

Tips for Applying for a Non-Immigrant Visa

Disclaimer: ISO has prepared this guide to provide you with general guidance. However, any advice provided to you by our office, as well as the information in this document, should not be construed as legal advice.

DEMONSTRATING TIES TO YOUR HOME COUNTRY

US law assumes that people applying for student or other temporary visas actually want to stay in the US permanently. You must prove to the visa officer that you plan to return to your home country after your studies to be eligible for a student visa. To do this, you must show that you have strong reasons to go back home, and that the reasons to return are stronger than your reasons to stay in the US. If you cannot demonstrate intent to return home, your visa will be denied. **This is the most common reason for visa refusal.**

"Ties" are the things that connect you to your home country: a current or future job; family members; property, money, or a business you own or expect to inherit; investments; etc. The interviewing officer may ask about your specific career goals, family or other relationships, educational objectives, grades, long-range plans and career prospects in your home country. Each person's situation is different, of course, and there is no magic explanation or single document, certificate, or letter which can guarantee visa issuance.

If you applied for the US Green Card Lottery, you may be asked if you plan to immigrate to the United States. You can explain that you applied because the lottery was available, not because you had a plan to move permanently. If you have ever stayed in the US longer than allowed, be ready to explain what happened in a clear and simple way. Bring documents if you have them.

You may also be asked questions about whether you fear harm or mistreatment in your home country. If you answer "yes," the officer will assume that you plan to enter the US in order to apply for asylum and your visa will be denied. If you answer "no," then later claim asylum in the US, your prior statement can be used against you in that application.

KNOW THE PROGRAM AND HOW IT FITS YOUR CAREER PLANS

If you cannot clearly explain why you want to study a specific program in the United States, the visa officer will think you have no real intention to study. **This is another very common reason for denial.** You must be able to explain:

1. Why you chose this program
2. Why you chose to study in the United States
3. How this education will help your future career when you return to your home country

Clear and honest answers help show that your main purpose is education, not immigration.



INTERNATIONAL
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ENGLISH

The interview will be conducted in English – not in your native language. You should be comfortable expressing yourself in English. We recommend practicing English conversation with a native speaker before the interview, but do NOT prepare speeches! Think about your responses ahead of time, but let your answers come naturally, and be prepared for follow up questions.

SPEAK FOR YOURSELF

Do not bring parents or family members with you to the interview. The consular officer wants to interview you, not your family. A negative impression is created if you are not prepared to speak on your own behalf.

BE BRIEF AND REMAIN CALM

Consular officers receive many visa applications, so they must conduct interviews very quickly – generally 2-3 minutes. Often, the officer decides based on the first minute of the interview. Because of this, the first impression you make matters a lot. Answer the officer's questions clearly, briefly, and directly. Do not give long or unnecessary explanations.

MAINTAIN A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Remain calm and be friendly throughout the process. Do not argue with consular officers. If you are denied a student visa, try to get the reason you were denied in writing. You can also ask the officer to suggest any documents that might help you overcome the refusal.

EMPLOYMENT

Your main purpose in coming to the United States should be to study, not for the chance to work before or after graduation. Do not focus on any employment benefits during your interview. Even though some students work during or after their studies, this is not the main purpose of a student visa. You must be able to clearly show that you are coming to learn and that your plan is to return home at the end of your program.

If your spouse is also applying for an F-2 visa, be aware that F-2 dependents cannot work in the US under any circumstances. If asked, be prepared to address what your spouse intends to do with his or her time while in the US. Volunteer work and attending school part-time are permitted activities.



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DEPENDENTS REMAINING AT HOME

If your spouse or children will stay in your home country, be ready to explain how they will support themselves while you are studying. This is especially important if you are the main person who earns money for your family. If the visa officer thinks that your family will need money sent from the United States, your student visa will very likely be denied. If your family plans to join you later, it is better if they apply for their visas at the same embassy or consulate where you applied.

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

In general, do not bring documents unless the embassy asks for them. Additional documentation that is not on the list of required materials will generally not be reviewed. Remember that you will have 2-3 minutes of interview time, if you're lucky. Lengthy written explanations cannot be quickly read or evaluated.

NOT ALL COUNTRIES ARE EQUAL

Students from countries with economic or social problems, or from countries where many students have stayed in the US permanently, may find it harder to get a visa. If you have had lots of close relatives move to the US, you may also find it harder to get a visa. Visa officers may think that applicants with these conditions are more likely to want to immigrate. Because of this, you may be asked more questions about job opportunities in your home country and/or your plans to return home after finishing your studies in the US. Students from countries with poor "visa metrics" may need to try multiple times to obtain a visa. If you are denied your visa, please contact us for information about deferring so that you can try again.

CONTACT INFORMATION ON THE DS-160

The email you list on your DS-160 visa application form should remain active for your entire time in the US. If the consulate needs to provide you with an update on your visa after it is issued, they will only be able to use this email address.

Social Media

The DS-160 form asks you to list all your social media accounts. This includes more than just platforms where you post content, such as Instagram, Facebook, Tiktok, WhatsApp/WeChat, or X (formerly Twitter). You should include any platform where you have an account, even if you only use it to view content and never post, like, or comment. For example, if you have a YouTube account that you use only to watch videos, it still counts as a social media account. Professional networking sites, such as LinkedIn, should also be listed. Although not all your posts need to be public, your social media accounts should remain publicly viewable until you have been admitted to the United States.

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EXPEDITED OR “EMERGENCY” VISA APPOINTMENTS

Visa appointment availability can be a challenge. You may find that the earliest visa appointment is after the I-20 start date. If this happens to you, book the earliest visa appointment available, but keep checking your embassy’s site daily to see if an earlier appointment may be released. You can always change your date. In addition, most embassies have a process to “expedite,” or rush, visa appointments for urgent situations. The process to request an expedited visa interview varies by location. You should refer to the instructions on your [Embassy or Consulate’s Visa Section](#) or on their online appointment scheduling site to see how early you can request an expedite. You will need to provide “proof” of the need for an earlier appointment. To provide this proof, you should submit a signed letter with your request that states that you need the earlier appointment as you cannot begin your academic program past the listed start date on your I-20. Do not submit your appointment request without providing this explanation.

In the meantime, we recommend that you complete online orientation in MyGCC so that you can register for courses. Should you not receive your visa, or need to defer attendance, you will be able to drop your courses, but this will ensure that your enrollment is not disrupted while you wait for the visa process.