

How to Work in the U.S. As a Foreign-Educated Counselor

Working as a mental health counselor in the United States is something that many foreign-educated individuals may be considering. However, this process can be confusing at first glance and may leave you wondering about how to easily complete each step and move to the United States so you can legally practice as a mental health counselor.

Our article gives you a helpful step-by-step guide for this process, and we answer questions such as:

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What Is the Process for Working in the U.S. As a Foreign-Educated Counselor?

The process is generally state-specific, so it's important to decide which state you wish to work in ahead of time.

The steps for becoming a foreign-educated counselor in the U.S. include:

1. Researching the state where you wish to practice in as a counselor; state licensing, education requirements, and experience requirements vary state-by-state, so it's important to understand the regulations for licensing and legal practice in the state you wish to immigrate first.

While you look into state regulations, you will also need to decide which type of license is best for you. The Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) certification is the most common, but other types of licenses you may be eligible for include:

- Licensed Mental Health Counselor (LMHC)
- Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor (LCPC)
- Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor of Mental Health (LPCC)

- Licensed Clinical Mental Health Counselor (LCMHC)
- Licensed Mental Health Practitioner (LMHP)

You will need to research the specific state regulations for the type of certification you wish to pursue, as they can also vary.

2. Once you've looked into the education requirements for the state where you wish to become a counselor, you will need to make sure that your foreign education and credentials meet the U.S. equivalency. This is done by obtaining a credential evaluation. You will also likely need to obtain a [certified translation](#) of your original academic transcripts, licenses, and diplomas so the credential evaluation service can provide you with the most accurate evaluation of your education.

Reliable credential evaluation services that adhere to high standards may be found through the [National Association of Credential Evaluation Services](#) (NACES) or the [Association of International Credential Evaluators](#) (AICE).

3. You will also need to make sure that you have obtained any work experience or internship experience necessary for licensing in your chosen state. Some states require a certain number of supervised hours to be completed or experience obtained while your education is completed in order for you to qualify for licensing. On average, between 2,000 and 3,000 hours are required, depending on the specific type of license you are aiming to obtain.
4. Examinations are required in most states before you can be awarded a license. The most common required exam you will need to pass is the [National Counselor Examination](#) administered by the [National Board for Certified Counselors](#) (NBCC). Alternate exams you may be required to take include the [National Clinical Mental Health Counseling Examination](#), or the [Certified Rehabilitation Counselor Examination](#). Make sure to double-check with the state requirements to find out which exam you will need to take and how to properly prepare yourself for it.

While you are looking into examinations, you may also want to consider taking the [Test of English as a Foreign Language](#) (TOEFL) or the [International English Language Testing System](#) (IELTS). A passing score on either of these exams generally isn't required to practice counseling in the U.S., but it may be helpful when it comes to finding a counseling job if you are from a country where English isn't a predominant language.

5. In addition to general counseling license exams, you may be required to take a state ethics exam. These tests are generally required before a license is awarded and will test you on specific state laws, ethics codes, and legal obligations that you may have as an LPC or other certified counselor in that state.
6. After you have ensured that you have completed all education and experience requirements for the state you wish to work in, obtained certified translations and credential evaluations, taken any required examinations and ethics exams, and paid

licensing fees in addition to your state license application, you will need to look into obtaining a U.S. visa or green card. The [H-1B visa for specialty occupations](#) is a common visa used by professional counselors, but employment-based [E-B2 visas](#) with a [Physician National Interest Waiver](#) or an [EB-3 visa](#) may also be an option. Consult with a U.S. immigration lawyer for more information.

You should also keep in mind that you will need to meet any state requirements for continuing education and license renewal, including paying renewal fees, in addition to adhering to your visa or green card requirements as you live and work in the U.S.

How Much Does It Cost to Work as a Foreign-Educated Counselor in the U.S.?

The overall cost of working as a foreign-educated counselor in the United States ranges between \$2,000 and \$3,000 on average, not including the cost of obtaining your counseling education and work or internship experience in a foreign country.

Important items that you will need to pay for as part of this process include certified translation and credential evaluation fees, testing fees and study materials for exams such as the [National Counselor Examination](#) or an English-language proficiency test, state license application fees, the cost of state-required ethics exams, and your visa or green card application (costs for these range between \$460 and \$700 or more depending on the type of visa you are applying for).

Make sure you check with specific visa applications for their cost and the requirements for the state you wish to work in to get a more detailed breakdown of the costs associated with becoming a foreign-educated counselor in the U.S.

How Long Does It Take To Work as a Foreign-Educated Counselor in the U.S.?

Many factors in the process determine how long it takes to complete each step. On average, the process of taking all exams, ensuring your foreign credentials are evaluated and submitted to both state licensing boards and as part of visa or green card applications, obtaining a job, and meeting other state-specific licensing requirements will take between 2 to 5 years. This length of time does vary based on each person's situation and how fast visa or green card applications are processed, and it does not include the length of time it takes to obtain your counseling education or any required work experience.

Are There Any Restrictions to Working as a Foreign-Educated Counselor in the U.S.?

Once you have met all of the minimum education and experience requirements of the state you wish to work in, completed any required exams, obtained your licensed professional counselor certification in the state that you wish to work in, and received your visa or green card for

working in the U.S., you will be able to immigrate to your preferred state and work as a foreign-educated counselor.

As long as you continue meeting ongoing state license requirements, immigration requirements, and adhere to U.S. laws when it comes to [working as a mental health counselor](#) and abiding by a code of ethics, you will be able to practice as a foreign-educated counselor in the U.S. without restrictions.

What Are the State-Specific Requirements for Foreign-Educated Counselors?

Professional licensing for counselors, including foreign-educated counselors, is handled on a state-by-state basis. This means that you can expect each state to have varying rules and regulations surrounding license applications, fees, continuing education requirements, and exams that are required before a licensed professional counselor (LPC) certification is awarded.

In general, state-specific requirements will dictate that an individual has a master's degree in a related field, meets post-graduate work or internship experience requirements, takes an exam of professional counseling knowledge such as the [National Counselor Examination](#), completes a state-specific ethics exam, pays license fees, and is a U.S. citizen or specific non-citizen group that is eligible for licensing in the state.

To learn about the specific requirements of the state you wish to work in, you can access the American Counseling Association's [directory of state professional counselor license boards](#). Review the requirements listed on the application page of each state.

What Are the Immigration Requirements for Foreign-Educated Counselors?

Depending on specific state and U.S. regulations, only U.S. citizens and certain groups of non-citizens are eligible to take advantage of public benefits, such as licensing in that state; you need to obtain a licensed professional counselor certification by the state you wish to work in if you are to legally practice your profession there.

Because of this, foreign-educated counselors will most likely need to apply for a [green card](#) to become permanent residents of the United States. That being said, there are a few different visa types that may help you enter the country and pave the way for eventually obtaining a green card so you can move to the United States without waiting for your green card application to be processed in a foreign country.

In most cases, foreign-educated mental health counselors will need to apply for an [H-1B visa for specialty occupations](#). However, employment-based [EB-2](#) and [EB-3 visas](#) may also be an option. If you obtain the EB-2 visa, you may also be able to apply for the [Physician National Interest Waiver](#) (NIW), which helps you gain a green card.

Make sure you consult an immigration lawyer for more advice on which visa type or immigration process is the best for your specific situation.

Where Can I Get a Certified Translation?

Certified translations are an essential part of the process when it comes to becoming a foreign-educated counselor working in the United States. In order to obtain credential evaluations and submit your license and visa or green card applications, you will need to provide your original documents along with a reliable certified translation.

Visit our online store to obtain certified translations of your important documents, including:

- Diplomas
- Academic transcripts
- Business licenses and certifications
- Resumes and employment records
- Birth certificates

[Get Your Certified Translation Now](#)

Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) Louisiana

Application Requirements:

- Fulfill the supervised experience requirement. This is done as a PLPC. You must complete 3,000 hours of post-graduate supervised counseling experience over a span of at least two years and not more than six. This must include 1,900 hours of direct client contact, 1,000 hours of indirect client contact, and 100 hours of face-to-face supervision. Once you've fulfilled this requirement you'll fill out your portion of a Documentation of Experience Form and your supervisor will submit this to the LA LPCBE. For every 30 semester credits of additional coursework in counseling you earn beyond your 60-credit graduate degree, you can earn 500 hours of indirect client contact credit.
- If you have not already passed the NCE or NCMHCE exam from the NBCC, you must register with the NBCC and pass one of these exams before you apply for an LPC license. Have the NBCC send your scores to the LA LPCBE.
- Step Three – Apply for LPC licensure through your online account with the LA LPCBE. The application fee is \$200. Include a Statement of Declaration of Practices and

Procedures with your application; you can use this as a model. Once the LA LPCBE approves your application it will issue your LPC license. Optional – Add a teletherapy specialization to your LPC license. This allows you to provide counseling services using interactive technology-assisted media through synchronous audio and video transmission. You can apply for this through your online LA LPCBE account. To add this designation to your license you must have been practicing for at least one year and complete one of the following:

A three-credit or 45-hour qualifying graduate-level academic course in telemental health counseling. A professional teletherapy training course that's at least nine hours. This must cover the following topics as they relate to teletherapy: appropriateness, theory and practice, theory integration, modes of delivery, risk management, managing emergencies, and legal and ethical issues.

VISAS

- You can travel to the US under the visa waiver program for 90 days, work digitally (not for us companies) and have no visa. Just need a new digital passport.
- Or there is the B1 business visa which gives you max 6 months. But you can extend to one year.

You may be eligible for a B-1 visa if you will be participating in business activities of a commercial or professional nature in the United States, including, but not limited to:

- Consulting with business associates
- Traveling for a scientific, educational, professional or business convention, or a conference on specific dates
- Settling an estate
- Negotiating a contract
- Participating in short-term training
- Transiting through the United States: certain persons may transit the United States with a B-1 visa

For a P-3 visa, you must be coming to the United States either individually or as a group for the purpose of developing, interpreting, representing, coaching, or teaching a unique or traditional ethnic, folk, cultural, musical, theatrical, or artistic performance or presentation. In addition, you must be coming to the United States to participate in a cultural event or events which will further the understanding or development of your art form. The program may be of a commercial or noncommercial nature. -can stay for up to a year.

Brazil: Foreigners that are employed by a foreign company who wish to work remotely in Brazil can now live and work in the country for one year. You can then renew the visa for an additional year, Brazil has launched a remote worker visa for qualifying foreign nationals to live and work in the country as of January 2022. You cannot currently apply for this visa online, and you will have to go, in person, to a Brazilian consular office. To be eligible for the Brazil remote worker

visa, you must prove that your income comes from sources outside of Brazil through an employment or service contract or other documents proving a link with an employer.

In addition, the minimum income requirements are at least \$1,500 a month, or you must have to show a bank deposit of a minimum of \$18,000 in a bank account. This is for a single applicant.

Plus private medical insurance. If you are travelling there for longer than 3 months at a time.