



The FindLaw Guide to Applying For Your Green Card



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A green card is an immigrant visa for permanent legal residency that allows a foreign national to live and work in the United States for an indefinite period of time. Here, you will learn about eligibility for a green card and the process to obtain one.

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Introduction

A United States Permanent Resident Card (or “green card”) is an identification card that shows that the non-citizen cardholder is a permanent resident of the U.S. A green card proves that the permanent resident has been granted benefits, including permission to live and work in the U.S. The cardholder must meet certain conditions and must file timely green card renewals in order to continue his or her permanent residency status. Otherwise, the green cardholder can be removed from the USA.

Green cards are an essential tool for non-citizens who want to work and live in the USA. The application can be tedious, though, and that’s where FindLaw and its directory of attorneys may be of help.

Who May Obtain a Green Card

Only certain categories of applicants are eligible for a green card. Those generally include:

- Immediate relatives of U.S. citizens. These relatives have a pretty speedy green card process, and they can obtain a green card as soon as they file all of the paperwork. Relatives who qualify under this category generally include spouses of U.S. citizens, unmarried children under age 21, stepchildren, stepparents, and adopted children.
- Other family members of citizens and permanent residents. Extended family members are eligible to file a green card application, but it takes a bit longer than it does for the immediate relatives. This category of applicants is usually awarded a green card on a first come, first served basis. The wait in this category can be lengthy, varying from three to even twenty-four years.
- Green card lotteries that create ethnic diversity. Green card lotteries whose purpose is to create ethnic diversity make several thousand green cards available to non-citizens from countries that have had the fewest immigrants come to the U.S.
- Asylum and refuge. Asylum and refuge are available to those non-citizens who fear that living in their native country would threaten their safety or subject them to persecution. This persecution must be based on a protected category such as race, nationality, religion, political stance, or affiliation with a certain group.

These are just some of the common categories of applicants eligible to receive a green card. To learn more, visit our page on [green card eligibility](#).

Submitting a Visa Petition

The first step towards obtaining a green card is to have someone sponsor you. This could be a family member who is a U.S. citizen or a U.S. employer who wants to work for them. After filing the petition, your sponsor is known as the “petitioner” and you become a “beneficiary”.



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If your petition is approved, you will be placed on a waiting list. Some categories of immigrants only receive a certain amount of green cards per year, so establishing your place in line is extremely important. Other categories of immigrants, such as close relatives don't typically have limits on the amount of green cards offered so they can receive them as soon as their applicants are processed and approved.

It is very important to follow all the steps of the visa petition process. If you have questions about the petition, or the [adjustment of status process](#), you may want to talk to an attorney.

Green Card Process

The process of obtaining a green card can be time consuming and complicated. Not all foreign individuals are eligible to work in the United States, but if you are, these steps can help your process run smoothly:

- Follow the instructions on your immigration forms and applications exactly. Omissions and errors can lead to very long delays.
- Attach all the documents called for in the forms and provide appropriate translations where necessary. Petitions may not be processed if requested documents are missing.
- Call your local USCIS office, or visit the office personally if you have questions.
- Request an interpreter if you have trouble understanding English. Many USCIS offices have interpreters on hand. To be safe, you may want to bring your own interpreter to an interview.
- Hire an immigration attorney if you have been previously denied entry to the United States, deported, convicted of a crime, made misrepresentations to the USCIS, overstayed a visa, or are currently in the country illegally.
- Be honest on forms and when talking to immigration officials.

Visit our site to learn more about the [dos and don'ts of the green card process](#) and [frequently asked questions related to the green card marriage interview](#).

STOP

Should I Talk to an Attorney?

If you are applying for a green card for entry into the U.S., it is probably a good idea to talk to an immigration attorney. Immigration laws change rapidly as do procedures and standards. An experienced immigration attorney knows how to deal with these changes, as well as the government officials who will handle your application. Many potential immigrants have had petitions rejected because of technicalities and failure to understand the complexities of U.S. immigration law. An immigration attorney can help avoid those problems.

You can locate an experienced immigration attorney in your area by visiting [our directory of attorneys](#).

For More Information

Regarding green cards and the immigration process, please visit <http://immigration.findlaw.com/visas/green-card/>

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