

National Visa Center Update for Congressional Offices



U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs

Form I-864 Affidavit of Support Assessment Letter Program

December 2015

NVC recently launched a worldwide “assessment letter” program for Form I-864 Affidavit of Support. The goal of the assessment letter is twofold: 1) to decrease the chance that a consular officer will need to reschedule an interview or temporarily deny a visa because he or she does not have a complete financial picture for an applicant’s case, and 2) to speed up the rate of cases becoming documentarily qualified at NVC.

Remember that NVC cannot adjudicate an immigrant visa case – that can only be done by a consular officer overseas. When it comes to Form I-864 our responsibility is to ensure the form contains the minimum information required for a consular officer to accept and adjudicate the form. The checklist letters that we send alert the financial sponsors to missing information on their form that a consular officer is legally required to review.

But NVC also takes seriously its role in preparing an applicant for their interview. The assessment letter helps us do this by alerting applicants to errors that a consular officer is likely to ask about. The letter encourages them to correct the form and – rather than mailing it back to NVC – to bring the updated form to their visa interview. Adjudicating consular officers will receive a copy of these assessment letters, too.

Over the last year NVC piloted the Form I-864 assessment letter with the U.S. Consulate in Ciudad Juarez. In our pilot, we found that the assessment letter helped applicants address questions or concerns that consular officers may have, and better prepared them to bring supporting documents that an interviewing officer may find useful.

Checklist letters will still be used for Form I-864 errors that won’t allow a consular officer to accept the form – for example, if a form is not signed. Applicants still have to send NVC a corrected form for this type of error.

How will you know if a constituent receives a checklist letter vs. an assessment letter? At the top of the page, you’ll see either “[NAME] Form I-864, Affidavit of Support, & Financial Evidence Checklist” or “Form I-864: Assessment Letter for [NAME].”



Current Processing Times (12/4)

- 20 days to process incoming petitions upon receipt of files from USCIS
- 33 days to review civil and financial documents mailed by applicants
- NVC receives 14,000 to 16,000 petitions weekly from USCIS

New Tip Sheets for I-864 Affidavit of Support

The Department of State and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) recently partnered to create informational “tip sheets” on the various Forms I-864 Affidavits of Support. These tips help customers determine which type of forms they need to submit, who completes the form, what information needs to be gathered before completing the form, and what information to include on specific questions.

Tip sheets for the below forms are available online:

- [Form I-864](#), Affidavit of Support
- [Form I-864A](#), Contract Between Sponsor and Household Member
- [Form I-864EZ](#), Affidavit of Support
- [Form I-864W](#), Intending Immigrant’s Affidavit of Support Exemption

Additionally, please remind constituents when applicable that USCIS and NVC are only accepting the July 2, 2015, version of Form I-864 Affidavit of Support. USCIS updated this form earlier this year and stopped accepting the previous version, which was dated March 22, 2013, in October. The edition date is at the bottom of the page on both the form and its instructions.



National Visa Center staff show visiting attorneys how NVC files approved immigration petitions.

Congressional district staff in that area. If your office is large enough to host an NVC presentation for Congressional staff members in your region, please let us know.

TIPS FOR FASTER SERVICE

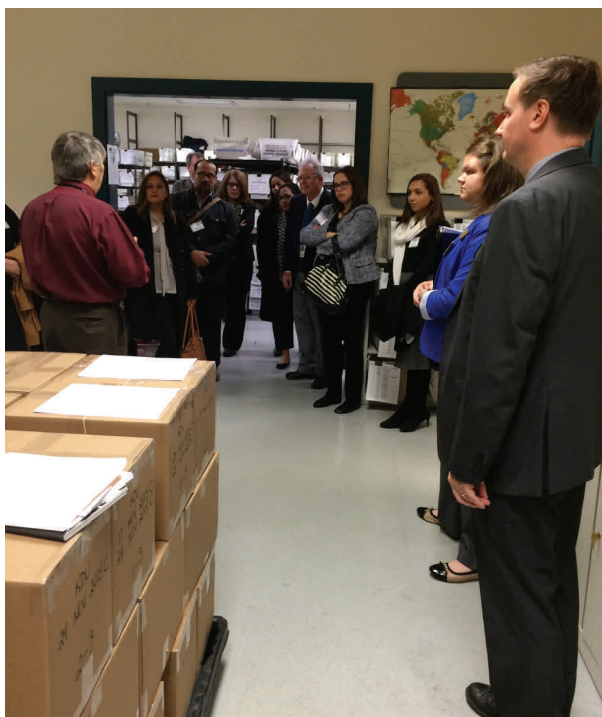
- E-mail us at NVCCongressional@state.gov
- Use the NVC case number or USCIS receipt number as the subject line
- Please refer to one case per e-mail
- Include in the body of the e-mail the name and date of birth of the beneficiary (visa applicant)
- Attach a privacy waiver

NVC Reaches Stakeholders in Midwest and New England

As part of the Bureau of Consular Affairs’ outreach program, NVC traveled this fall to four states to talk about NVC’s role in the immigration application journey with various stakeholder groups.

In Boston, NVC Director Phill Slattery spoke at a September USCIS Workshop for area Congressional district staff members. Three NVC staff members presented at a USCIS Stakeholder event in St. Albans, Vermont in late September. In October, Director Slattery met with Congressional district colleagues in Chicago, where he also gave a presentation to 24 local immigrant advocacy organizations and met with USCIS colleagues in the Chicago Field Office. Director Slattery addressed a meeting of the Ohio Chapter of the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) in Columbus, Ohio in October. On November 3, NVC welcomed AILA’s leadership to our office for a question-and-answer session followed by a tour for their general membership.

We realize that many of our partners can’t travel to New Hampshire to tour our offices. When we travel, we make every effort to schedule a discussion with



Congressional district staff stop in the National Visa Center's outgoing mail unit to learn about the transfer of cases from NVC to embassies worldwide.



Director Phill Slattery shows visiting Congressional staff NVC's filing room for noncurrent petitions.

New England Congressional Districts Tour NVC and National Passport Center

NVC was pleased to co-host with the National Passport Center (NPC) our first New England Congressional District Day on October 27. District staff from Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Vermont, Connecticut and Rhode Island visited both NVC and NPC in Portsmouth, NH for a full day of presentations, tours, and question-and-answer sessions.

The feedback we receive from you is invaluable in designing improvements to our internal processes, and we welcome any of you who are passing through the area to contact us at NVCCongressional@state.gov to discuss arranging a tour.

Online Resource for Congressional Offices

Do you use the Congressional information page on <http://travel.state.gov>? This online resource was created by the Bureau of Consular Affairs to ensure that our Congressional colleagues in Washington, DC and district offices have immediate access to a wealth of information on consular-related topics, including immigrant visas. Please bookmark <http://travel.state.gov/Congress> and visit often.

Reminder about Non-Immigrant Visa Inquiries

NVC has received a number of inquiries about non-immigrant visa (NIV) cases that we were unable to respond to because it is not clear that the applicant has given permission for us to provide information to the Congressional office. NIV cases differ from immigrant visa cases because your constituent is not a party on the case and therefore cannot request case details.

Section 222(f) of the Immigration and Nationality Act restricts the release of information from visa records. Therefore, if seeking information about an NIV case, please send NVC a Privacy Act Waiver form or 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.

If you are simply forwarding us a letter of support for an application, we can send that to the U.S. embassy or consulate overseas without a Privacy Act Waiver form.

Protecting Your Constituents' Privacy

On a related note, last month, NVC notified Congressional offices that we were unable to accept Privacy Act Waivers (PAWs) that:

- 1) Require a constituent to specifically name a federal agency that is allowed to share information about their immigrant visa case, **AND**
- 2) Do not then list NVC, Department of State, or a U.S. embassy/consulate on that line.

Use of this type of PAW specifically excludes NVC from providing information. We want to make sure that we protect your constituents' information and do not violate federal privacy act provisions by disclosing information without authorization. What types of PAWs do we accept? PAWs that:

- Give the Congressional office permission to receive information from "any federal agency" without requiring the constituent to specifically name one;
- Ask a constituent to name a federal agency **AND** the inquirer specifically lists NVC or Department of State; or
- Give permission to a U.S. embassy or consulate overseas to share information.

We've heard from several offices that instead of asking a constituent to specifically name a "federal agency to be contacted," they instead use the following broad statement on their PAWs:

"I, [constituent name], hereby authorize [name of your Representative or Senator] and his/her staff to work on my behalf with any federal agency relevant to the matter described [above/below], to receive and review any information contained in my file and, if necessary, to forward any pertinent correspondence sent by me regarding this matter."

This type of PAW is fully acceptable when inquiring about immigrant visa cases. Thank you for your help in ensuring your constituents' privacy and let us know if you have any questions.

NVC Employees Help Families Celebrate Thanksgiving



National Visa Center employees participated in a charity program arranged by NVC contractor FCI Federal to provide Thanksgiving dinner for 75 local families. NVC staff donated Thanksgiving dinner staples such as vegetables, pumpkin pie ingredients, breads, gravies and more through our local American Red Cross office in New Hampshire.

NVC Winter Holiday Schedule

Don't forget the National Visa Center will be closed on the following federal holidays:

- Friday, December 25, Christmas Day
- Friday, January 1, New Year's Day
- Monday, January 18, Martin Luther King, Jr's Birthday
- Monday, February 15, George Washington's Birthday

Preparing for the Immigrant Visa Interview

When NVC schedules a visa interview appointment, we send all parties on the case – the applicant, the petitioner and attorney (if applicable) – notice of the appointment date and time. We also send instructions on how to prepare for the visa interview.

Details and important online links are at <http://nvc.state.gov/interview>, but here are some key points to relay to your constituents:

- Don't forget to review the U.S. Embassy or Consulate's instructions online. You can find those at <http://nvc.state.gov/interview> under Step #2. This is an important step because each consular office has instructions specific to that country. For example, some embassies use a passport delivery service for which applicants must register prior to their interview. Other embassies require applicants to attend a pre-interview to collect fingerprints or photographs. Applicants will need to look at security guidelines for embassy visitors. If an embassy has not provided information on this site, applicants should visit <http://usembassy.gov> to find the embassy's website, and review the links on their consular information page.
- All persons applying for a visa must schedule and attend a medical examination with a U.S. Embassy-approved physician before the visa interview. Each embassy has a list of approved physicians (called a "panel physician") online. Applicants can visit <http://travel.state.gov/content/visas/english/immigrate/immigrant-process/interview/prepare/medical-examination.html> or the embassy's own website to find instructions on making a medical appointment. After the exam, the physician will either give the applicant a sealed envelope that he/she must bring (unopened) to the visa interview or send the envelope directly to the consular section.
- Applicants should bring the original versions of all documents submitted to NVC (such as a signed I-864 Affidavit of Support, original birth certificate, etc.) to the visa interview. The appointment letter will include a list of what the applicant needs to bring. Details on required documents are also online at <http://travel.state.gov/content/visas/english/immigrate/immigrant-process/interview/prepare/interview-preparation-required-documents.html>.
- If an applicant needs to reschedule an interview, they should do so with the embassy or consulate, rather than NVC. You can find instructions online at <http://nvc.state.gov/interview> under Step #2 or at the embassy's website, which you can find at <http://usembassy.gov>.

CONTACT US

Congressional Inquiries Team

 603-334-0828

 NVCCongressional@state.gov

The above contact information is for Congressional use only. Please do not share this information with the public.

Website

<http://nvc.state.gov>

GENERAL PUBLIC INQUIRIES

 603-334-0700

Monday through Friday
7:00 am – midnight EDT

 E-mail via the public inquiry form on <http://nvc.state.gov/ask>

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