

## [These New Online Tools Give Immigrants Cheap Legal Help With Their Cases](#)

Fast Company

02.03.17

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In the wake of Donald Trump's executive order on immigration, a handful of startups are streamlining access to crucial information and assistance for people trying to remain in the U.S.

As Jeremy Peskin watched the news about Trump's executive order on immigration—and the [fallout at airports](#)—he felt it at a visceral level. Peskin, an entrepreneur originally from Canada, received his own green card just a year ago, and spent the previous decade in the U.S. on temporary visas.

“Every time I would leave the U.S. and return, I'd wait in line at the airport nervous that I wasn't going to be allowed back in, for any number of reasons,” he says. “Which isn't a crazy concern. It's a terrible feeling, not knowing whether you're going to be pulled out of the life you have built in the U.S.”

The screenshot shows the 'borderwise' logo in the top left corner. In the top right, there are links for 'FOR LAWYERS', 'LEARN +', and 'TRIAL ACCOUNT +'. The main heading is 'Green Card Application' with a 'SAVE APPLICATION' button to its right. On the left is a sidebar with navigation links: 'General Information' (selected), 'Applicant Details', 'Sponsor Details', 'Notice', and 'Review Application'. The main content area is titled 'Let's get some basic information from you.' and contains three sections: 1. 'What is Ben Benino's citizenship?' with a dropdown menu showing 'Canada'. 2. 'What is Ben Benino's date of birth?' with a text input field containing '08/31/1983'. 3. 'Is Ben Benino currently in the US?' with two buttons: 'Yes' (highlighted in green) and 'No'.

On January 30, days after Trump issued the executive order, Peskin started offering fellow immigrants ultra-low-cost help via an application that streamlines the process of applying for a green card, and offers a review from an immigration attorney.

Peskin's startup, [Borderwise](#), typically offers the service at a cost of \$500, much lower than the thousands that an immigration attorney might usually charge. But in the new, post-executive-order program, he's offering it to low-income immigrants for only \$1, with pro bono legal review. Any proceeds from the new program will be donated to an immigration nonprofit.

"There are hundreds of thousands of immigrants in the U.S. who are eligible for green cards but live close to the poverty line, and lack the resources to navigate the application process," he says. "We want to do as much as we can to eliminate that obstacle." Among non-citizen immigrants, [60%](#) struggle to even pay for basic needs like food, housing, and transportation.

A green card application is usually staggeringly difficult to get through, with as many as 12 different forms and 40 pages of paperwork. Peskin, himself a lawyer, said he gave up and hired an immigration lawyer after spending hours on his own application. Borderwise automatically fills in the forms as much as possible, and translates legalese into simply worded questions. Offering review by an attorney was also key.



“We didn’t want to just build a TurboTax for immigration law,” Peskin says. “The stakes are a lot higher. If TurboTax messes up an application, the user can be audited. If the user’s immigration application is messed up, they can get deported. So we wanted to make sure the immigration lawyers are involved in the process.”

Another new tool, called [Immi](#), also uses technology to help immigrants, asking a series of questions to determine if someone might be eligible for legal status through various avenues, such as asylum or Special Immigrant Juvenile Statutes.

An estimated [1.5 million undocumented immigrants](#) may be eligible through legal status but not even realize it.

“This is the first site we’re aware of that comprehensively screens for the various benefits, and offers a result that tells people based on their screening why they might be eligible, potential risks, and also what the next steps are for them,” says Matthew Burnett, director of [Immigrant Advocates Network](#), a civil legal aid organization that created the tool along with [Pro Bono Net](#). “It’s created to be a very individuated, tailored experience.”

On a mobile phone, an [undocumented immigrant](#) can go through a series of simple questions in English or Spanish (Immi plans to add more languages in the future), and learn how they might be able to apply. It also provides plain-language explanations of what someone’s rights are if they run into police or immigration officials, and connects people with local nonprofits for more help.

In the past, immigrants have often struggled with misinformation or dealt with fake experts called “notarios,” who take people’s money but aren’t actually qualified to help them with immigration issues. Nonprofits are often overburdened. The app is meant to help answer questions easily, accessibly, and at no cost.

It officially launched on January 26, a day after Trump issued executive orders to hire 5,000 new border agents and 10,000 new immigration officials as a first step in ramping up deportations.

“This is always been something that’s important and timely,” says Burnett. “Now it’s just critical that folks are learning about their rights and protecting their future.”