

FAQ about Green Cards: “I’m Approved. What’s Next?”

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*This material is not intended to substitute as legal advice.

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FAQ after Receiving Your Green Card

Congratulations! You've successfully completed a long and challenging process. Finally, you have a green card. You're a lawful permanent resident. But now what?

Here are answers to the top questions we receive about your important new legal status.

1. What are the next steps I should take?

Below is an outline of what you should do now that you have your green card. Several of these steps are explained in more detail in sections below.

- Update your Social Security card to remove the restrictive language.
- Update your driver's license, as per your state's policy.
- Inform your banks, insurance providers, and mortgage lender about your residency status. In some states/cities, you may be eligible for lower rates after getting your green card.
- Let your employer know that you now have a green card, so they can update your Form I-9, Employment Eligibility Verification, accordingly.
- Make one or more color copies (front and back) of your green card. Keep them in a very safe place. Do the same for all family members, if applicable.
- Send your immigration attorney a color copy of your card. We're always thrilled to see our clients' cards!

2. Can I apply for an unrestricted Social Security card?

Yes. Now that you are a legal permanent resident you can apply for an unrestricted Social Security card. To apply, visit the [Social Security Agency's website](#) or call 1-800-772-1213 (TTY 1-800-325-0778).

You may already have a *restricted* Social Security card as a result of your nonimmigrant status. If that is the case, you should contact the Social Security Administration to apply for an unrestricted card. This process should be easy and involves demonstrating that you are now a green card holder.

3. How do I update my driver's license?

Each state maintains different policies, but in general, you need to provide some or all of the following documents:

- Your current driver's license
- Your green card
- Your updated Social Security card and
- Proof of current residence

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4. Do I need to inform USCIS if I change my address?

Yes. As a lawful permanent resident, you are required to file an address change notification within 10 days of moving to a new address. This is a *very important* obligation, but it is easy to file the required form.

To submit an address change notification, it is best if you notify USCIS electronically. You can simply [file the notification online here](#).

5. Are there changes to my tax requirements?

There might be. You should consult a tax lawyer or CPA who has experience working with foreign nationals and foreign income.

As a green card holder, you will be required to file U.S. federal income tax returns. You may be responsible for state income tax depending on your state of residence and required to report income earned in the U.S. and other countries.

Failing to file income tax returns can be a crime – and can prevent you from becoming a U.S. citizen.

6. What restrictions do I have that U.S. citizens don't have?

Lawful permanent residents have many of the same rights as citizens, but you also have some restrictions that do not apply to U.S. citizens.

These limitations include:

- You cannot vote or register to vote in federal elections. (You may be allowed to vote in local elections depending on the laws in your city, but be extremely careful to check.)
- You cannot apply for a U.S. passport.

7. How do I travel abroad? Are there restrictions to my travel?

As a green card holder, you can travel in and out of the U.S. using your valid foreign passport and your green card. The length and the purpose of your travel is very important to consider.

Length of trip.

If you plan to spend more than six months abroad, you should apply for a re-entry permit. This permit may be valid for up to two years.

Purpose of trip.

As a green card holder, you are expected to make the U.S. your residence. You can be found to have abandoned your U.S. residency if you take actions that indicate your intention to live elsewhere.

These actions include:

- The amount of time you spend abroad vs. in the U.S.
- Where you are currently working
- Whether your trips abroad are temporary in purpose
- Your ties to the U.S.
- Whether you have a home in the U.S.
- Whether you have been paying U.S. taxes

If you plan to spend six months or longer abroad, you should consult with an immigration attorney before you leave.

8. I received a conditional residence valid for two years. What does that mean?

Employment-based green cards are typically valid for 10 years. Family-based green cards from marriage to a U.S. citizen are typically valid for two years and are conditional on your valid good faith marriage.

A conditional resident has all the rights of other lawful permanent residents – with one very important exception. Conditional residents are required to file an I-751 petition to maintain their resident status. This petition needs to be filed in the 90 days before the expiration of your two-year green card.

Filing the I-751 petition is extremely important. If you don't file it within the required time, then you are considered deportable. So right now, go mark your calendar. Set an email reminder. Do whatever you need to remember this deadline!

9. When can I apply for U.S. citizenship?

Most green card holders need to wait five years before applying for U.S. citizenship. For those who obtained their green card through marriage to a U.S. Citizen, the waiting period is generally three years.

The Form N-400, Application for Naturalization, may be filed in the 90-day window just before the end of the waiting period.

10. How can I prepare to apply for U.S. citizenship?

Here are a few of the important requirements to apply for citizenship including:

Physical Presence Requirement

At the time you file your [N-400 application](#), you are required to fulfill a physical presence requirement.

For most applicants, you need to show that you have been physically present in the U.S. for at least 30 of the past 60 months. If you obtained your green card through marriage, you are required to have been in the U.S. for 18 of the previous 36 months prior to applying.

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Continuous Residence Requirement

For purposes of a naturalization application, “residence” is different than “physical presence.” To be eligible for naturalization, you must be a permanent resident for at least five years, and you must not have interrupted your status as resident of the U.S.

The rule is that a departure of less than six months does not break residence. A departure of more than six months but less than one year generally breaks your residence. You also must have lived at least three months in the state or USCIS district where you apply for citizenship.

English Proficiency

You must be able to read, write, and speak basic English. You will be required to pass a test. You can find study materials on the USCIS site [here](#).

Civics Requirement

You must have a basic understanding of U.S. history and government. Again, you can find study materials on the USCIS site [here](#).

Don’t let the tests scare you away from seeking U.S. citizenship. According to [USCIS](#), the overall national pass rate is 91%.

For additional information or to learn about how our Immigration Team may assist your business, please contact us via email: immigrationteam@marksgray.com.