



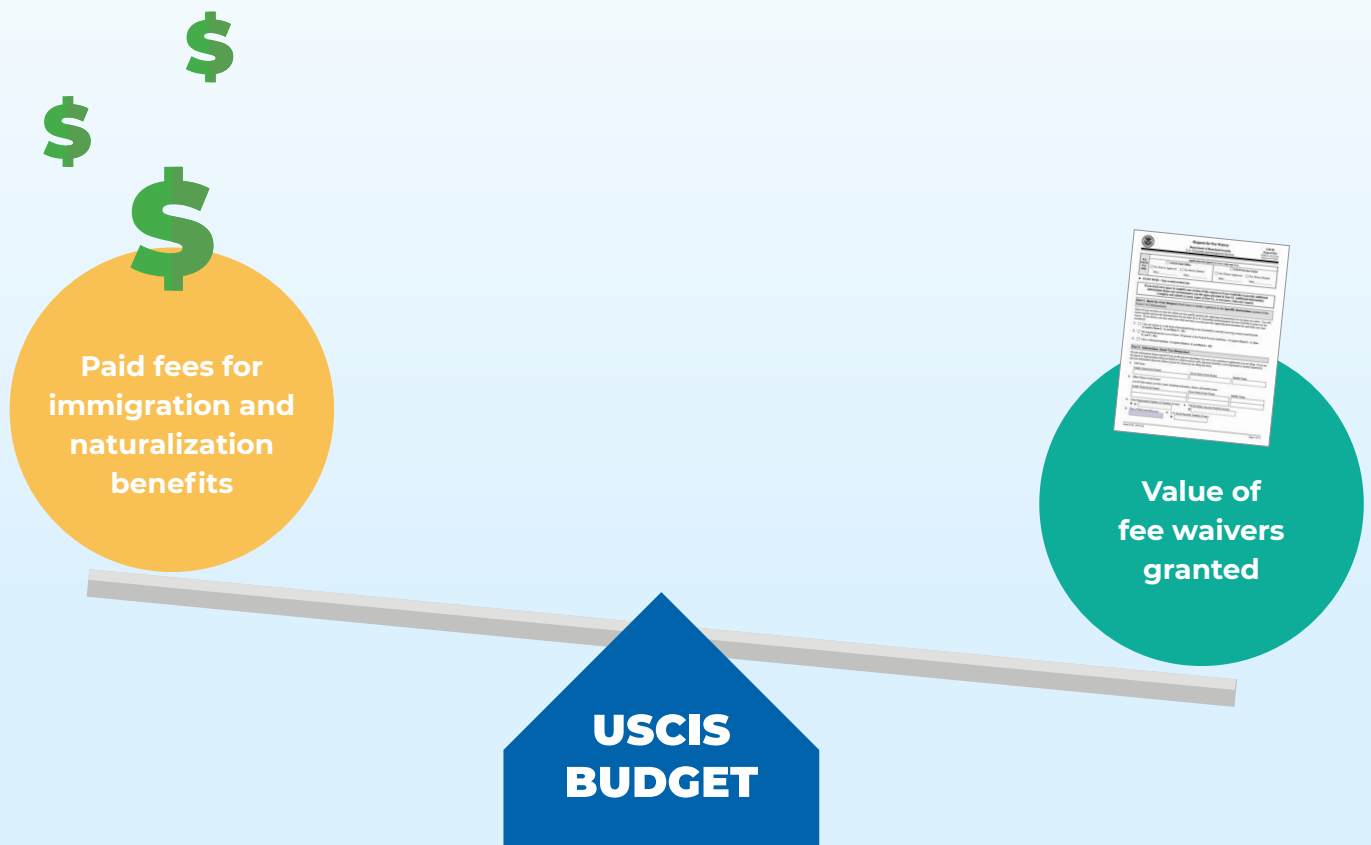
Making Citizenship Affordable

When and Why Does USCIS Waive Fees?

What are Fee Waivers?

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) offers waivers of application fees normally charged to people seeking immigration or naturalization benefits, on a case by case basis.

Immigration and naturalization services are funded through fees, not taxpayer dollars. The agency makes up for fee waiver grants by calibrating fees it charges applicants with the means to pay.



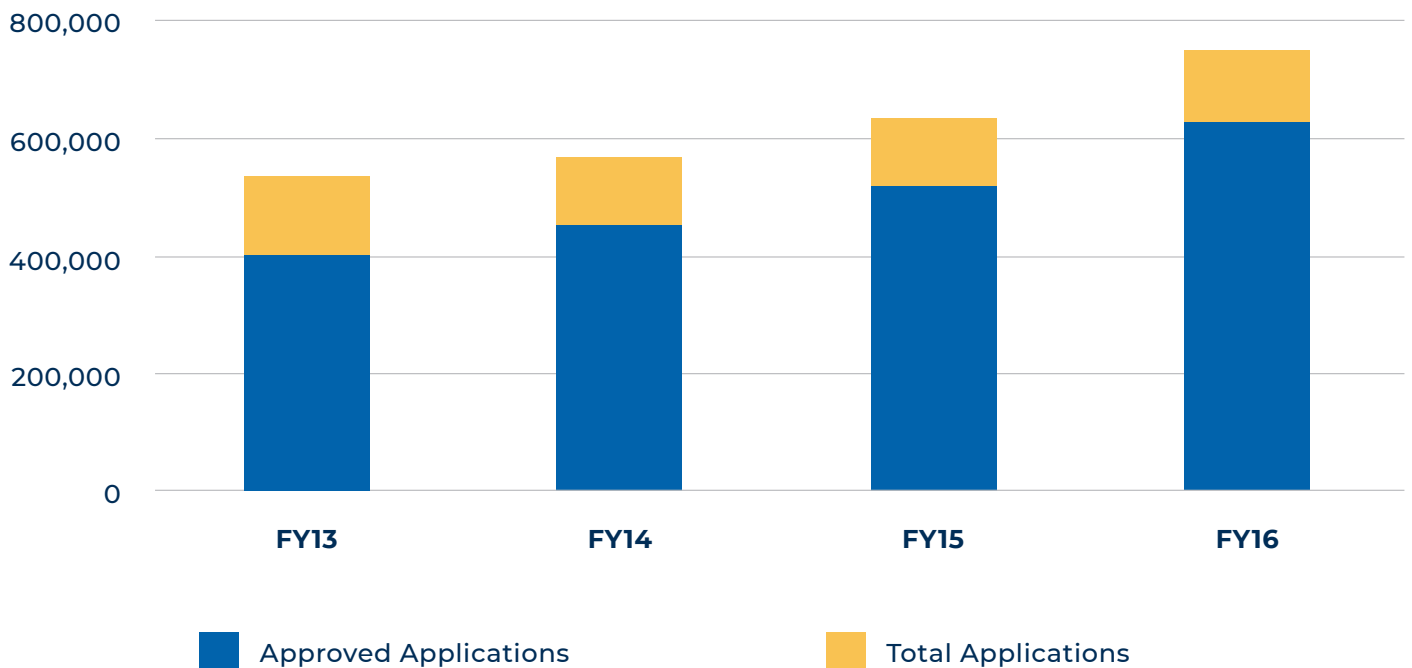
When and Why Are Fee Waivers Offered?

Fee waivers are only available in special cases, where the public interest lies in ensuring that people can apply for immigration and naturalization benefits even if they cannot afford application fees. Examples of people eligible for fee waivers include:

- Afghan and Iraqi nationals who worked for the U.S. government in their home countries;
- Children who derive U.S. citizenship when their parents naturalize; and
- Refugees, asylees, and victims of domestic violence and/or trafficking who seek documentation of their eligibility to work in the United States.

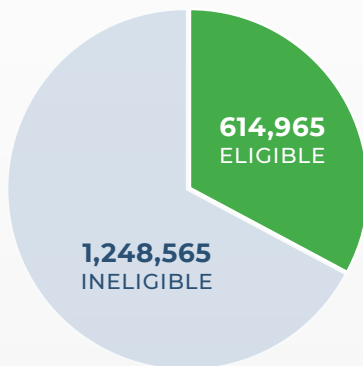
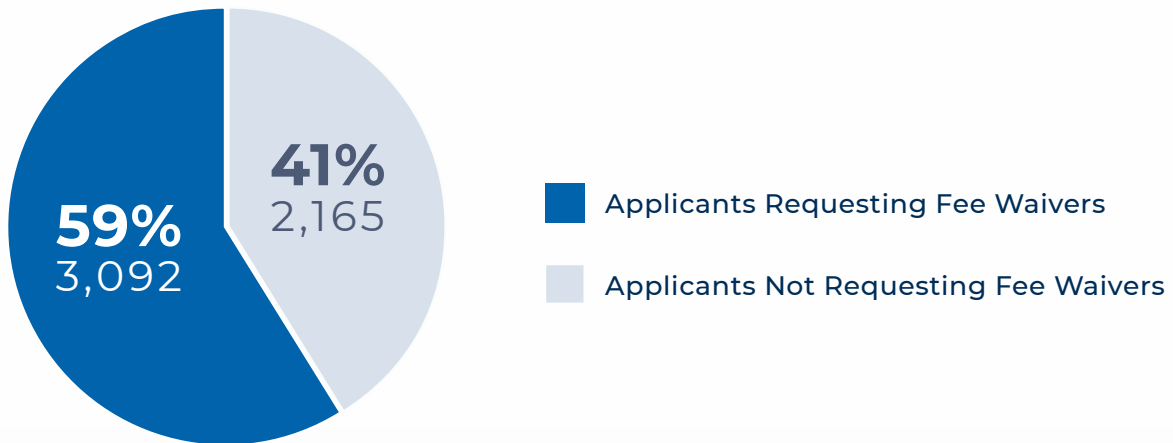
Hundreds of thousands of people benefit from fee waivers in an average year.

Historical Fee Waiver Requests and Approvals

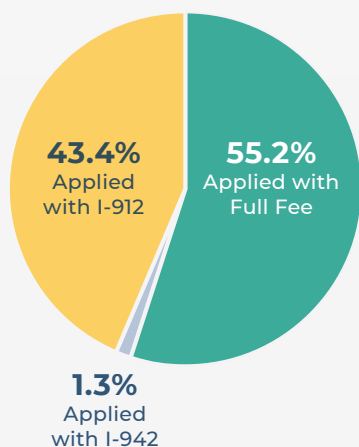


Applications for naturalization account for a significant number of fee waiver requests.

International Rescue Committee Naturalization Clients in a Representative Year



The **Cities for Citizenship** coalition estimated in 2015 that **33 percent** of all residents eligible to naturalize in 21 cities selected for study were also eligible for fee waivers.



In a typical year, **more than 40 percent** of the tens of thousands of naturalization applications prepared with assistance from **New Americans Campaign** partners include fee waiver requests.

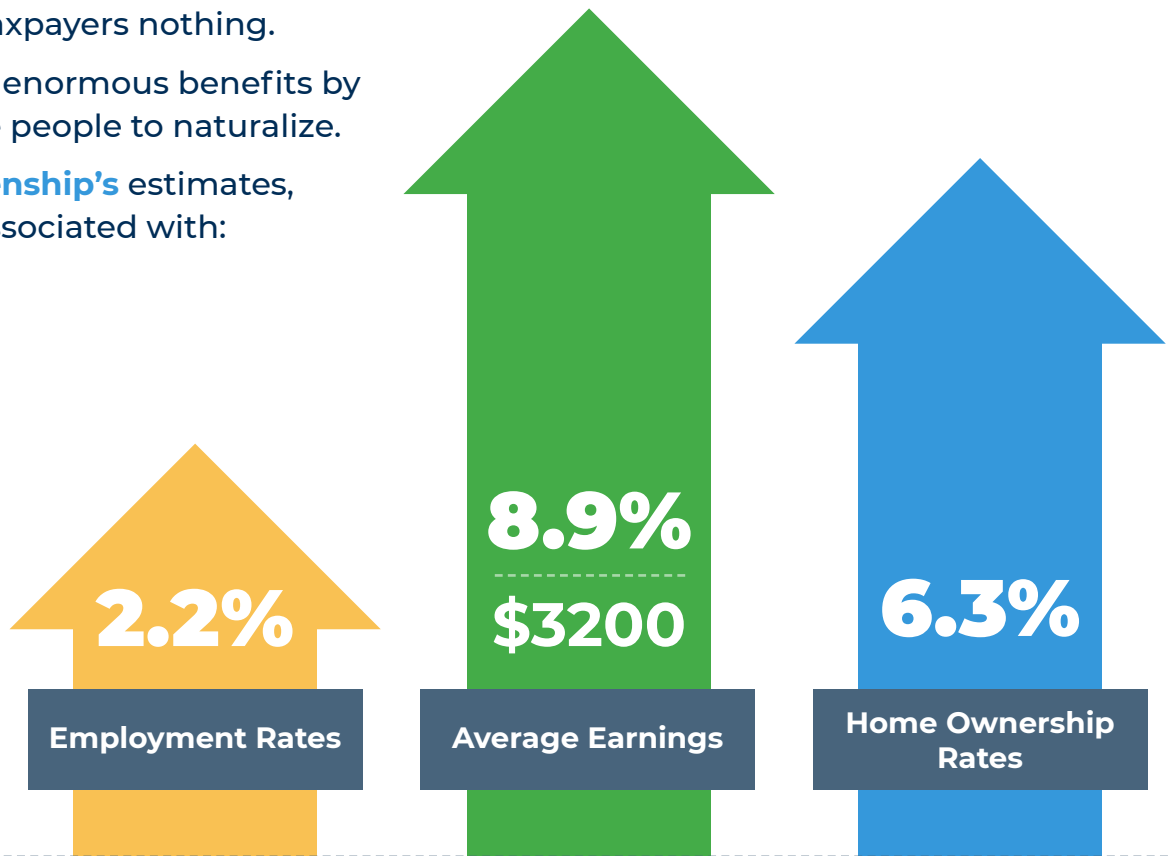
How NAC Applicants Pay the Naturalization Fee
Data from the past 5 years (April 2014 - March 2019)

What Are the Costs and Benefits of Fee Waivers?

Fee waivers cost taxpayers nothing.

But they generate enormous benefits by encouraging more people to naturalize.

By **Cities for Citizenship's** estimates, naturalization is associated with:



\$789 million more in federal tax revenue if all eligible NYC residents naturalized; plus **\$34 million decrease** in public benefits payments.



A fee waiver recipient's story

Giannina Diaz Coello

[View Source](#)

IN 2007, MY CHILDREN – who were 2, 5 and 7 years old at the time – and I made the journey from our home in Peru to Maryland. I knew it was the best thing for my children, but it was still hard to leave my hometown, especially my family and friends. Within only a few weeks, I got a job helping elderly patients at a nursing home and my kids started at a good school. I will also always remember how warmly the people in our community welcomed us. I had just left everything and everyone I knew thousands of miles away, so feeling welcome in my new community made me feel a little less alone.

Despite how optimistic I was when we first arrived, we barely scraped by. My job paid minimum wage and I saw firsthand how expensive it was to live a short drive away from the nation's capital. I was happy when I finally landed a job as a stocker at Target because it paid much better than my job at the nursing home, which made it easier to support my family. But I was also sad because I had to work the night shift, which meant my children and I were on different schedules. For nine years they would either come home from school while I was getting ready for work, or I would come home from work while they were getting ready for school. They were growing up and I couldn't even watch it happen.

I knew I needed a new job so I could have more time with my children, but I also knew my options as a green card holder were limited. That's why I started to think about applying for citizenship. I knew many immigrants like myself who were able to qualify for better jobs after becoming citizens.

Even though I knew it was the right decision to apply for citizenship, I had two big concerns. First, I knew pulling together the extra money to file the application would be difficult. I was really worried my broken English wouldn't be enough for me to pass the interview. Luckily, I heard about citizenship classes being offered by a local organization called Community Ministries of Rockville and decided to sign up. During the first class, volunteers went through the entire application process with an attorney from the Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center (APALRC) named Linda Vuong. Linda eventually helped me fill out my application and investigate if my income level qualified me for an application fee waiver (it did!). Linda regularly checked up on me once my application was filed. When I passed the civics test on my first try, I called her immediately. I was so relieved and I wanted her to know that I couldn't have done it without her words of encouragement.

Thanks to APALRC, I officially became a U.S. citizen in December 2016. Looking back at my experience, I realize I should not have been worried about applying. If anything, I should have applied sooner! It's incredible to think about the opportunities that are available to me now that I'm a citizen – like access to better paying jobs, the ability to vote and to travel freely to and from the United States.