



TIPS FOR CONGRESSIONAL OFFICES ON WORKING WITH THE NATIONAL VISA CENTER

The National Visa Center (NVC), located in Portsmouth, NH, provides support for immigrant visa (IV) applications, including acceptance of approved IV petitions from USCIS and preparation of cases for post adjudication. Call center agents at NVC answered 1.7 million written inquiries, 1.5 public calls, and 92,000 congressional inquiries in FY 2015. We look forward to working with you and hope these tips help you reach the right person at NVC.

1. Send all email correspondence to NVCCongressional@state.gov.

- For us to provide information, you must provide a Privacy Release Form (PRF). See *details about acceptable PRFs on the reverse of this page*.
- Refer to only one case per email.
- Use the case number or receipt number as the subject line.
- Include in the body of the email the name of the petitioner; name and date of birth of beneficiary; and name/office requesting information.

2. You can call NVC's Congressional Inquiry Unit at 603-334-0828. However, to release specific details about a case, we will need you to email us a Privacy Release Form.

3. Please allow up to 6 weeks after receipt of an I-797 from USCIS before contacting NVC about a case to ensure USCIS has had enough time to mail the case and NVC can enter it into our database. This is the first point that NVC is aware of a case and is able to provide information.

4. Scheduling visa interview appointments. NVC schedules immigrant visa interviews for IV-issuing posts on a monthly basis. We receive each embassy's list of available appointment dates and times, and we fill the appointment slots in the order that cases became documentarily qualified, as long as they are also current and there is an available visa number. Since we work only one month at a time, we cannot predict when a case will receive an appointment. A good rule of thumb is to wait 60 days from notice that a case is documentarily qualified before calling about the interview.

5. Advice to share with constituents:

- Visit NVC's website to review our Frequently Asked Questions at <http://NVC.state.gov>.
- Please **do not** send original civil documents to NVC. Submit photocopies of items such as birth certificates. The only original form to submit to NVC is the I-864 Affidavit of Support. *However, applicants must bring the original documents to the visa interview for the consular officer to review.*
- Mail financial and supporting documents to NVC in one envelope, and include the NVC-provided document cover sheet.

TIPS FOR CONGRESSIONAL OFFICES ON WORKING WITH THE NATIONAL VISA CENTER

- Visit the U.S. Embassy's website after receiving an interview appointment to review instructions for scheduling a medical appointment. **PRIOR** to all visa interviews, applicants must have completed a medical exam with an Embassy-approved physician in the country of interview.
 - I-864 Affidavit of Support Tip Sheets are online at <http://nvc.state.gov/aos> and <http://uscis.gov>. Please only use the July 2, 2015, version of the I-864 form. Submit all pages of forms even if they are blank.
6. NVC researches cases and communicates with overseas embassies and USCIS when necessary. As the "middle man," NVC cannot on its own:
- Approve an expedite or transfer request
 - Reinstatement a case
 - Explain the reasons for a visa denial

In the above instances, NVC forwards your request to a consular officer overseas and waits for their decision. We are unable to provide information on case status once a petition is returned to USCIS.

7. **Information about Privacy Release Forms (PRF).** PRFs, also known as Privacy Act Waivers (PAW), should accompany inquiries for both immigrant and nonimmigrant visa cases when you are seeking information specific or unique to that case. Since visa records are confidential, a PRF gives government agencies permission from a private citizen to release their personal or case information.
8. With immigrant visa cases, keep in mind that a *PRF giving permission to USCIS or DHS to share information cannot be used at NVC, since NVC is part of the U.S. Department of State.* Instead, we recommend that your constituents either give permission broadly to "the federal government" or specifically to the Department of State, NVC or a U.S. embassy or consulate abroad.

Examples of acceptable PRFs include:

- "I, [constituent name], authorize *any federal agency* with information relevant to my immigrant visa petition or case to share that information with ..."
- "I, [constituent name], authorize the *U.S. State Department/NVC/U.S. Embassy* to release information relevant to my immigrant visa application to ..."

Keep in mind there is no need to re-create your office's form or waiver documents. NVC accepts forms where our name (or that of the State Department or U.S. Embassy) is handwritten on the page to indicate that we have permission to share information.

A **nonimmigrant visa** (NIV) waiver should be signed by the visa applicant, not by your constituent. That is because in an NIV application, your constituent is not a party to the case and therefore cannot request case details. In lieu of a PRF, for NIV inquiries NVC can accept a letter signed by the applicant or an attached e-mail from an address linked to the visa applicant's record that specifically requests help from the Congressional office.