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Immigration Law &
Advocacy Clinic

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Consular Processing Tips and Suggestions

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Consular processing for a nonimmigrant visa can feel daunting, especially if you're navigating additional steps like a 212(d)(3) waiver or advance parole. This guide walks you through the process from start to finish, with practical tips for choosing the right consulate or embassy, preparing required documents, and understanding what to expect at your interview. We include key considerations for third-country nationals, detailed guidance for DACA recipients, particularly those applying through a U.S. Consulate in Mexico, and suggestions to make the experience as smooth as possible. Whether you are pursuing an H-1B, O-1, or another nonimmigrant visa, this resource is designed to help you prepare, avoid common pitfalls, and feel confident every step of the way.

1. Choosing the Consulate or Embassy

You will typically apply for a nonimmigrant visa interview at a U.S. consulate or embassy in your home country.

Some consulates and embassies allow third-country nationals (those applying from a country where they are not citizens) to schedule visa interviews. However, [a recent policy](#) on September 6, 2025 makes it more difficult for third-country nationals to apply for a U.S. nonimmigrant visa outside their country of nationality or residence.

While the recent policy does not entirely bar individuals from applying outside their country of nationality or residence, it makes the process more difficult and less practical due to potentially much longer appointment wait times and non-refundable and non-transferable fees if an appointment is refused. However, any appointments booked before the policy took effect will still be honored.



Before choosing a consulate or embassy other than your home country, be sure to visit its official website to confirm whether it accepts visa applications from third-country nationals. Also keep in mind that some countries have multiple U.S. consulates or embassies, and not all of them handle nonimmigrant visa interviews, so it's important to verify this in advance.

2. Third Country Nationals and Mexican Consulates

In practice, some U.S. consulates in Mexico, have allowed non-Mexican nationals to schedule nonimmigrant visa interviews. However, as discussed above, this might be more difficult moving forward.

Before booking your appointment, be sure to check whether Mexico requires you to obtain a tourist visa to enter the country. If a visa is required, you'll need to apply through a Mexican consulate or embassy in the United States. Be sure to schedule this appointment well in advance, as availability is often limited.

[You can learn more about visa requirements to enter Mexico here.](#)

3. Valid Passport

Before attending your consulate interview, make sure your passport is valid for at least six months beyond your expected return date to the United States. This requirement also applies if you need to obtain a Mexican tourist visa.

4. Applying for Advance Parole

If you are a DACA recipient applying for advance parole before you leave the United States, you can learn more about the benefits and tips to apply for advance parole for your consulate interview in our [resource here](#).

5. Interview Process

- A. **Paying for Visa Fee:** Some consulates, like in Mexico, require you to go to a bank in that country in order to pay the proper visa fee. For that reason, it is important to identify a person who can help pay for your visa if you do not have a bank in that country. For non-immigrant visas like an H-1B or an O-1, the visa fee should be around \$205. Make sure to read the consulate's policies around fees and payment methods for more information. For Mexico, [you can visit this website](#).



- B. **Biometrics:** As part of the interview process, you will be required to provide biometrics, which typically include fingerprinting and photographs. In most cases, this is done on the same day as your consular interview, although at some embassies or consulates, the biometric appointment may take place a few days earlier.
- C. **What to Bring:** You should bring a valid passport and copies of your DS-160 confirmation page, and any supporting documents like your educational degree, employer letter, previous DACA approvals, and 212(d)(3) waiver if you are seeking one. [See this guide for more information on the 212\(d\)\(3\) waiver, including templates.](#)
- D. **What Not to Bring:** Most consulates do not allow personal electronic devices inside the building. You also cannot bring family members or friends into the building with you. For a list of prohibited items in Mexico, [you can visit this website.](#)
- E. **Medical Exam:** Some people might also be referred to a panel physician to undergo a medical exam. This is usually required for persons who have alcohol or drug related arrests or convictions.
- F. **Consular Interview:** Consular officers typically review between 100 and 120 cases per day, so interviews are brief—often lasting no more than two minutes.

The primary purpose of the interview is to confirm your eligibility for the nonimmigrant visa you're applying for. We recommend waiting for the officer to ask questions rather than offering unsolicited information.

For Dreamers, common questions include why you are traveling to the United States, whether you have ever left the country (without advance parole), and whether you are requesting a [212\(d\)\(3\) waiver](#). Some officers may also ask about your education and employment to ensure that what you say matches the information in your DS-160 and in the H-1B/O-1 application that was filed with USCIS.

If you are applying for a nonimmigrant visa such as an O-1, the officer may also ask whether you intend to leave the United States if your visa expires. Below are sample responses for both H-1B and O-1 visa applicants who are seeking a D3 waiver.



6. Sample Elevator Pitches

A. H-1B DACA Applicant Sample Elevator Pitch:

“I have DACA and have been approved for an H-1B visa. Even though I have more than 180 days of unlawful presence, I departed the United States with advance parole and do not believe I need a 212(d)(3) waiver for the 3/10 year unlawful presence bar. However, if the consulate requires me to have a waiver, here is my waiver.”

B. O-1 Undocumented Applicant Sample Elevator Pitch:

“I have been approved for an O-1 visa. Even though I have more than 180 days of unlawful presence, I am seeking a 212(d)(3) waiver for the 3/10 year unlawful presence bar. Additionally, the FAM guidance allows O-1 visa applicants to have dual intent and does not require me to have a residence abroad.”

7. After the Interview: At the end of your interview, you will typically leave your passport with the consulate while your visa is processed. If you are applying for a 212(d)(3) waiver, the processing time will depend on whether the consular officer recommends approval and whether they also request expedited processing. Recently, some individuals approved for expedited 212(d)(3) waivers from the Tijuana consulate in Mexico have received their visas in about a month, but processing times can vary and are difficult to predict. You can check the status of your visa through the Department of State website.

8. Tijuana-Specific and Miscellaneous Tips: If you choose Tijuana as the consulate, try to stay near the consulate, as there are many hotels in the area. Some individuals have also chosen to travel to other parts of Mexico while waiting for their visa to be processed. In some cases, DACA recipients who attended their interview on advance parole have returned to the U.S. and then traveled back to the consulate once their visa was ready. You can generally request that the consulate or embassy return your passport while you await a decision on the waiver. Some consulates also offer the option to mail your passport with the visa to a designated location.

Transportation and Safety Tips for Visiting Tijuana

For transportation within Tijuana, Uber is the recommended option, as it is generally considered safer than traditional taxis.



Like many places, Tijuana is generally safe but you should also be cautious. It is strongly advised to avoid Zona Norte, known as the city's red-light district. This area has a higher rate of crime and a significant police presence. Stick to well-populated, tourist-friendly areas and avoid isolated or unfamiliar locations. When checking directions, using a map, or ordering an Uber, avoid doing so while walking or standing on the sidewalk—find a safe, discreet location instead.

