



INFORMATION ON GREEN CARDS AND CITIZENSHIP FOR CO-SPONSORED CLIENTS

IRIS's Immigration Legal Services Department provides low- and no-cost legal services to IRIS's resettled clients, including permanent resident (green card) and naturalization (citizenship) applications.

Case Initiation

To begin a case with IRIS Legal, send an email to LegalIntakes@irisct.org. IRIS Legal addresses and processes applications in the order they are requested and according to their relative priority. For example, some types of applications (such as applications for green cards) are of a higher priority than applications for citizenship. Depending on client demand, staffing, and case priorities, there is sometimes a wait list for certain legal services.

When IRIS Legal learns of a new case, staff will contact clients as soon as possible, depending on the case's priority and/or particular circumstances. This communication may be via email, phone call, and/or in-person meetings. Sometimes it will be through a client's case manager or Co-Sponsor, depending on what is most effective.

IRIS Legal will give clients a checklist of documents and information to gather for their specific applications. The client should begin gathering the documents and materials in advance of meeting with a IRIS attorney. Without the client's earnest participation and preparation, cases are inevitably delayed. ***Often, immigration forms change and old forms are no longer accepted. If clients do not pursue their cases, outdated forms may have to be re-drafted from scratch**.

GREEN CARDS

- By law, every refugee resettled by the U.S. government must apply for a green card. Each individual in a family group must submit his or her own application, even children and infants.
- Clients may begin the green card application process on the 91st day after their arrival by contacting IRIS's Immigration Legal Services at LegalIntakes@irisct.org. Co-sponsors may assist clients with contacting IRIS Legal or may contact IRIS Legal on a client's behalf.
- Co-sponsors may not participate in meetings between clients and their attorney. Additionally, clients must bring their own interpreter, if interpretation is needed. Given the sensitive nature of

events that must be recounted during the meeting, children should not be present during the appointment. Co-sponsors may be of great assistance in facilitating transportation to and childcare during meetings.

- The green card process requires that a Form I-693 Report of Immigration Medical Examination and Vaccination Record be completed by a U.S.C.I.S-designated civil surgeon. The attorney will be able to provide additional information regarding these forms.

Fees: USCIS waives green card application fees for refugees. IRIS Legal charges \$25 per application. Civil surgeon fees for completing the Form I-693 vary, but in most cases range from \$75-\$250 per person.

Government Timeframe: The green card application process can take up to **3 years** after submission of the application. Clients should anticipate the green card application process being a long one.

Questions: Please do not contact your community sponsor coach with questions about green cards – such questions should be addressed to IRIS attorneys.

CITIZENSHIP

- Permanent residents are not required to apply for citizenship. However, there are important benefits and privileges associated with citizenship, and IRIS Legal strongly encourages all refugee clients to work towards naturalization. By law, a refugee (who has become a permanent resident—a required first step) may become a citizen five years after being admitted to the U.S. if he or she meets all eligibility requirements. Children who are under age eighteen and in the physical custody of a parent at the time her or she naturalizes *do not* need to apply for citizenship, they automatically become U.S. citizens at the time their parent does.
- IRIS Clients may contact IRIS Legal to schedule an appointment to begin the citizenship process up to 4 months prior to the 5-year anniversary of their arrival in the US. To schedule an appointment, contact the legal department at legalintakes@irisct.org. *IRIS Legal does not offer services to individuals who have been in the U.S. for more than 8 years.*
- Naturalization requires English language skills in the areas of speaking, comprehension, reading, and writing.¹ Each client must be able to speak and comprehend English with a level of proficiency such that they can carry on a casual conversation with the immigration officer, as well as discuss the details of their personal history from memory. Additionally, clients must also have the ability to read and write 100 words in English. They will be tested on this. Their language skills need not be perfect, but they must be good. They must pass these tests without assistance from anyone. No family members or interpreters are permitted inside the interview room.² IRIS attorneys will only work with clients who are able to demonstrate adequate English

¹ Clients with significant medical conditions or older clients who have had their green card for more than 15 years may qualify for one or more exception. These rules and regulations should be discussed with an attorney.

² Id.

language skills at the time that they begin the application process.³ If a client cannot read or write English well, or needs to work on conversation or comprehension, then they should *not* contact our office until after they have spent time improving their skills. *It is important for clients to know these requirements and to know that IRIS Legal will first assess their English language ability before accepting them as clients.*

- Naturalization requires that clients pass a simple U.S. civics and history test. Clients must learn 100 civics questions to pass their citizenship interview. IRIS Legal strongly recommends that clients *do not* start studying these questions now, but rather focus on their English language skills, including practicing conversation. The civics questions should be the last stage in the preparation process. Clients can start studying those *after* the application is actually submitted.

Fees. USCIS charges \$725 for citizenship applications. A fee waiver or partial waiver is available for this application, depending on the client's income level. IRIS Legal charges \$100 per application.

Government Timeframe. The citizenship process can take up to 1 year after submission of the application due to USCIS processing times. This timeframe could be delayed due to the high volume of applicants. Clients should anticipate the citizenship process being a long one.

Clients Who Have Already Contacted IRIS. If you know of clients who do not have English language skills, but have already contacted IRIS Legal and been put on a citizenship application waitlist, please let the legal office know. This information can assist the legal department in managing its work flow. If you know of clients who have some level of English acquisition, but you cannot assess their skill level, IRIS Legal will do so. If IRIS Legal decides their skills are not yet at the requisite level, we will recommend that they keep studying and/or take a class and then contact IRIS again after 6 months for a reassessment.

Study Materials for the Naturalization Tests

Studying for the naturalization test is critical to successfully achieving U.S. citizenship. To help you prepare, USCIS provides study materials for each component of the exam, including the English test and the civics test. Here are links to those study materials:

³ Id.

Civics/History Exam

<https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/questions-and-answers/100q.pdf>

Reading Vocabulary

https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/guides/reading_vocab.pdf

Writing Vocabulary

https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/guides/writing_vocab.pdf