

Diversity Visa Lottery Green Card

Each October, the U.S. Department of State hosts what is called the Diversity Visa Lottery. There are 50,000 winners, and each of them receives an immigrant visa. The lottery aims to diversify the immigrant population by selecting applicants from countries with low numbers of immigrants to the United States. **It is really important to understand that an immigrant visa alone is NOT a green card or lawful permanent residency!** An immigrant visa is just the first step in getting a green card or lawful permanent residency.

The Diversity Visa Lottery

Who Can Apply?

Each year, the U.S. Department of State releases a list of countries whose citizens are eligible to apply for the [Diversity Visa Lottery](#). Since the purpose of the lottery is to diversify the countries from where the United States receives immigrants, countries from where we receive many immigrants will not appear on this list.

In 2018, the only country in North America whose citizens could apply for the diversity visa lottery was the Bahamas. But citizens from some countries you might not expect to see could apply for the Diversity Visa Lottery. For example, citizens from Guatemala, Nicaragua, Somalia, Ethiopia and Burma could all apply.

Avoid Deportation

Don't automatically send in your green card application just because you won the lottery. A mistake in your green card application could send you to deportation. Therefore, DO NOT mail an application for a green card to Immigration unless you know **with certainty** that you qualify for it. Applying for a green card requires you to share your name, home address, work address, phone number, and digital scans of your fingerprints and your face. All of these identifiers make you

easy to find if you are deportable. There are many people who may win the diversity visa lottery but do not personally qualify for green cards.

As always, it's important to talk to a competent immigration attorney before sending anything to Immigration. Remember, getting a green card, or lawful permanent residency, is always a two-step process. Learn more about this process in our Green Cards article.

Personal Requirements

1. Birth or Marriage

Birth

You are eligible to apply for an Immigrant visa in the Diversity Visa Lottery if you were born in one of the eligible countries. If you were not born in one of the eligible countries, you may still apply if:

- One of your parents was born in an eligible country, **AND**
- Your parents were not born in or lawfully within your country of birth when you were born.

This can be complicated. Please speak to a knowledgeable attorney before applying for the Diversity Visa Lottery using this exemption.

Example: Let's say your parents were born in the Bahamas, but then moved to Canada without getting a legal status. If your mother gave birth to you while they were unlawfully living in Canada, you could still apply for the Diversity Visa Lottery. You would apply through your parents' Bahamian citizenship.

Marriage

If you are married, either you or your spouse must come from [one of the eligible countries](#). However, if you are relying on your spouse's eligibility, then you both must come to the United States at the same time.

2. Education or Work Experience

Diversity Visa Lottery applicants **must have** one of two accomplishments to meet the education or work requirement:

- A high school diploma or the equivalent of graduating high school, OR
- Two years of work experience within the past five years in an occupation that requires at least two years of training or experience to perform, such as plumbing or electrical.

How to Apply

It's Free and Online

The U.S. Department of State opens an online application in early October and closes it in early November. The application is free, but you may submit only one. The Department of State will cancel any applications from someone they believe has submitted more than one. Complete instructions can be found in a number of languages at [USCIS.gov](https://uscis.gov).

The Diversity Visa Lottery website gets really busy right before the deadline to apply in early November. You should not wait until the last minute because the website might jam, you might not have all your materials, or you might run into other problems. Once you know that you qualify, submit your application as early as possible.

You will be notified if you are chosen as a lottery winner. Once you've received that notification, you can apply for your green card, or lawful permanent residency. There is a process called "consular processing" for those who are abroad, and a separate process called "adjustment of status" for those who are already in the United States.

Civil Documents by Country

The U.S. Department of State provides a list of acceptable documents on their website for each country that has a relationship with the United States. For example, if you are looking for what documents you need to prove a marriage, start by selecting your country and then scroll until you see the marriage certificate section. There you will find the documentation you need to give U.S. Immigration that is specific to your country. This resource can also be helpful if you need to find out how to get a copy of a divorce, birth, adoption, or death certificate from your home

country.

Applying from Within the United States

Usually, to get a green card from within the United States, you have to enter the United States lawfully and still be here lawfully. This applies for people trying to get green cards through the Diversity Visa Lottery. For example, if you entered the United States through a student visa or had advanced parole as a DACA recipient, you may be eligible to apply if you are still here lawfully.

If you entered the United States unlawfully or if you have been in the United States unlawfully for any period of time, talk to an immigration attorney before sending in a green card application based on having won the lottery. You might not be able to get a green card. You will also have problems if you have certain criminal convictions. Talk to a competent immigration attorney. The last thing you want is an invitation to your deportation hearing.

Frequently Asked Questions

Last updated on July 09, 2025.

How often can I apply for the Diversity Visa Lottery?

You can apply for the diversity visa lottery only once during each application period. If you try to put in multiple applications, immigration will cancel all of them.

However, you can apply again the next year, and the year after that, and the year after that. You can apply once a year regardless of how many other years you have tried to apply.

How long will it take me to get a green card through the Diversity Visa Lottery?

To successfully get a green card through the Diversity Visa Lottery, you must complete the entire process within the same fiscal year in which you win the lottery. Basically, that means that you have to finish EVERYTHING before September 30. You might run out of time if you don't stay on top of things and complete your forms in a timely manner.

Will I need an economic sponsor for the Diversity Visa Lottery?

Yes! You will need an Affidavit of Support. This is the I-134. It is different from the complicated affidavit for people who get an immigrant visa through a family member.

Can I apply for other immigrant visas at the same time?

You can apply for as many different types of immigrant visas as you like. If you have a petition pending through a family member, or through work, you can still apply for the Diversity Visa Lottery.

Can I bring my family with me?

Yes, you can include derivatives on your application. A derivative can be your spouse or unmarried children under the age of 21. A child can be a step-child if you married their biological parent before the child turned 18. A child can also be an adopted child as long as the adoption was completed before the child turned 16. If any child gets married or turns 21, they will no longer qualify as a derivative and will have to apply for their own status in the United States.

[Green Cards](#) [Options for Status, Visas, Permits & Papers](#) [Immigration](#)

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Table of Contents

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