

### Role of Sister Cities International

Welcome to the Inbound Visa Toolkit section of the Sister Cities International Visa Toolkit. In hopes of making the daunting visa process more understandable, the following document breaks down the different visas that are needed to enter the US and how to go about getting them.

### Visa Resources and the Role of Sister Cities International in the Visa Process

As an organization Sister Cities International is unable to process visas directly through the Department of State. However, there are several resources that Sister Cities International offers that can help answer questions and educate members on the process of attaining visas for inbound and outbound travelers.

- Online Visa Toolkit which includes:
  - Inbound visa application process
  - Outbound visa application process
  - Visa Types for inbound travelers
  - Important links and resources for visa questions
  - Necessary Forms
  - Frequently Asked Questions
  
- J-1 High School Visa program:
  - A partnership with American Cultural Exchange Service to help international students in the sister cities network to get their J-1 visa for one year or semester of study in a US public high school
  
- Sister Cities International staff resources
  - If you have any questions or cannot find information on a particular aspect of the visa application process, please do not hesitate to contact Jennelle Root in the DC office at 202-347-8630 x 4003 or by email at [jroot@sister-cities.org](mailto:jroot@sister-cities.org). She will be able to get you the information you need.
  
- American Immigration Council (AIC)
  - This new partnership between Sister Cities International and AIC gives members access to immigration lawyers across the country and opportunities for educational conference calls and staff expertise to help make the visa process more manageable.
  
- Letters of Invitation
  - For programs organized by the DC office, Sister Cities International can write letters of invitation for inbound visitors to help with the application process. For programs run by local sister city associations, letters of invitation must be written by the official responsible for the event. Sister Cities International can write letters of support for the exchange but a local letter will also be necessary.

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### Contents

Role of Sister Cities International .....	1
Visa Resources and the Role of Sister Cities International in the Visa Process .....	1
Visa Background Information.....	3
What are visas?.....	3
How long does it take to get a visa? .....	3
Do I have to have a visa to travel to the US? .....	3
The Visa Application Process .....	5
For a B-1 Business Visa or B-2 Pleasure Visa:.....	5
For an H-3 Trainee Visa: .....	6
For a J-1 Exchange Visa:.....	6
For an F-1 Academic Visa:.....	7
For an L-1 Transfer Employee Visa:.....	8
For an M-1 Vocational Education Visa: .....	9
For the O-1 Extraordinary Ability Visa: .....	10
For the P-1 Internationally Recognized Performers Visa: .....	10
For the P-2 Artists Exchange Visa: .....	11
For the P-3 Culturally Unique Exchanges Visa: .....	12
For a Q-1 Cultural Exchanges Visa:.....	12
For a TN Canada or Mexico Professional Worker Visa: .....	13
The Interview Process .....	15
Components of an Interview: .....	16
Application Fees .....	17
General fees: (All are in USD amounts:.....	17
Visa-specific fees:.....	17
References .....	18

### Visa Background Information

The following information was compiled in order to present a better, more simplified outline of the visa process for entering the United States and the documentation and fees required for attaining a visa.

#### What are visas?

A visa allows you to enter the United States as far as the port of entry (airport or land border crossing). Only the immigration officer has the authority to permit you to enter the United States. He or she decides how long you can stay for any particular visit. Immigration matters are the responsibility of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. The list of relevant visas for sister city members are included in this section.

#### How long does it take to get a visa?

Some visa applications require additional administrative processing, which requires some additional time. Most administrative processing is resolved within 60 days of application. When administrative processing is required, the timing will vary based on individual circumstances including types of visas and which part of the world the US State Department Embassy interview occurs. The US State Department has placed on their website a list of Embassy wait times for interviews.

In general, inquiries about status of administrative processing, applicants or their representatives are asked to wait at least 90 days from the date of interview or submission of supplemental documents, whichever is later.

#### Do I have to have a visa to travel to the US?

Not in all cases. The Visa Waiver Program (VWP) enables nationals of certain countries to travel to the United States for tourism or business for stays of 90 days or less without obtaining a visa. The program was established in 1986 with the objective of eliminating unnecessary barriers to travel, stimulating the tourism industry, and permitting the Department of State to focus consular resources in other areas. VWP eligible travelers may apply for a visa, if they prefer to do so. Not all countries participate in the VWP, and not all travelers from VWP countries are eligible to use the program. Eligible VWP countries are listed below.

- Andorra
- Australia
- Austria
- Belgium
- Brunei
- Czech Republic
- Denmark
- Estonia
- Finland
- France
- Germany
- Greece
- Hungary
- Iceland
- Ireland
- Italy
- Japan
- Latvia
- Lichtenstein
- Lithuania
- Luxemburg
- Malta
- Monaco
- the Netherlands
- New Zealand
- Norway



- Portugal
- San Marino
- Singapore
- Slovakia
- Slovenia
- South Korea
- Spain
- Sweden
- Switzerland
- United Kingdom

For Visitors coming to the US from any VWP country, it is mandatory that they first register with the **Electronic System of Travel Authorization** that can be found at <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov/esta>.

The Department of Homeland Security requires visas from all other countries. To become a VWP country, the government has to uphold several criteria set by the Department of Homeland Security including:

- Governments provide reciprocal visa-free travel for U.S. citizens (90 days for tourism or business purposes)
- Governments issue secure machine-readable passports that satisfy internationally accepted standards
- Governments certify that they report the theft of blank passports on a timely basis to the U.S. Government, and do so in practice
- The country must have a very low nonimmigrant refusal rate (as explained in Section 217 (c)(2)(A) of the Immigration and Nationality Act)

### The Visa Application Process

Since 9/11 the Department of State has increased the amount of paperwork and regulations that foreign nationals must go through to obtain visas. The process does differ depending on the visa that one needs. Unfortunately the process can be quite subjective. The Consulates have full authority to approve or deny a visa at the interviewing process. It is important for the person applying for the visa to have all necessary documentations in place to help this process along.

Below is an outline of the necessary information and procedures needed for successfully obtaining the appropriate visa.

**Note on the DS-156:** Some embassies are now moving to the Online DS-160 application form that will replace the DS-156. Before filling out the DS-156 form, visit the Department of State website at [http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/forms/forms\\_4230.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/forms/forms_4230.html) to see which embassies are requiring the Online DS-160 form.

### For a B-1 Business Visa or B-2 Pleasure Visa:

Commonly known as the “visa for temporary visitors for business or pleasure”. You may apply for either a B-1 (Business) or a B-2 (pleasure) visa, but if the travel is not specific enough (as judged by the consulate), you will receive a B-1/B-2 visa.

1. Collect the following information:
  - a. Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-156, completed and signed. For the DS-156 form, go to <http://evisaforms.state.gov/> and fill out the electronic copy at the bottom. The fee for submitting the DS-156 Form is \$131.00 and can be paid online.
  - b. Current, valid passport or travel document
  - c. Photograph (2 x 2 inches, passport type. See the internet address below.)
  - d. Evidence of funds to cover expenses in the United States such as credit card statements
  - e. Evidence of permanent residence abroad (bills, family relationships, work information)
  - f. Supplemental Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-157 for men between 16-45 years of age, and for all applicants age 16 and over who are from Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Sudan and Syria. This form can be found in the Important Forms for Visa Applications Section of this Online Toolkit. Note that a consular officer may ask any applicant to complete this form.
2. Then, contact the closest local US embassy to schedule an interview and to receive your visa. The contact information for your embassy can be found at <http://www.usembassy.gov/>. Make sure you have all the required information above and check with the embassy if any other information is needed.

### For an H-3 Trainee Visa:

The visitor must only focus on training with the understanding that it will help vocationally when the visitor returns to his or her home country. This process requires an additional step of applying through the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) first which is a part of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS.)

1. Apply to USCIS by sending in Form I-129 filed by the U.S. sponsor. This form can be found in the Important Forms for Visa Applications Section of this Online Toolkit.
2. The I-129 form should include the following information:
  - a. Detailed description of the specific training program, including number of classroom hours and number of on the job training hours per week.
  - b. Summarization of the previous training/experience of each foreign national listed in the petition.
  - c. Detailed explanation of why training is required, whether similar training is available in the foreign nationals' country, how training will benefit the alien in pursuing a career abroad, what benefits the employer will receive from the training, and why the employer is willing to absorb the cost of training, knowing that the foreign national can not be used for productive labor.
3. Form I-129 must be submitted to the one of 4 service centers located in the United States, Vermont, California, Nebraska and Texas. You will apply to the center that is closest geographically to the applicant.
4. You must wait to receive approval from CIS to schedule the interview appointment with the Embassy. You will need the receipt number that is printed on the approved Form I-129 petition.
5. The following documentation should be brought to the interview at the local embassy:
  - a. The Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-156 found at <http://evisaforms.state.gov/>. The fee for submitting the DS-156 Form is \$131.00 and can be paid online.
  - b. Supplemental Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-157, for men between 16-45 years of age, and for all applicants age 16 and over who are from Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Sudan and Syria. This form can be found in the Important Forms for Visa Applications Section of this Online Toolkit.
  - c. Current, valid passport or travel document
  - d. Photograph (2 x 2 inches, passport type. See the internet address below.)
  - e. A copy of your I-129 Petition from the US employer

### For a J-1 Exchange Visa:

The J-1 visa is specifically for cultural exchange trips for students, researchers, and physicians to come to the United States.

1. The student or teacher will need to apply to an exchange program through a US sponsoring organization. Again, that information can be found at <http://exchanges.state.gov/jexchanges/>.
2. Through the sponsoring organization the visitor will receive the DS-2019 Form for exchanges.



3. The sponsoring organization will also send a SLEP Test which is required by the State Department as proof of English proficiency. The SLEP test is taken by the international traveler and must be graded and submitted to the sponsoring organization before the interview at the embassy.
4. Next step is to book an interview with the local US embassy. The embassy can be found by going to the following link: <http://www.usembassy.gov/>.
5. Before the interview, make sure to pay the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) fee. This can be found on the Department of Immigration and Customs Enforcement's website at [www.fmjfee.com](http://www.fmjfee.com). The DS-2019 is needed to sign on to the SEVIS system and pay the \$180.00 fee.
6. At the interview, it is essential to have the following:
  - a. DS 2019, Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor Status.
  - b. If part of a Training/Internship Placement Plan, the DS-7002 is needed as well.
  - c. The Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-156 found at <http://evisaforms.state.gov/>. The fee for submitting the DS-156 Form is \$131.00 and can be paid online.
  - d. Supplemental Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-157, for men between 16-45 years of age, and for all applicants age 16 and over who are from Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Sudan and Syria. This form can be found in the Important Forms for Visa Applications Section of this Online Toolkit
  - e. A Contact Information and Work History, Form DS-158, completed. This form can be found in the Important Forms for Visa Applications Section of this Online Toolkit
  - f. A passport valid for travel to the United States and with a validity date at least six months beyond the applicant's intended period of stay in the United States.
  - g. One (1) 2x2 photograph.
7. The visa covers 30 days before the school begins and 30 days after the school year ends.

### For an F-1 Academic Visa:

The F-1 is for foreign nationals qualified to attend a full course of study at colleges, universities, conservatories, or academic high schools in the U.S.

1. If applying to US colleges or universities, it is required of students to take the SAT or ACT standardized tests, along with the TOEFL which proves English proficiency.
2. After applying and gaining acceptance to a US high school or college, the Form I-20A-B LINK, Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant (F-1) Student Status-For Academic and Language Students is needed before arranging an interview with the local US embassy. The Form I-20 is generated by the SEVIS system and is provided by the local school the student is currently enrolled at. The student and his or her school official must sign the I-20 form to make it legitimate.
3. Before the embassy interview, make sure to pay the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) fee. This can be found on the Department of Immigration and Customs Enforcement's website at [www.fmjfee.com](http://www.fmjfee.com). The I-20 Form is needed to sign on to the SEVIS system and pay the \$180.00 fee.
4. At the embassy interview, the following documentation is needed:
  - a. The receipt that the SEVIS fee has been paid.
  - b. The I-20 form signed by the student and student's school official.



- c. The Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-156 found at <http://evisaforms.state.gov/>. The fee for submitting the DS-156 Form is \$131.00 and can be paid online.
  - d. A passport valid for travel to the United States and with a validity date at least six months beyond the applicant's intended period of stay in the United States.
  - e. One (1) 2x2 photograph.
5. It is important to note that the following documentation may be requested by the consulate. It is important to also bring them to the interview.
- a. Transcripts and diplomas from previous institutions attended
  - b. Scores from standardized tests required by the educational institution such as the TOEFL, SAT, GRE, GMAT, etc.
  - c. Financial evidence that shows you or your parents who are sponsoring you have sufficient funds to cover your tuition and living expenses during the period of your intended study.
6. The visa covers 30 days before the school begins and 30 days after the school year ends.

### For an L-1 Transfer Employee Visa:

The L-1 visa is a temporary visa (non-immigrant visa) that allows companies operating both in the United States and abroad to transfer certain classes of employee from its foreign operations to its U.S. operations for up to seven years.

1. The US employer must fill out and send in the I-129 Form. This form can be found in the Important Forms for Visa Applications Section of this Online Toolkit. It is a Petition for Nonimmigrant Worker to USCIS. This form should include the following information:
  - a. Detailed description of the specific training program, including number of classroom hours and number of on the job training hours per week.
  - b. Summarization of the previous training/experience of each foreign national listed in the petition.
  - c. Detailed explanation of why training is required, whether similar training is available in the foreign nationals' country, how training will benefit the alien in pursuing a career abroad, what benefits the employer will receive from the training, and why the employer is willing to absorb the cost of training, knowing that the foreign national can not be used for productive labor.
2. To schedule the interview appointment, you will need the approved receipt form number from USCIS that is printed on the approved I-129 petition.
3. The following documentation should be brought to the interview at the local embassy:
  - a. An application, Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-156 found at <http://evisaforms.state.gov/>. The fee for submitting the DS-156 Form is \$131.00 and can be paid online.
  - b. Supplemental Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-157, for men between 16-45 years of age, and for all applicants age 16 and over who are from Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Sudan and Syria. This form can be found in the Important Forms for Visa Applications Section of this Online Toolkit
  - c. Current, valid passport or travel document
  - d. Photograph (2 x 2 inches, passport type. See the internet address below.)
  - e. A copy of your I-129 Petition from the US employer





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### For an M-1 Vocational Education Visa:

The M1 visa is suitable for foreign students wishing to attend a full vocational or non-academic course, other than language training, at colleges, universities, or conservatories in the United States.

1. If applying to US colleges or universities, it is required that students take the SAT or ACT standardized tests, along with the TOEFL which proves English proficiency.
2. After applying and gaining acceptance to a US high school or college, the Form 1-20 Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant (M-1) Student Status for Vocational Students.
3. The 1-20 Form is needed before arranging an interview with the local US embassy. The Form I-20 is generated by the SEVIS system and is provided by the local school the student is currently enrolled at. The student and his or her school official must sign the I-20 form to make it legitimate.
4. Before the embassy interview, make sure to pay the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) fee. This can be found on the Department of Immigration and Customs Enforcement's website at [www.fmjfee.com](http://www.fmjfee.com). The I-20 Form is needed to sign on to the SEVIS system and pay the \$180.00 fee.
5. At the embassy interview, the following documentation is needed:
  - a. The receipt that the SEVIS fee has been paid.
  - b. The 1-20 form signed by the student and student's school official.
  - c. An application, Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-156 found at <http://evisaforms.state.gov/>. The fee for submitting the DS-156 Form is \$131.00 and can be paid online.
  - d. A passport valid for travel to the United States and with a validity date at least six months beyond the applicant's intended period of stay in the United States.
  - e. One (1) 2x2 photograph.
6. It is important to note that the following documentation may be requested by the consulate. It is important to also bring them to the interview.
  - a. Transcripts and diplomas from previous institutions attended
  - b. Scores from standardized tests required by the educational institution such as the TOEFL, SAT, GRE, GMAT, etc.
  - c. Financial evidence that shows you or your parents who are sponsoring you have sufficient funds to cover your tuition and living expenses during the period of your intended study.
7. The visa covers 30 days before the school begins and 30 days after the school year ends.

### For the O-1 Extraordinary Ability Visa:

This visa is for individuals who have extraordinary ability in the field of science, art, education, business, or athletics that have come to the US to improve upon their ability granted they could not find proper training and resources in their home country.

1. The exchange must be approved in advance by the office of the Department of Homeland Security, US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) on the basis of a petition, Form I-129 filed by the U.S. sponsor.
2. The US sponsor must fill out and send in the I-129 Form, a Petition for Nonimmigrant Worker. This form can be found in the Important Forms for Visa Applications Section of this Online Toolkit and should include the following information:
  - a. Detailed description of the specific exchange program
  - b. Summarization of the previous training/experience of each foreign national listed in the petition.
3. Detailed explanation of the program and the role of the foreign national in the cultural and educational exchange.
4. To schedule the interview appointment, you will need the receipt number that is printed on the approved Form I-129 petition.
5. The following documentation should be brought to the interview at the local embassy:
  - a. An application, Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-156 found at <http://evisaforms.state.gov/>. The fee for submitting the DS-156 Form is \$131.00 and can be paid online.
  - b. Supplemental Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-157, for men between 16-45 years of age, and for all applicants age 16 and over who are from Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Sudan and Syria. This form can be found in the Important Forms for Visa Applications Section of this Online Toolkit
  - c. Current, valid passport or travel document
  - d. Photograph (2 x 2 inches, passport type. See the internet address below.)
  - e. A copy of your I-129 Petition from the US sponsor

### For the P-1 Internationally Recognized Performers Visa:

This visa applies to internationally recognized artists or performers or athletes who are here to compete, hold workshops, or entertain.

1. The exchange must be approved in advance by the office of the Department of Homeland Security, US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) on the basis of a petition, Form I-129 filed by the U.S. sponsor.



2. The US sponsor must fill out and send in the I-129 Form, a Petition for Nonimmigrant Worker. This form can be found in the Important Forms for Visa Applications Section of this Online Toolkit and should include the following information:
  - a. Detailed description of the specific exchange program
  - b. Summarization of the previous training/experience of each foreign national listed in the petition.
3. Detailed explanation of the program and the role of the foreign national in the cultural and educational exchange.
4. To schedule the interview appointment, you will need the receipt number that is printed on the approved Form I-129 petition.
5. The following documentation should be brought to the interview at the local embassy:
  - a. An application, Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-156 found at <http://evisaforms.state.gov/>. The fee for submitting the DS-156 Form is \$131.00 and can be paid online.
  - b. Supplemental Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-157, for men between 16-45 years of age, and for all applicants age 16 and over who are from Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Sudan and Syria. This form can be found in the Important Forms for Visa Applications Section of this Online Toolkit
  - c. Current, valid passport or travel document
  - d. Photograph (2 x 2 inches, passport type. See the internet address below.)
  - e. A copy of your I-129 Petition from the US sponsor

### For the P-2 Artists Exchange Visa:

This visa applies to artists or entertainers who will perform under a reciprocal exchange program with artists in the US.

1. The exchange must be approved in advance by the office of the Department of Homeland Security, US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) on the basis of a petition, Form I-129 filed by the U.S. sponsor.
2. The US sponsor must fill out and send in the I-129 Form, a Petition for Nonimmigrant Worker. This form can be found in the Important Forms for Visa Applications Section of this Online Toolkit and should include the following information:
  - a. Detailed description of the specific exchange program
  - b. Summarization of the previous training/experience of each foreign national listed in the petition.
3. Detailed explanation of the program and the role of the foreign national in the cultural and educational exchange.
4. To schedule the interview appointment, you will need the receipt number that is printed on the approved Form I-129 petition.
5. The following documentation should be brought to the interview at the local embassy:
  - a. An application, Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-156 found at <http://evisaforms.state.gov/>. The fee for submitting the DS-156 Form is \$131.00 and can be paid online.



- b. Supplemental Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-157, for men between 16-45 years of age, and for all applicants age 16 and over who are from Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Sudan and Syria. This form can be found in the Important Forms for Visa Applications Section of this Online Toolkit
- c. Current, valid passport or travel document
- d. Photograph (2 x 2 inches, passport type. See the internet address below.)
- e. A copy of your I-129 Petition from the US sponsor

### For the P-3 Culturally Unique Exchanges Visa:

This visa applies to individuals or groups coming to the US to perform, teach, or coach in a commercial or non-commercial program that is culturally unique.

1. The exchange must be approved in advance by the office of the Department of Homeland Security, US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) on the basis of a petition, Form I-129 filed by the U.S. sponsor.
2. The US sponsor must fill out and send in the I-129 Form, a Petition for Nonimmigrant Worker. This form can be found in the Important Forms for Visa Applications Section of this Online Toolkit and should include the following information:
  - f. Detailed description of the specific exchange program
  - g. Summarization of the previous training/experience of each foreign national listed in the petition.
3. Detailed explanation of the program and the role of the foreign national in the cultural and educational exchange.
4. To schedule the interview appointment, you will need the receipt number that is printed on the approved Form I-129 petition.
5. The following documentation should be brought to the interview at the local embassy:
  - a. An application, Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-156 found at <http://evisaforms.state.gov/>. The fee for submitting the DS-156 Form is \$131.00 and can be paid online.
  - b. Supplemental Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-157, for men between 16-45 years of age, and for all applicants age 16 and over who are from Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Sudan and Syria. This form can be found in the Important Forms for Visa Applications Section of this Online Toolkit
  - c. Current, valid passport or travel document
  - d. Photograph (2 x 2 inches, passport type. See the internet address below.)
  - e. A copy of your I-129 Petition from the US sponsor

### For a Q-1 Cultural Exchanges Visa:

This visa applies to participants in an international cultural exchange program for the purpose of providing practical training, employment, and the sharing of the history, culture, and traditions of the visitor's home country.



1. The training/employment must be approved in advance by the office of the Department of Homeland Security, US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) on the basis of a petition, Form I-129 filed by the U.S. sponsor.
1. The US employer must fill out and send in the I-129 Form, a Petition for Nonimmigrant Worker. This form can be found in the Important Forms for Visa Applications Section of this Online Toolkit and should include the following information:
  - a. Detailed description of the specific training program, including number of classroom hours and number of on the job training hours per week.
  - b. Summarization of the previous training/experience of each foreign national listed in the petition.
2. Detailed explanation of the program and the role of the foreign national
3. in the cultural and educational exchange.
4. To schedule the interview appointment, you will need the receipt number that is printed on the approved Form I-129 petition.
5. The following documentation should be brought to the interview at the local embassy:
6. c. An application, Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-156 found at <http://evisaforms.state.gov/>. The fee for submitting the DS-156 Form is \$131.00 and can be paid online.
7. d. Supplemental Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-157, for men between 16-45 years of age, and for all applicants age 16 and over who are from Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Sudan and Syria. This form can be found in the Important Forms for Visa Applications Section of this Online Toolkit
  - f. Current, valid passport or travel document
  - g. Photograph (2 x 2 inches, passport type. See the internet address below.)
  - h. A copy of your I-129 Petition from the US employer

### For a TN Canada or Mexico Professional Worker Visa:

This visa is for Mexican and Canadian nationals as part of the NAFTA agreement to help improve travel and business between the participating countries.

1. A Canadian citizen without a TN visa can apply at a U.S. port of entry with all of the following:
  - a. Proof of professional qualifications, such as transcripts of grades, licenses, certificates, degrees, and/or records of previous employment;
  - b. Proof of Canadian citizenship- Canadian citizens may present a passport, as visas are not required, or they may provide secondary evidence, such as a birth certificate. However, Canadian citizens traveling to the United States from outside the Western Hemisphere are required to present a valid passport at the port-of-entry;
  - c. Fee of U.S. \$50
2. As a Mexican applying for a TN visa, the following documentation is necessary:
  - a. An application, Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-156 found at <http://evisaforms.state.gov/>. The fee for submitting the DS-156 Form is \$131.00 and can be paid online.



- b. Supplemental Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-157, for men between 16-45 years of age, and for all applicants age 16 and over who are from Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Sudan and Syria. This form can be found in the Important Forms for Visa Applications Section of this Online Toolkit
  - c. Current, valid passport or travel document
  - d. Photograph (2 x 2 inches, passport type. See the internet address below.)
  - e. A letter of employment in the US
3. The applicant must present evidence of professional employment to satisfy the Consular Officer of your plans to be employed in prearranged business activities for a U.S. employer(s) or entity(ies) at a professional level. Part-time employment is permitted. Self-employment is not permitted. An employment letter or contract providing a detailed description of the business activities may be provided from the U.S. or foreign employer, and should state the following:
- Activity in which the applicant shall be engaged
- a. Purpose of entry
  - b. Anticipate length of stay
  - c. Educational qualifications or appropriate credentials demonstrating professional status
  - d. Evidence of compliance with DHS regulation, and/or state law
  - e. Arrangements for pay

### The Interview Process

During the application process for every visa, the embassy interview is the greatest hurdle and making a good impression in front of the consulate officers is essential. Remember, it is up to the interviewee to prove that he or she is not a flight risk or a danger to the United States. The Consular officer needs to feel comfortable that the interviewee will not cause harm to the U.S. and will return back to his or her country of origin upon completion of the schedule as outlined in the visa.

The following are a list of tips to having a successful interview:

1. The interview is must be with a consulate official at an American Embassy or a U.S. Consulate in the visitor's home country.
  - a. Nearest embassies can be found at <http://www.usembassy.gov/>.
2. Prepare early for arranging the interview. Many embassies will not take interviews more than 120 days before the visa is to become active. With that in mind, it is essential that the interview is done well in advance of leaving for the US.
3. Make sure that the forms that require SEVIS fees or employer or school official signatures (I-20, DS-2019, I-129) are in hand well before the interview.
4. At the interview, BRING ALL RELEVANT DOCUMENTS. The officer may not look at these, but it is important that they are readily available for inspection.
  - a. Absolutely necessary forms:
    - i. The I-20, DS-2019, I-129 (whichever is appropriate)
    - ii. A valid passport
    - iii. 1 (2x2) photograph
    - iv. Trip Itinerary and/or invitation letter from host community
  - b. Additional Forms to consider bringing:
    - i. Bank Statements
    - ii. Proof of residence (bills, letters)
    - iii. Birth Certificate and documentation of family living in the country of origin.
    - iv. Proof of Employment or enrollment in school.
5. The results of this interview are extremely consequential in determining whether you will receive a visa or not. For this reason, be sure to speak honestly and come over-prepared with trip itineraries, possible hotels you will be staying at, individuals in the United States that you may be visiting, and information on the school, company, or city that you are intending to visit.
6. The purpose of the interview is to allow the US Government to establish the identity of those seeking admission to the United States, evaluate the credibility of the interviewee, and to make a determination of whether the applicant is eligible for entrance to the United States.
7. This will be a non-adversarial interview. This means that the government official is NOT opposed to you entering the United States, but simply must ask questions to determine IF you qualify for a non-immigrant visa.
8. Your responsibilities during the interview:
  - a. Answer all questions truthfully to the best of your ability.



- b. If you do not know the answer to a question, do not lie or guess. Tell the officer that you do not know the answer but you will find out as soon as you can.
  - c. Pose any questions that you may have to the officer.
  - d. Ask the officer to rephrase or restate a question if you do not understand it. It is important that you understand that the officer has a reason for asking you a specific question. Simply answer all questions to the best of your ability.
9. If you are uncomfortable with speaking and understanding English, you may request that a translator or interpreter be present during your interview to be sure that you understand the questions being asked.
10. Typically, the interviewer will ask you basic questions relating to your trip and details about your job and family.
11. Some sample questions for someone applying for a student visa (F-1) are:
  - “What do you know about your university?”
  - “Why do you want to study in the United States?”
  - “How will you pay for your stay in the US?”
  - “How many years do you plan on staying in the United States?”
12. Typical duration of an interview is approximately 20 minutes. However, it may take longer depending on the breadth of questioning that the officer feels is necessary.

### Components of an Interview:

**Introduction:** The Interviewer will introduce him/herself to you and explain their role in the process.

**Oath:** The oath’s purpose is to ensure that you understand that you must, by law, tell the truth during the course of the interview. If you are uncomfortable with the words “swear” or “so help me God”, the officer conducting the interview will be able change the oath’s wording without altering the meaning of the oath. This will not affect the officer’s decision to issue you a visa.

**Verification of Basic Biographic and Entry Information:** The officer will simply ask you if the information on your application is correct. They will also look at your documents (passport, birth certificate, marriage certificate) to be sure that they are legal and are correctly numbered on the application. If there are discrepancies, the officer will make any necessary corrections before continuing the interview.

**Testimony:** This is the part of the interview where you are asked questions regarding your plans while in the United States and other general background questions on why you are traveling and where you will be staying, studying, or working (depending on the type of visa). If there are inconsistencies between the application and your answers, the interviewer will give you an opportunity to explain them. After the officer asks you all of his or her questions, he/she will give you an opportunity to present any additional information which you may believe is pertinent to the visa process.

**Conclusion:** Following the officer’s questioning, the interview process is over and you will discover whether the visa was granted within the designated time frame per type of visa sought. You should inquire with the embassy or consulate about the status of your visa at any time before you have heard.



### Application Fees

There are several costs that go along with the application process. The following are estimated fees but they are subject to change based on the local embassy and new visa policies.

#### General fees: (All are in USD amounts:

DS-156/DS-160 Visa Application, paid to the Department of State: \$160.00

Any extension of a visa or transfer of visa status to another type, paid to the Department of State: \$246.00

#### Visa-specific fees:

SEVIS fee (for J-1, Q-1, F-1, and M-1 visas), paid online: \$180.00

Sponsoring organization fee: Varied depending on program. Usually ranges from \$3,000.00 to \$7,500.00.

Travel insurance: For J-1, included in sponsoring organization fee, also can be bought through local insurance company or through current insurance provider



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