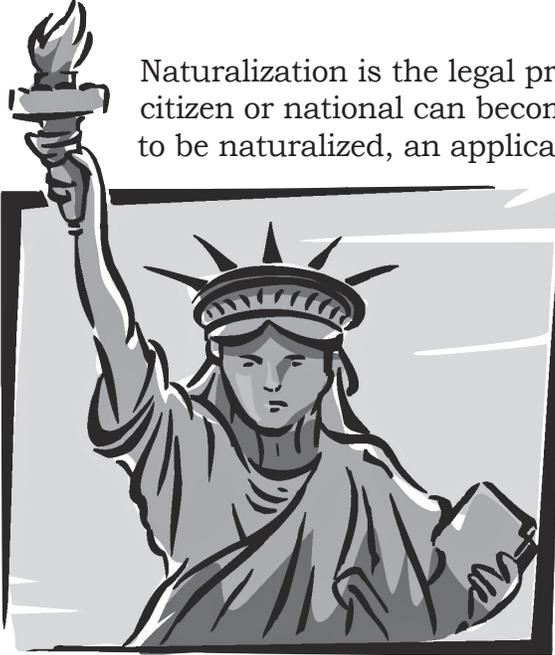


# The Naturalization Process



Naturalization is the legal process through which a foreign citizen or national can become a United States citizen. In order to be naturalized, an applicant must first be qualified to apply for citizenship. Then, he or she must complete an application, attend an interview, and pass an English and a civics test. Upon successful completion of these steps, the applicant takes an oath of loyalty, and becomes a citizen. These legal requirements help the immigration service ensure that only those people who are sincere in their desire to become Americans become naturalized.

## **Who is Eligible?**

The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) states that applicants for naturalization must be:

- *At least eighteen years old.*
- *A lawful permanent resident of the United States.*
- *Resident and physically present in the United States for at least five years at the time of application.*
- *Of good moral character.*

The residency requirement has some exceptions for time outside the country that your attorney can explain in detail. The USCIS also provides a Naturalization Eligibility Worksheet that helps potential applicants determine if they are able to apply. Your most important resource is an experienced immigration attorney, who can prepare your application and coach you through test and interview preparation.

If you meet these requirements, you may apply for naturalization. The government provides a range of publications to explain the naturalization process in detail. A Guide to Naturalization, available through the USCIS, may be a useful starting point for your inquiries.

## **Completing Your Application**

Working with your attorney, you must:

- *Complete Form N-400, Application for Naturalization.*
- *Get two photographs of yourself that meet immigration service requirements (pose, size, lighting, etc.).*
- *Collect the necessary documents.*
- *Send your application, documents and fee (\$320 application fee/ \$70 biometric fee for fingerprinting as of August 2004) to the appropriate Service Center.*

## **Getting Fingerprinted**

As part of your application, you will be fingerprinted. You will:

- *Receive an appointment letter from the USCIS.*
- *Go to the fingerprint location.*
- *Get your fingerprints taken.*
- *Mail additional documents if requested.*

This security step ensures that no fraud is perpetrated on the USCIS.

## **Being Interviewed and Tested**

- *The next step is the big one: the interview and tests. You will:*
- *Receive an appointment for your interview.*
- *Go to your local office at the specified time.*
- *Bring identification.*
- *Answer questions about your application and your background.*
- *Take the English and civics tests.*
- *Receive a decision.*

## **Taking the Oath of Allegiance**

If you are successful, you can take the final step: the oath of allegiance. You will:

- *Receive a ceremony date.*
- *Check in at the ceremony.*
- *Return your Permanent Resident Card.*
- *Answer questions about what you have been doing since your interview.*
- *Take the oath of allegiance.*