

Citizenship: Things to Consider Before You Apply

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There is an application fee of \$680.

For some people, it can take a long time to save up this much money. (People with very low income do not have to pay this fee. They can apply for a “fee waiver” from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). For example, if you receive SSI: Supplemental Security Income, USCIS might agree to give you a fee waiver.)



It may take many months for USCIS to process your application.

This depends on which city you live in because some USCIS offices are faster, and some are slower. It also depends on whether there are any problems with the FBI criminal record check.

You will have to go to three appointments:

- fingerprinting
- your interview, and
- the oath ceremony

You will have to find a way to get to the immigration office. For many people, this means losing a day of work each time.

Becoming a U.S. citizen may affect your citizenship in your home country.

Your home country may have rules about what U.S. citizens can and cannot do. The rules can be very different from country to country. For example, U.S. citizens are not allowed to vote, to own land, or own a business in some countries. U.S. citizens have to apply for a visa

from some countries each time they travel back to visit their families. On the other hand, some countries allow you to consider yourself a citizen of both the U.S. and the home country. To learn more, ask about “dual citizenship” at your country’s consulate.

You will have to make a promise to serve in the U.S. military if the law requires it.

This is not likely to happen, but if the U.S. had a war against your home country, you would have to fight on the side of the U.S. This is part of the promise you make when you take the U.S. Oath of Citizenship.

If you don’t meet all of the qualifications for citizenship, your application can be denied.

If this happens, the time and money you spent on your application will be wasted, and you cannot become a citizen unless you apply all over again. For example, if you cannot show that you speak, read, and write English, your application will be denied. USCIS will also check to see whether you have lived continuously in the U.S., whether you owe any money for taxes or child support, and whether you lied on your green card application. If there are any problems like these in your application, it may be denied. To learn more about qualification for citizenship, download a free copy of *A Guide to Naturalization* from <http://www.uscis.gov/files/article/M-476.pdf>.

USCIS checks to see if you have ever had a problem with the police or the courts.

If you have a criminal record, it is possible that your application will be denied. But even worse, if USCIS thinks this criminal record is serious, you could be deported (sent back your home country).

Remember—if you have ever been convicted of a crime, it is very important to check with an immigration expert before you apply for citizenship—even if:

- you think the crime was not very serious
- the conviction happened a long time ago
- the record was “expunged,” or “erased”
- you did not have to spend any time in jail
- the conviction happened in another country

USCIS may take some crimes more seriously than you expect them to. If there is an “aggravated felony” in your record, they are required to begin deportation proceedings against you. Even if a crime is not an “aggravated felony,” USCIS may decide that you don’t qualify for citizenship, and your application may be denied. It sometimes depends on how the law is written in your particular state, and this is one reason why it is important to have a legal expert look over your case before you send in an application.