

FAMILY-BASED IMMIGRATION INTERVIEW

COMPLETE PREPARATION GUIDE

For Marriage-Based Immigrant Visa Interviews at U.S. Embassies, Consulates, and USCIS Offices

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A MESSAGE TO OUR CLIENTS

Your immigration interview is one of the most important steps in your family-based case. Whether you are appearing at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate abroad (Consular Processing) or at a USCIS office here in the United States (Adjustment of Status), the officer conducting your interview has one primary goal: to determine whether your marriage is genuine and whether you are eligible for the immigration benefit you are seeking.

This guide is designed to prepare you as thoroughly as possible. We will walk you through what to expect, what to bring, what questions will be asked, and how to present yourself and your case in the best possible light. Please read every section carefully. If anything is unclear or if you have concerns about a specific issue in your case, contact our office immediately at 508-500-1551.

CONSULAR PROCESSING

For spouses living OUTSIDE the United States at the time of the interview. Interview takes place at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate in your home country or country of residence.

Case Types: CR-1, IR-1, F2A

ADJUSTMENT OF STATUS

For spouses living INSIDE the United States at the time of the interview. Interview takes place at a USCIS Field Office. Both spouses typically appear together.

Case Types: I-130/I-485 Package

PART 1 — IMPORTANT GOVERNMENT RESOURCES

The websites listed below are official U.S. government resources that are directly relevant to your case. We strongly encourage you to bookmark these and review them carefully. When this document is provided to you as a PDF, each link is clickable. These resources are updated regularly by the government and contain the most current instructions for your specific embassy, consulate, or USCIS office.

U.S. Embassy Finder

Find your specific embassy or consulate, confirm interview location, hours, security rules, and any post-specific document requirements. Always check this before your interview — rules vary by location.

<https://www.usembassy.gov>

DOS Interview Preparation

The Department of State's official immigrant visa interview preparation overview. Explains the full process from NVC to the interview.

Medical Exam Instructions	https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/immigrate/the-immigrant-visa-process/interview/prepare/interview-preparation.html Official instructions for the required medical examination, including which vaccines are required and how to find an approved panel physician in your country. https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/immigrate/the-immigrant-visa-process/interview/prepare/medical-examination.html
CEAC Case Tracker	Check your case status and post-interview updates in the Consular Electronic Application Center. Use this to monitor progress after your interview. https://ceac.state.gov/CEACStatTracker
Civil Documents by Country	Look up the exact civil document requirements (birth certificate format, police certificate requirements, marriage record format) by your specific country. https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/Visa-Reciprocity-and-Civil-Documents-by-Country.html
USCIS Immigrant Fee	After visa approval, you must pay the USCIS Immigrant Fee before traveling to the United States. Pay here and keep your receipt. https://www.uscis.gov/file-online/uscis-immigrant-fee
DS-260 Online Form	The online immigrant visa application. Print your confirmation page from here and bring it to your interview. https://ceac.state.gov/IV
USCIS Field Offices	If your interview is at a USCIS Field Office (Adjustment of Status), find your office location, hours, and specific instructions here. https://www.uscis.gov/about-us/find-a-uscis-office/field-offices

PART 2 — UNDERSTANDING THE PURPOSE OF YOUR INTERVIEW

What the Officer Is Evaluating

Your immigration interview is a formal legal proceeding, not a casual conversation. The officer has authority to approve or deny your case on the spot. Understanding exactly what they are looking for — and why — will help you prepare effectively.

Is Your Marriage Genuine?	The officer must be satisfied that you entered your marriage in good faith — because you love each other and intend to build a real life together — and NOT primarily to obtain an immigration benefit. This is the central question in every marriage-based interview. Everything you bring and everything you say should speak to the reality of your relationship.
Are You Admissible?	Under INA Section 212, certain grounds can make a person ineligible for a visa or green card. These include prior immigration violations (overstays, unlawful presence, misrepresentation), criminal history, certain medical conditions, and security concerns. The officer is required to screen for all of these.

Is Your Application Complete?	The officer will verify that your forms, civil documents, financial support, and medical exam are all complete, consistent, and credible. Missing or inconsistent documents are one of the most common causes of delays.
Is Your Sponsor Able to Support You?	The U.S. citizen or LPR petitioner must demonstrate they have sufficient income to support you at 125% of the federal poverty guidelines. The Form I-864 Affidavit of Support must be complete and supported by tax and income evidence.

YOUR CREDIBILITY IS EVERYTHING

Officers are trained to detect inconsistencies. They compare your answers to your DS-260 form, your petitioner's I-130 petition, your prior visa history, and any previous statements made to immigration authorities. Even an innocent mistake — a wrong date, a misremembered fact — can raise concerns. The key is to be honest, calm, consistent, and prepared.

PART 3 — WHAT TO EXPECT: A STEP-BY-STEP WALKTHROUGH

At a U.S. Embassy or Consulate (Consular Processing)

STEP 1 Arrival & Security	• Arrive 15–30 minutes before your appointment time. Do not be late — late arrivals may not be admitted. • Consult your specific embassy's website at usembassy.gov for exact security rules — these vary by location. • Most embassies prohibit: cell phones, smart watches, earbuds, USB drives, laptops, large bags, food, liquids, lighters, knives, and sealed envelopes (except a sealed medical packet from a panel physician). • You will go through a security screening similar to an airport. Bring only what is required. • Present your passport and interview appointment letter at the gate to gain entry.
STEP 2 Check-In & Document Intake	• Embassy staff will verify your identity, scan your fingerprints, and collect your documents. • Your case is already in the Consular Electronic Application Center (CEAC) — the officer will have access to your DS-260, your NVC submission, and your petition. Be consistent with what you previously submitted.

	• Staff may ask you to sit and wait. Waiting times vary significantly by post — plan for the possibility of several hours. • Stay calm, organized, and respectful to all staff at all times.
STEP 3 The Oath	• Before your interview begins, you will be placed under oath — you swear to tell the truth. • This is a solemn legal obligation. Everything you say from this point forward is sworn testimony. Providing false information to a consular officer is a federal crime and a permanent bar to immigration benefits. • Answer clearly and honestly. If you do not understand a question, ask the officer to repeat or clarify — never guess.
STEP 4 The Interview	• The officer will confirm your biographical information from the DS-260 and review your application file. • They will ask questions about your marriage history, your relationship with your petitioner, your background, and your eligibility. • They will screen for grounds of inadmissibility under INA §212 (prior overstay, misrepresentation, criminal history, security concerns, medical issues). • The interview may last anywhere from 10 minutes to over an hour, depending on the complexity of your case. • Present documents only when asked. Have everything organized in a folder so you can retrieve items quickly.
STEP 5 The Decision	• APPROVED: Your passport is retained for visa printing. Immigrant visas are typically valid for 6 months (often limited by your medical exam validity). You will receive instructions for passport/visa delivery via courier or pick-up. • 221(g) Administrative Processing: Not a denial — but additional review is required. You will receive a written notice listing exactly what is needed. Follow those instructions precisely and contact our office the same day you receive it. • Refused / Inadmissibility Finding: If the officer finds you inadmissible (e.g., INA §212 grounds), you may be eligible for a waiver (such as Form I-601 or I-601A). Contact our office immediately to discuss next steps.
STEP 6 After Approval	• Confirm courier or pickup arrangements per your embassy's instructions at usembassy.gov. • Pay the USCIS Immigrant Fee at uscis.gov/file-online/uscis-immigrant-fee BEFORE traveling to the United States.

- When you receive your visa packet, carefully review: your name spelling, date of birth, visa type, and expiration date. Report any errors immediately.
- Upon entry to the United States, a CBP officer at the port of entry will admit you as a Lawful Permanent Resident. Your green card will be mailed to your designated U.S. address within a few weeks.
- **IMPORTANT:** If you were married for less than two years on the date of U.S. entry, you will receive a 2-year conditional green card (Form I-551 with code CR1). We will need to file Form I-751 during the 90-day window before it expires. We will contact you about this.

At a USCIS Field Office (Adjustment of Status)

If your spouse is already in the United States and filed a combined I-130/I-485 package (or has an approved I-130 and became eligible to file I-485), your interview will take place at a USCIS Field Office. Here is what to expect:

KEY DIFFERENCE FROM CONSULAR PROCESSING

- Both spouses — the U.S. citizen or LPR petitioner AND the foreign national spouse — typically appear at the interview together.
- The officer may interview both of you together, or separately, or both. Separate interviews are more common in cases where the officer has concerns about the marriage's genuineness.
- The interview is conducted in English. Bring a certified interpreter if needed — do not use a family member as your interpreter.
- Bring originals AND copies of all documents. USCIS staff may retain originals for the file.
- After the interview, the officer may approve on the spot, or may issue an RFE (Request for Evidence) or NOID (Notice of Intent to Deny) requiring additional documentation. Contact our office immediately upon receiving either.

PART 4 — WHAT TO BRING TO YOUR INTERVIEW

Organization is critical. Bring originals and one clean set of photocopies for every document, organized in labeled sections. The officer should never have to wait while you search through a disorganized stack of papers. A well-organized document packet projects confidence and credibility.

A. Identification and Appointment Documents

- **Passport** — Must be valid for at least 6 months beyond your intended U.S. entry date. Bring ALL prior passports as well, as they may contain prior U.S. visa stamps the officer will want to review.
- **Interview Appointment Letter** — The official appointment notice from the embassy/consulate or USCIS. Do not lose this.

- **DS-260 Confirmation Page** (Consular Processing) — Print from ceac.state.gov/IV. The officer will use this as the basis for your interview.
- **Two U.S.-Style Passport Photos** — Check your specific embassy's photo requirements at usembassy.gov. Most require 2 inches x 2 inches, white background, recent, no glasses.
- **I-797 Notice of Action** (Adjustment of Status) — The approval notice for your I-130 or any other approved petitions.

B. Civil Status Documents

IMPORTANT: Country-Specific Requirements

Civil document requirements vary significantly by country. Before gathering your documents, verify the exact format and requirements for your specific country at: travel.state.gov — [Civil Documents by Country](#)

- **Birth Certificate** — In the correct format required for your country of birth. Must have certified English translation if not in English.
- **Marriage Certificate** — The official government-issued certificate for your current marriage. If married in a religious ceremony only, you may also need the civil registration document.
- **Divorce / Annulment / Death Certificates** — Required for EVERY prior marriage for BOTH the petitioner and the beneficiary. You cannot get legally married without legally ending a prior marriage — the officer will verify this.
- **Police Certificates** — Required from every country where you have lived for 6 or more months since age 16. Requirements vary by country — check usembassy.gov for your post's requirements.
- **Court and Prison Records** — For any arrest, charge, or conviction anywhere in the world, regardless of outcome. Include records even if charges were dropped or you were found not guilty.
- **Military Records** — If you have served in any military, bring discharge papers or service records.
- **Name Change Documents** — If your name has ever legally changed (by marriage, divorce, court order, or any other process).
- **Certified English Translations** — Required for ALL documents not in English. The translator must certify that they are competent to translate and that the translation is accurate.

C. Financial Support — Affidavit of Support

The I-864 Affidavit of Support is a legally binding contract in which the petitioner promises the U.S. government that the immigrant will not become a public charge. The officer will scrutinize this carefully.

- **Form I-864** — Signed by the petitioner (and joint sponsor if applicable). Must be the most current version of the form.
- **IRS Tax Transcripts or Tax Returns** — Most recent year is required; providing the last three years is strongly recommended. Tax transcripts are preferred over returns. Obtain them at irs.gov.
- **W-2s and 1099s** — For the same years as the tax returns.
- **Recent Pay Stubs** — Last 3–6 months. Must show employer name, employee name, pay period, and year-to-date earnings.

- **Employment Letter** — On company letterhead, signed by an employer representative, stating job title, start date, hours per week, and annual or hourly wage.
- **Proof of U.S. Domicile** — The petitioner must prove they live in the United States. Acceptable documents include: lease or mortgage, utility bills, driver's license, voter registration, bank statements.
- **Joint Sponsor Package** — If the petitioner does not meet the income requirement, a joint sponsor who does meet the requirement must provide their own complete I-864 package with all of the above documents.
- **Additional Assets (if needed)** — Bank statements, investment account statements, or real estate documents if assets are being used to supplement income.

D. Evidence of Your Bona Fide Marriage

This is often the most important category of documents in a marriage-based interview. The officer is looking for evidence that your marriage is real — that you have built a life together, share finances and a home, communicate regularly, and are committed to each other as a couple.

STRONGEST EVIDENCE	SUPPORTING EVIDENCE
✓ Joint bank account statements showing regular activity ✓ Joint lease or mortgage with both names ✓ Utility bills listing both spouses at the same address ✓ Joint federal or state tax returns ✓ Insurance policies listing spouse as beneficiary or co-insured ✓ Birth certificates of children born to the marriage ✓ Photographs throughout the relationship (labeled with dates/locations)	✓ Communication records (WhatsApp, texts, calls with dates/times) ✓ Travel itineraries and boarding passes from visits ✓ Remittance records / wire transfers to spouse ✓ Wedding photos, ceremony program, guest list ✓ Affidavits from family members and friends ✓ Social media posts, cards, letters, emails ✓ Evidence of planning for future together (house purchase, pregnancy, school enrollment)

E. Medical Examination

The medical examination must be completed by a government-approved panel physician — you cannot go to your personal doctor. The exam must be completed before your interview. Do not bring a completed medical exam in an open envelope — it must remain sealed.

- Find approved panel physicians and complete instructions at: [travel.state.gov — Medical Examination](https://travel.state.gov/Medical-Examination)
- Bring your vaccination records — if you are missing required vaccines, the panel physician will administer them, potentially at additional cost.
- Bring the sealed medical packet to your interview and give it to embassy staff as directed. Do NOT open the envelope.
- Note: The validity of your medical exam affects the validity of your immigrant visa. Older exams may result in a shorter visa validity window.

F. What NOT to Bring

LEAVE THESE AT HOME OR IN YOUR VEHICLE

- X Cell phones, smartphones, smart watches, tablets, or any electronics
- X Earbuds, headphones, or Bluetooth devices
- X USB drives or any portable storage devices
- X Laptops or portable computers
- X Large bags, backpacks, or luggage
- X Food, beverages, or liquids of any kind
- X Knives, scissors, lighters, or matches
- X Sealed envelopes (EXCEPT your sealed medical packet from the panel physician)
- X Children (unless the embassy specifically permits it — check your post's rules)
- X Friends or family members who are not also being interviewed

PART 5 — TYPES OF QUESTIONS YOU WILL BE ASKED

The questions below represent the full range of topics a consular or USCIS officer may cover in a marriage-based interview. You will not be asked every question — the officer selects questions based on your specific case file. Review all of them and make sure you can answer each one truthfully, confidently, and consistently.

HOW TO ANSWER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Be direct and truthful. There is no trick question — the officer wants factual information.
- Be concise. Answer the question asked and stop. Do not over-explain or volunteer information that was not requested.
- If you do not remember an exact date or fact, it is perfectly acceptable to say "approximately" or "I am not certain of the exact date."
- If you do not understand a question, ask the officer to repeat or rephrase it. Never guess at what is being asked.
- Never argue, become emotional, or speak disrespectfully to the officer, even if you believe the question is unfair.
- If the petitioner is present and the officer asks you a question, answer it yourself — do not look at your spouse for the answer.

IDENTITY Identity and Biographical Background

- ▶ What is your full legal name? Have you ever used any other names (maiden name, prior married name, nickname, alias)?
- ▶ What is your date of birth? Where were you born (city, state/province, country)?

- ▶ What is your current address? Where have you lived over the past five years?
- ▶ What is your highest level of education? What schools did you attend and when?
- ▶ What is your current occupation? Where do you work and how long have you worked there?
- ▶ Do you have any children? What are their names, dates of birth, and where do they currently live?
- ▶ Have you ever applied for a U.S. visa before? What type? Was it approved or denied?
- ▶ Have you ever traveled to or lived in the United States before?

MARRIAGE Your Marriage and Relationship

- ▶ How did you and your spouse first meet? When and where was this?
- ▶ How long did you know each other before you began a romantic relationship?
- ▶ How did your relationship develop? Were you long-distance? How did you communicate?
- ▶ How many times did you see each other in person before your wedding? Describe those visits.
- ▶ Who proposed? How, when, and where did the proposal happen?
- ▶ When and where were you married? Was it a civil ceremony, religious ceremony, or both?
- ▶ Who attended your wedding? Approximately how many guests?
- ▶ Did your spouse's family attend? Did your family attend?
- ▶ Did you have a honeymoon? If so, where did you go?
- ▶ Where do you currently live? Do you live with your spouse? If not, why not and when do you plan to live together?
- ▶ How do you communicate on a daily basis (phone, video calls, messages)?
- ▶ How often do you speak with your spouse? What is the typical time difference?
- ▶ What is your spouse's current employer and job title?
- ▶ What are your spouse's daily routines — what time do they wake up, what time do they start work?
- ▶ Does your spouse have any children from a prior relationship? If so, what are their names and ages?
- ▶ What is your spouse's home address in the United States?
- ▶ Describe your spouse's home — how many bedrooms, what floor do they live on, what does the neighborhood look like?
- ▶ What are your plans as a couple once you arrive in the United States?
- ▶ Do you plan to have children together?
- ▶ What do you know about your spouse's family in the United States?

IMMIGRATION Immigration and Travel History

- ▶ Have you ever overstayed a visa in the United States or any other country?
- ▶ Have you ever been deported, removed, or voluntarily departed from the United States or any other country?
- ▶ Have you ever applied for asylum or refugee status anywhere in the world?
- ▶ Have you ever been denied a visa to the United States or any other country? If so, explain.

- ▶ Have you ever made a misrepresentation or provided false information to obtain a U.S. visa or immigration benefit?
- ▶ Have you ever worked in the United States without authorization?
- ▶ Have you ever entered the United States without inspection (crossed the border illegally)?
- ▶ Are you currently in removal proceedings or have you ever been in removal proceedings?

CRIMINAL Criminal and Security History

- ▶ Have you ever been arrested, cited, charged, or detained by police or law enforcement in any country?
- ▶ Have you ever been convicted of any crime, including traffic offenses, misdemeanors, or felonies?
- ▶ Have you ever been involved in drug trafficking, money laundering, human trafficking, or any organized criminal activity?
- ▶ Have you ever been a member of a gang, terrorist organization, or paramilitary group?
- ▶ Have you ever participated in persecution of any group based on race, religion, nationality, or political opinion?
- ▶ Have you ever served in any military or paramilitary force? If so, which one and what was your role?
- ▶ Are there any pending charges or investigations against you in any country?

FINANCIAL Financial Support and Sponsorship

- ▶ What is your spouse's current annual income? What is their employer?
- ▶ Does your spouse file tax returns? What was their reported income on last year's return?
- ▶ Will there be a joint sponsor helping to support you? If so, who are they and what is their relationship to you?
- ▶ Where does your spouse live — do they rent or own their home?
- ▶ Do you have any joint financial accounts with your spouse?
- ▶ Does your spouse send you money? How often and through what method?

MEDICAL Medical and Public Health

- ▶ Have you completed your medical examination with an approved panel physician?
- ▶ Do you have any communicable diseases that might be relevant?
- ▶ Have you received all required vaccinations?
- ▶ Do you have any physical or mental health condition that might affect your ability to care for yourself?
- ▶ Have you ever been treated for drug or alcohol addiction?

RED FLAG TOPICS — PREPARE HONEST ANSWERS

Officers are trained to pay particular attention to certain situations. These are not disqualifying on their own, but they will trigger more scrutiny and more detailed questioning.

If any of the following apply to your case, be prepared to explain them clearly and provide supporting documentation:

- **Short courtship:** If you married within a few months of meeting, be ready to explain how you came to know each other so well so quickly.
- **Significant age difference:** Officers may question whether an age gap reflects a genuine relationship. Your communication history, knowledge of each other's lives, and shared plans are especially important.
- **Limited in-person contact before marriage:** If most of your relationship was long-distance or conducted online/by phone, bring comprehensive communication records.
- **Prior visa denials:** Any prior denial will be in your record. Be prepared to explain what was different then and why the outcome should be different now.
- **Prior marriages (either spouse):** Bring complete divorce or death certificates for every prior marriage. The officer will verify that your current marriage is legally valid.
- **Different cultural, religious, or language backgrounds:** Not disqualifying — but be prepared to explain how you communicate and share your life across cultural differences.
- **Prior petitions (prior spouse petitions):** If the petitioner has sponsored another spouse for immigration before, this will receive additional scrutiny.

PART 6 — PREPARATION CHECKLISTS

One Month Before Your Interview

- ✓ Confirm your medical examination appointment and complete it with an approved panel physician
- ✓ Verify all required civil documents are in hand (birth certificate, marriage certificate, police certificates, divorce records for all prior marriages)
- ✓ Confirm all non-English documents have certified English translations
- ✓ Review your DS-260 or I-485 for accuracy — your interview answers must be consistent with what you submitted
- ✓ Review your petitioner's I-130 petition to ensure consistency
- ✓ Gather all financial support documents (tax returns, pay stubs, employment letter, I-864)
- ✓ Compile your relationship evidence package (photos, communication records, financial evidence)
- ✓ Review the specific requirements for your embassy or consulate at usembassy.gov
- ✓ Contact our office to review your document packet before the interview

One Week Before Your Interview

- ✓ Confirm your appointment date, time, and location
- ✓ Organize all documents in a labeled folder — originals and one set of copies
- ✓ Reprint your DS-260 confirmation page, fee payment receipts, and appointment letter

- ✓ Review your relationship timeline: when you met, first in-person meeting, proposal, wedding, significant events
- ✓ Review your petitioner spouse's basic information: employer, address, daily routine, family members
- ✓ Recheck embassy security rules — confirm what you may and may not bring
- ✓ Plan your route to the embassy/consulate and confirm transportation
- ✓ Arrange for childcare if you have young children who cannot accompany you

The Day Before Your Interview

- ✓ Lay out all documents in their organized folder — do a final check
- ✓ Set your alarm and have a reliable wake-up plan — do not be late
- ✓ Choose your professional attire — dress as you would for an important job interview
- ✓ Get a full night of sleep — being rested helps you stay calm and clear
- ✓ Do not drink alcohol the night before

The Morning of Your Interview

- ✓ Eat a good breakfast — you may be waiting for several hours
- ✓ Leave with ample extra time to account for traffic, parking, and security lines
- ✓ Bring only permitted items — leave electronics and prohibited items in your vehicle or at home
- ✓ Bring water if permitted by your embassy's rules (check first)
- ✓ Remain calm and positive — you have prepared thoroughly

AFTER YOUR INTERVIEW — WHAT TO DO NEXT

- **If approved:** Photograph your visa before leaving the embassy. Pay the USCIS Immigrant Fee at uscis.gov/file-online/uscis-immigrant-fee before traveling. Contact us to confirm entry planning.
- **If issued a 221(g):** Photograph or scan the 221(g) notice immediately. Send it to our office the same day. Do not take any action until you hear from us.
- **If refused:** Remain calm. Obtain any written notice provided. Contact our office immediately — refusals can often be challenged or addressed with additional evidence or a waiver.
- **If you received a conditional green card (CR-1):** Note your green card expiration date. We will file Form I-751 during the 90-day window before expiration. Contact us 3–4 months before the expiration.
- **Always:** Send our office a brief summary of the interview — what questions were asked, how it went, and copies of any documents issued to you.

PART 7 — HOW BOTELHO LAW GROUP SUPPORTS YOU

WE ARE WITH YOU EVERY STEP OF THE WAY

- Before your interview: Call us at 508-500-1551 with any last-minute document questions, concerns about a specific issue in your case, or if you are unsure whether to bring a particular document.
- During your interview: We cannot be present with you in the interview room, but we have prepared you as thoroughly as possible. Trust your preparation.
- After your interview: Contact us immediately — the same day — with a summary of what happened, especially if you received a 221(g), an RFE, a NOID, or a refusal.
- If you receive a 221(g): We will review the notice, prepare the response package, and coordinate submission with you.
- Track your case status at: ceac.state.gov/CEACStatTracker — check this regularly after your interview.
- Upon approval: We will assist you with final entry planning, your conditional green card timeline (if applicable), and any follow-up filings required.
- Office: 901 Eastern Ave., Suite 2, Fall River, MA 02723 | Phone: 508-500-1551

QUESTIONS? BOTELHO LAW GROUP IS HERE TO HELP.

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