



CHARACTER REFERENCE LETTER FOR NATURALIZATION

Practice Alert and Letter Template for Naturalization Applications

By Eric Cohen, Lucia Martel-Dow, and Alison Kamhi

I. Introduction

USCIS recently announced that naturalization applicants may receive neighborhood visits to ask neighbors and/or co-workers questions about the applicant's work, family status, social activities, travel, criminal history, and more.¹ USCIS also acknowledged that it has discretion to waive these neighborhood visits. New USCIS guidance invites applicants to affirmatively submit two-character reference letters as consideration to waive the neighborhood visit.² These letters are not required for naturalization eligibility. As of October 1, 2026, ILRC is not aware of any neighborhood visits under the new guidance. We will learn more as the policy is implemented. It is possible that submitting two letters will help an applicant avoid a neighborhood investigation by an immigration officer; it is also possible the investigation will be waived without the letters, or that the investigation will not be waived even if the applicant submits two letters.

If an applicant chooses to submit two letters, the letters should come from people who personally know the applicant. For example, neighbors, employers, professors, co-workers, and business associates. **Letters from family members and relatives will not be considered. Letters should preferably be written by U.S. citizens.** ILRC does not recommend that undocumented individuals submit character letters at this time, although people with other lawful immigration status may also do so. USCIS asks that each letter include the following:

1. Full name, address, phone number, email, and proof of citizenship or immigration status;
2. How the person knows the applicant and for how long;
3. Specific examples of the applicant's honesty, integrity, and community engagement; and
4. An explicit statement about the applicant's moral character and loyalty to the United States and the U.S. Constitution.

II. How to Complete the Form Letter

ILRC has created the following template letter to address the issues USCIS recommends to help applicants who choose to submit letters. The writer submitting a character letter can complete the template included in this packet or draft their own letter. Print clearly or type.

¹ USCIS Policy Manual, <https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-12-part-b-chapter-2#footnotelink-8>.

² *Id.*

Part 1: Personal information

Write your full name, home address, phone number, and email.

Part 2: Citizenship or immigration status

Please note that USCIS has stated that it prefers that these letters be written by U.S. citizens. However, character letters from people with other immigration status can still be submitted. Writers with other status include:

- Lawful permanent residents (green card holders);
- Persons with humanitarian status, such as asylum or U visa holders;
- Employment-based visa holders, such as H-1B or O-1 visas; and
- Religious workers holding R-1 visas.

Caution: If you do not have lawful immigration status in the United States, ILRC recommends that you **not** write this letter. If you have any questions or concerns about your own immigration status, ILRC recommends that you consult with a legal worker before writing this letter.

Enclose proof of your immigration status with your letter:

- U.S. citizens: copy of U.S. passport, birth certificate, or naturalization certificate;
- Lawful permanent residents: copy of green card; and
- All others: copy of work permit or USCIS approval notice.

Part 3: How you know the applicant

Write the applicant's full name as it appears on their application. Confirm you are not related to the applicant (this includes by blood, marriage, or adoption). Then write the month and year you met and how you know them (if you don't remember the exact month, just write the year you met the applicant). For example, "we are neighbors," "she works for me," or "we attend the same church."

Part 4: Examples (very important)

Write real examples of things you have personally seen the applicant do. Do not just write that the applicant is a good person; describe actual events. Use your own words. It does not need to sound legal or formal.

Pick ideas from this list, or use your own:

- Volunteering: youth sports, PTA, school events, cultural festivals, children's activities;
- Community and neighborhood engagement: helping neighbors, neighborhood cleanups, block parties, helping organize Fourth of July celebrations, community gardens, organizing or joining local groups;
- Religious participation: regular attendance and volunteering at their church, mosque, synagogue, temple, or other religious institution; helping with services, meals, or charity drives;

- Work history: reliability, length of time working, expertise or skills, good relationships with employer and co-workers, honesty in business dealings;
- Everyday honesty: returns borrowed items on time, replaces anything damaged, keeps promises, can be trusted with money or keys;
- Helping others: caring for sick or elderly neighbors, babysitting, driving people to appointments; and
- Any other act of kindness or generosity you have witnessed.

Step 5: Complete statement about the applicant's good moral character and attitude towards the United States

The final paragraph states that the applicant has good moral character, is loyal to the United States, and supports the U.S. Constitution. Add the applicant's name to the paragraph if you agree.

Step 6: Signature

Sign, print your name, and write the date.

Do not mail the letter to USCIS yourself. Return it to the applicant or their legal representative.



San Francisco
t: 415.255.9499
f: 415.255.9792

Washington D.C.
t: 202.777.8999
f: 202.293.2849

Houston

San Antonio

www.ilrc.org

About the Immigrant Legal Resource Center

The Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC) works with immigrants, community organizations, legal professionals, law enforcement, and policy makers to build a democratic society that values diversity and the rights of all people. Through community education programs, legal training and technical assistance, and policy development and advocacy, the ILRC's mission is to protect and defend the fundamental rights of immigrant families and communities.

Copyright © 2026 Immigrant Legal Resource Center

Sample Letter—Character Reference Letter for USCIS

My name is Mary Smith

I live at 123 Main Street, Los Angeles, CA

My phone number is 213-123-4567

My email address is msmith17486@gmail.com

I am writing on behalf of Joe Jones

I am not related to Joe Jones

I am a

☒ United States citizen

☐ Lawful Permanent Resident of the United States

☐ Other immigration status: _____

I have known Joe Jones

since approximately (MMM YYYY) June 2024

I know Joe Jones because we are neighbors since

2024. He moved to the house next to ours.

The following are examples of the applicant's honesty, integrity, and community

engagement: Joe has become an important part of our
neighborhood and community. He volunteers at his kid's
soccer games. He often helps me carry groceries into my
house, and we have spent many hours gardening
together. I know that I can rely on Joe to return any items
he borrows on time. If anything ever gets damaged, he
immediately replaces the item.

I can say with certainty that Joe Jones has good moral character
and is completely supportive of the United States and the United States Constitution.

Mary Smith

Signature

September 21, 2026

Date

Character Reference Letter for USCIS

My name is _____

I live at _____

My phone number is _____

My email address is _____

I am writing on behalf of _____

I am not related to _____

I am a

☐ United States citizen

☐ Lawful Permanent Resident of the United States

☐ Other immigration status: _____

I have known _____

since approximately (MMM YYYY) _____

I know _____ because we _____

The following are examples of the applicant's honesty, integrity, and community

engagement: _____

I can say with certainty that _____ has good moral character

And is completely supportive of the United States and the United States Constitution.

Signature

Date