

Citizenship Defined

A citizen is an individual that is legally recognized as a participating member of a political community such as a state, country, or local government. Citizenship of countries is most often acquired by birth, but can also be obtained by a process called naturalization, which requires meeting the legal requirements of the country's government.

There are four ways that a person can become a U.S. citizen. The first, and most common, is to be born to parents who are U.S. citizens, even if you are not born in the United States. Another way is naturalization, which requires applying to the U.S. government for citizenship. A third way is to marry a U.S. citizen and then apply for naturalization. A fourth way is to serve honorably in the U.S. military prior to applying for naturalization.



Citizenship confers many benefits. U.S. citizens all enjoy certain rights, like the right to a fair trial by jury, the right to vote for their political representatives, the right to work for the federal government, and the right to run for elected office. U.S. citizens have freedom of speech, and the freedom to worship in whatever way they choose. U.S. citizens can also apply for help at U.S. embassies if they run into trouble in a foreign country.

Citizens also have responsibilities to their country. They are expected to support and defend the Constitution, participate in the democratic process, obey laws, respect the rights, beliefs, and opinions of others, and to pay income taxes. Citizens are expected to be informed about what is going on in their community and their country, and to participate, when needed. U.S. citizens are also expected to serve on a jury when called upon. Lastly, citizens are expected to help defend the country when needed, by serving in the military if necessary.