levels who shape the policy of the government.
- Only a citizen has the right to hold most city, state or federal offices, and the right to hold certain federal, state and city jobs.
- Citizens can leave the U.S. and live in another country for as long as they want and travel may be easier for U.S. citizens to certain countries.
- Citizens can petition for more family members to come to the U.S. with shorter waiting lists for green card sponsorship.
- Citizens cannot be prevented from re-entering the U.S. or removed (removed or deported).
- Citizens do not have to worry about renewing their green cards every ten years.
- Citizens who retire abroad receive full Social Security benefits (whereas lawful permanent residents receive only half their benefits) and citizens may be subject to fewer restrictions on estate taxes.
- Certain countries, including Ireland and the United Kingdom, recognize "dual citizenship" permitting naturalized U.S. citizens to maintain their citizenship of birth and original passport.

- Citizens are eligible for more public benefits, such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Food Stamps, and certain types of educational scholarships and financial aid.
- In some cases, children under 18 years of age can naturalize automatically with their parents.

BASIC REQUIREMENTS FOR NATURALIZATION

1. You must be at least eighteen (18) years of age. Minor children under 18 years of age are eligible for citizenship when their parent(s) naturalize(s).
2. You have been a lawful permanent resident (green card holder) for at least **four years and nine months** *or* you are a lawful permanent resident for at least **two years and nine months** **AND** have been married to a U.S. citizen for that time period **AND** continue to be married and living with that U.S. citizen.
3. You must have been a resident of the state from which you are applying for at least three months.
4. You have "good moral character" - last five (three) years of taxes have been properly paid, males between 18-26 years old have registered for the Selective Service, no criminal record, etc.
5. You must be able to speak, read, write and understand basic English
 - *unless* you are at least fifty (50) years of age and have been a lawful permanent resident for at least twenty (20) years;
 - *or* you are at least fifty-five (55) years of age and have been a lawful permanent resident for at least fifteen (15) years;
 - *or* you have a permanent physical or developmental disability or mental impairment making it impossible for you to meet the English language requirement.
6. You must be able to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the fundamentals of U.S. history and principles of government
 - *unless* you have a permanent physical or developmental disability or mental impairment making it impossible for you to meet the civics requirement;
 - *or* you qualify for "special consideration" because you are at least sixty-five (65) years of age and have been a lawful permanent resident for at least twenty (20) years.
7. You must have been physically present in the U.S.A. for at least 30 months (2½ years) of the five years or 18 months (1½ years) of the three years you have resided in the U.S. **and** you have not left the U.S.A. for more than six months on any one trip **and** you intend to permanently reside in the U.S.

These are the basic requirements for naturalization for most applicants. Other requirements may affect you depending on individual circumstances. Also, there are exceptions and waivers for some of the naturalization requirements. Please contact us at the Emerald Isle if you have any questions or think you may be eligible.

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

You will need the following application forms and materials to apply:

1. [Form N-400](#) (09/13/13. No previous editions accepted.) (Application for Naturalization).
2. 2 color passport style photographs, 2" x 2"
3. Photocopy of alien registration card (green card), front and back.
4. \$680.00 application and fingerprint fee, by money order or personal check, payable to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, with your name, address and alien registration number on the front of the check.

5. If applying as a spouse of a U.S. citizen, a copy of your marriage license and U.S. spouse's birth certificate (if born in the U.S.) or Certificate of Naturalization (if naturalized).
6. A photocopy of USCIS [Form N-648](#) (Medical disability waiver) (12/07/12) (06/17/11 version also accepted.) completed by a psychologist or physician if you have a mental or physical disability that makes it difficult to learn English and/or take the Civics examination.

N-400 forms may be obtained in by mail by calling the USCIS Forms Hotline at (800) 870-3676, or ordered on the Internet at www.uscis.gov.

Application packets for applicants in Connecticut, New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania should be mailed "Certified Mail - Return Receipt Requested" to the following address:

USCIS
P.O. Box 660060
Dallas, TX 75266

Please contact us for the address of your regional service center if you are applying from another state not listed above or check the website at www.uscis.gov.

You may also make an appointment with EIIC and complete your citizenship application with the assistance of a trained counselor.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS - If your address changes while your application is pending, you should call the USCIS Customer Service Hotline (800-375-5283) to change your address over the phone. You may also change your address online at the USCIS website at the following link www.uscis.gov/addresschange. If the USCIS does not have your current address, you will not be able to receive timely notification of fingerprint and interview appointments, which may cause your case to be closed. Do not rely on the U.S. Post Office mail forwarding service for timely notification.

TRIPS OUTSIDE THE U.S. – You are permitted to travel outside the United States while your application is pending provided your trips are for less than six months at a time. You must maintain a permanent residence within the United States at all times. While you are away, have someone monitor your mail in case you are contacted for an appointment with the USCIS. Generally the USCIS gives at least two weeks notice before an appointment.

FINGERPRINTS

Citizenship applications are now filed without fingerprints. Instead applicants are required to submit \$85.00 in addition to the \$595.00 application fee. Applicants for naturalization who are seventy-five (75) years of age or older are exempt from the fingerprint requirement and fee.

Applicants should be notified by mail within 2-4 weeks of filing to be scheduled for fingerprinting at one of the USCIS Application Support Centers (ASC).

The ASCs in the New York metropolitan area are as follows:

Bronx	1827 Westchester Avenue Bronx, NY 10472-3017
Brooklyn	1260-1278 60th Street Brooklyn, NY 11219

Long Island	87 Bethpage Road Hicksville, NY 11801 30 Barretts Avenue Holtsville, NY 11742
Manhattan	201 West Houston Street Room #1023 New York, NY 10014-7055
Queens	27-35 Jackson Avenue Long Island City, NY 11101 153-01 Jamaica Avenue, 1st Floor Jamaica, NY 11432
Westchester	40 South Main Street Port Chester, NY 10573

Do not appear at any of these sites without an appointment. Applicants should be assigned to the ASC closest to their current address.

You must appear only at the assigned ASC at the date and time of your appointment. You may request a postponement or rescheduling of your appointment by mail. Applicants should bring photo identification and the scheduling notice received in the mail.

Fingerprints are only valid for fifteen (15) months after they are taken. It is possible that the fingerprints may expire before your application is completely processed. Therefore, applicants fingerprinted more than fifteen months ago who have not already been sworn in as U.S. citizens must be re-printed under USCIS regulations.

The USCIS will automatically notify applicants with expired fingerprints by mail to be re-printed at one of the ASCs.

INTERVIEW

In New York, it is taking around 6 months to be scheduled for a naturalization interview.

Applicants will receive a notice in the mail telling them when and where to appear for the interview and what documents they need to bring with them. If you can not make your scheduled interview, you must notify the office where your interview is scheduled by mail. Send a letter requesting that your interview be rescheduled and return a copy of the appointment notice with the letter.

During the interview the USCIS will:

1. Update and review information on the N-400 application.
2. Test your knowledge of U.S. history and government, unless you qualify for a waiver based on a disability.
3. Test for a basic ability to speak, read, write and understand English, unless you qualify for a waiver.
4. Review supporting documents including tax returns for the last five years, green card, birth certificate, passports, etc.
5. Determine your eligibility.

Applicants who fail the English and/or civics examinations have the right to be re-examined within 90 days. Those who fail a second time must start the application process all over again from the beginning. Otherwise, the INS has 120 days from the interview to grant or deny the application. The USCIS will notify successful applicants of the swearing-in ceremony usually within 1-3 months after the interview.