

# 10 things you need to know about: Naturalization

The final step of an immigrant's path to citizenship is naturalization, a process by which a foreign-born person may become a U.S. citizen after fulfilling certain criteria set by the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA).

**1 Obtain and Hold a Green Card.** In order to apply for naturalization, an applicant must first obtain a green card and hold it for at least five years. Under the current law, an individual can acquire a green card in one of four main ways: family, employment, refugee or asylum status, or the diversity visa lottery.

**2 Meet Residency Requirements.** The applicant must also fulfill a set of residency requirements, proving he or she resided in the state of application for not less than three months, was physically present in the U.S. for at least 30 months out of the preceding five years, and lived continuously in the U.S. from the date of application up to the time of naturalization.

**3 Demonstrate English Proficiency and Knowledge of U.S. History & Civics.** Applicants must also demonstrate their ability to read, write, and speak English, and pass a U.S. history and civics citizenship test. After an individual files an Application for Naturalization and pays the \$680 application fee, the application is considered by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

**4 Take the Oath of Citizenship.** The last step in the naturalization process is a ceremony before a USCIS official or a judge, during which an eligible person takes the oath of citizenship and swears allegiance to the United States. After the ceremony, the person receives a Certificate of Naturalization and may apply for a U.S. passport.

**5 Rights Afforded to Naturalized Citizens.** As a U.S. citizen, the naturalized individual has a right to vote in federal elections and run for federal office. In addition, the person can sponsor parents, siblings, and certain other relatives for green cards and become eligible for certain state and federal benefits not available to non-citizens. Naturalized citizens also cannot be deported, unless they are found to have been ineligible for naturalization at the time they applied.

**6 Responsibilities of Naturalized Citizens.** Naturalized citizens also share the responsibilities that come with U.S. citizenship, including committing to serve on a jury when called and to defend the country in military service or non-combatant service if necessary and required by law.

**7 Naturalization Rates.** Each year, about 680,000 individuals become U.S. citizens during naturalization ceremonies held across the United States and around the world (active duty military and spouses may be naturalized while deployed overseas). The number of citizens naturalized in 2014 was 654,949, following two consecutive years surpassing 700,000. In 2008, the figure exceeded 1 million, the highest level in recent years.

**8 Countries of Origin.** In 2013, most new citizens were born in Mexico (99,385), followed by India (49,897), the Philippines (43,489), the Dominican Republic (39,590), and China (35,387). In general, 70 percent of persons naturalizing in 2013 came from Asia and North America.

**9 Naturalized Citizens Concentrated in a Few States.** Overall, 75 percent of naturalized citizens resided in ten U.S. states in 2013, living mainly in California (164,792), New York (107,330), and Florida (101,773). The other states in the top ten were Texas, New Jersey, Illinois, Virginia, Massachusetts, Georgia, and Pennsylvania.

**10 Reasons for Naturalizing or Not.** On a recent survey of naturalized citizens, obtaining civil and legal rights was the number one reason provided for submitting the application and 72 percent of those specifically cited the right to vote. The survey also indicated that 26 percent of those who had chosen not to naturalize listed the language and citizenship test requirements as the main reasons driving their decision.