



National Visa Center Best Practices (updated July 2022)

By AILA's Department of State Liaison Committee

[AILA's Department of State \(DOS\) Liaison Committee](#) engages annually with the National Visa Center (NVC). Please review [AILA's National Agency Liaison Meetings and Meeting Minutes page](#) for the latest minutes and takeaways from these and other agency engagements (AILA Doc. No. 21110803).

This resource provides AILA members with relevant information on immigrant visa processing at NVC and resources and best practices for communicating with NVC about pending cases. To raise any issues or problematic trends pertaining to the NVC or DOS generally, members should complete the "Report a Trend" survey on the [DOS Liaison Committee page](#) on AILA's website.

1. NVC Background

The NVC is operated by the DOS Bureau of Consular Affairs and administers the processing of immigrant visa applications after USCIS approves a petition and before the case is sent to a consular post for adjudication.

Notification & Transfer of an Approved Petition from USCIS to DOS/NVC

To ensure USCIS sends a case to the NVC, the petition submitted to USCIS must include a request for immigrant visa/consular processing. If a petition is submitted with a request for the applicant to adjust status in the United States, USCIS will not automatically transfer the case to the NVC, and the applicant will be required to submit an I-824 to USCIS to initiate the transfer. NVC continues to confirm that it will work with USCIS to locate petitions that USCIS claims to have transferred but are not received by NVC. For more information concerning the best way to communicate with NVC on this issue, see the "Communicating with NVC" section in this document.

2. NVC Timeframes

NVC Processing times continue to be lengthy due to substantial backlogs. The DOS website includes information on the NVC's processing times, updated weekly¹. This site contains timeframes for:

- **Case creation** - this includes creating a visa case in the Consular Electronic Application Center (CEAC) system and sending the Welcome Letter to the applicant and legal representative if a G-28 for the beneficiary/visa applicant was submitted to USCIS. The Welcome Letter includes the Immigrant Visa Case Number, Invoice ID, and instructions

¹ See NVC Timeframes, <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/immigrate/nvc-timeframes.html>

for creating an account on the CEAC. Once an applicant pays the immigrant visa fees, it may take up to seven (7) days before the payment is updated in CEAC.

- **Case review** - processing begins only after all fees have been paid and required documents uploaded to the CEAC account.
- **Public Inquiry (formerly ‘Ask NVC’) Form** response time (for more on inquiries, see “Communicating with NVC” below).

The ongoing COVID-19 global pandemic and related host country restrictions have resulted in reductions in visa processing capacity. During much of the pandemic, many embassies and consulates could only offer emergency services. Today, most consular sections are open and conducting immigrant and nonimmigrant visa operations, prioritizing urgent and emergency travel and travel that is in the national interest. Some embassies and consulates still face COVID-19-related restrictions, and many continue to face staffing challenges that began during the pandemic. DOS/NVC has acknowledged these delays and continues to work on improvements to reduce wait times for visa interviews while ensuring a secure and efficient visa process that protects national security.²

3. Using CEAC

Upon receiving a file from USCIS with a visa currently available, all immigrant visa applicants use CEAC to pay the immigrant visa fees and submit the DS-260 Application for Immigrant Visa and Alien Registration form. The applicant’s account will include instructions on how and where to submit documents.

- **Step 1: Choose an Agent.** Once NVC has sent the Welcome Notice with the case number, an applicant will create an account and choose an agent.³
- **Step 2: Pay Fees.** Immigrant visa fee invoices are then issued after a case has been created.⁴
- **Step 3: If Required, Submit I-864 and Financial Documents.**⁵

² See AILA DOS Liaison Committee Q&As with DOS National Visa Center, available at AILA Doc. No. 22060703 (posted 6/7/2022), <https://www.aila.org/advo-media/agency-liaison/aila-national-agency-liaison-meetings/aila-liaison-qas-with-dos-national-visa-center>.

³ See Immigrant Visa Process Step 2: Begin NVC Processing, available at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/immigrate/the-immigrant-visa-process/step-1-submit-a-petition/step-2-begin-nvc-processing.html>.

⁴ See Immigrant Visa Process Step 3: Pay Fees, available at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/immigrate/the-immigrant-visa-process/step-1-submit-a-petition/step-3-pay-fees.html>.

⁵ See Immigrant Visa Process Steps 4-5: Affidavit of Support and Financial Documents, available at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/immigrate/the-immigrant-visa-process/step-1-submit-a-petition/affidavit-of-support.html> and <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/immigrate/the-immigrant-visa-process/step-5-collect-financial-evidence-and-other-supporting-documents.html>.

- **Step 4: Submit Visa Application Form DS-260 and Civil Documents.**⁶ Once the fee has been paid and processed, the applicant may access and complete the DS-260 form through CEAC. NVC reports that applicants have 20 minutes to complete each page. Persistent, widespread reports, however, suggest that the actual timeout period is much less. NVC recommends frequently clicking the “Save” button at the bottom of the page to avoid losing data.⁷

Saved applications can be viewed by returning to the CEAC and selecting “View/Edit” from the IV and Alien Registration section of the Immigrant Visa Summary Information screen. Once a DS-260 is submitted by clicking the “Sign and Submit Application” button, no additional editing is possible. It can only be unlocked if the consular section unlocks it for the applicant to make changes and re-submit.

NVC uses Country-Specific Documents guidelines⁸ to determine the availability and acceptability of documents. NVC should send an email explaining the reason for any document rejection (i.e., unacceptability). If a document is unavailable, but the country-specific guidelines indicate that they are,⁹ or if a document is rejected without an apparent reason, use the online Public Inquiry Form explaining why you are or are not required to submit the document requested, along with supporting information, and request clarification from NVC.¹⁰

Members should utilize the following tips for uploading scanned documents if an applicant is eligible to submit documents to the NVC through CEAC.

- Currently, each digital file uploaded to CEAC must be no larger than 2 MB. If the digital file is too large, compress it or scan it at a lower resolution (black and white) before uploading it. Zipped files or password-protected files are not accepted.¹¹ The NVC has indicated since the November 2019 meeting with the

⁶ See Immigrant Visa Process Step 6: Complete online visa application, available at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/immigrate/the-immigrant-visa-process/step-5-collect-financial-evidence-and-other-supporting-documents/step-6-complete-online-visa-application.html>.

⁷ See AILA DOS Liaison Committee Q&As with DOS National Visa Center, Question 37, available at AILA Doc. No. 22060703 (posted 6/7/2022), <https://www.aila.org/advo-media/agency-liaison/aila-national-agency-liaison-meetings/aila-liaison-qas-with-dos-national-visa-center>.

⁸ See U.S. Visa: Reciprocity and Civil Documents by Country: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/Visa-Reciprocity-and-Civil-Documents-by-Country.html>.

⁹ See Immigrant Visa Process Step 7, Collect Civil Documents, available here: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/immigrate/the-immigrant-visa-process/step-5-collect-financial-evidence-and-other-supporting-documents/step-7-collect-civil-documents.html>.

¹⁰ See AILA DOS Liaison Committee Q&As with DOS National Visa Center, Question 40, available at AILA Doc. No. 22060703 (posted 6/7/2022). <https://www.aila.org/advo-media/agency-liaison/aila-national-agency-liaison-meetings/aila-liaison-qas-with-dos-national-visa-center> See also AILA Liaison Meeting with DOS (6/9/22), Question 14, available at AILA Doc. No. 22060801 (posted 6/9/2022), <https://www.aila.org/advo-media/agency-liaison/aila-national-agency-liaison-meetings/aila-liaison-meeting-with-dos-6-9-22>.

¹¹ See AILA DOS Liaison Committee Q&As with DOS National Visa Center, Question 38, available at AILA Doc. No. 22060703 (posted 6/7/2022), <https://www.aila.org/advo-media/agency-liaison/aila-national-agency-liaison-meetings/aila-liaison-qas-with-dos-national-visa-center>. See also AILA Liaison Meeting with DOS (6/9/22),

Department of State Liaison Committee that it expects to increase this size to 4 MB but has not done so as of yet.¹²

- Each document should be scanned and uploaded as a separate file. If a document has multiple pages, all pages should be scanned and uploaded together in a single file.¹³
- NVC strongly recommends submitting tax transcripts, not tax returns, if applicable to a case.¹⁴
- Visit nvc.state.gov/scan for more scanning tips, quality help, naming help, and document orientation issues.
- If an application is not eligible for document upload electronically, follow the instructions from NVC on submitting copies of documents by mail in a single package.
- **Step 5: Documentarily Complete and Transfer to Post.** Once NVC determines that a case is documentarily complete, it will generate an automatic notification in the applicant's CEAC account¹⁵ that the case is documentarily complete.¹⁶ Applicants can also log into CEAC and review the summary page with information about the status and location of a case.¹⁷ NVC will then hold or schedule the immigrant visa interview based on a post's availability. Once the immigrant visa interview has been scheduled, the case

Question 19, available at AILA Doc. No. 22060801 (posted 6/9/2022). <https://www.aila.org/advo-media/agency-liaison/aila-national-agency-liaison-meetings/aila-liaison-meeting-with-dos-6-9-22>

¹² See AILA NVC Liaison Q&As (11/7/19), Question 16, available at AILA Doc. No. 19110833 (posted 11/7/2019). <https://www.aila.org/infonet/aila-nvc-liaison-qas-11-7-19>

¹³ See AILA DOS Liaison Committee Q&As with DOS National Visa Center, Question 39, available at AILA Doc. No. 22060703 (posted 6/7/2022), <https://www.aila.org/advo-media/agency-liaison/aila-national-agency-liaison-meetings/aila-liaison-qas-with-dos-national-visa-center>. See also AILA Liaison Meeting with DOS (6/9/22), Question 19, available at AILA Doc. No. 22060801 (posted 6/9/2022), <https://www.aila.org/advo-media/agency-liaison/aila-national-agency-liaison-meetings/aila-liaison-meeting-with-dos-6-9-22>.

¹⁴ See AILA DOS Liaison Committee Q&As with DOS National Visa Center, Question 39, available at AILA Doc. No. 22060703 (posted 6/7/2022), <https://www.aila.org/advo-media/agency-liaison/aila-national-agency-liaison-meetings/aila-liaison-qas-with-dos-national-visa-center>.

¹⁵ Whenever NVC puts a new message in the applicants' CEAC account, NVC will send an email to every email address listed on the case. See AILA DOS Liaison Committee Q&As with DOS National Visa Center, Question 35, available at AILA Doc. No. 22060703 (posted 6/7/2022), <https://www.aila.org/advo-media/agency-liaison/aila-national-agency-liaison-meetings/aila-liaison-qas-with-dos-national-visa-center>.

¹⁶ See Current Case Review Timelines available at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/immigrate/nvc-timeframes.html>. See AILA DOS Liaison Committee Q&As with DOS National Visa Center, Questions 32-34, available at AILA Doc. No. 22060703 (posted 6/7/2022), <https://www.aila.org/advo-media/agency-liaison/aila-national-agency-liaison-meetings/aila-liaison-qas-with-dos-national-visa-center>.

¹⁷ If the chart on the CEAC summary page says that everything is "paid" or "complete", that means NVC has finished reviewing the case. See AILA DOS Liaison Committee Q&As with DOS National Visa Center, Question 7, available at AILA Doc. No. 22060703 (posted 6/7/2022), <https://www.aila.org/advo-media/agency-liaison/aila-national-agency-liaison-meetings/aila-liaison-qas-with-dos-national-visa-center>.

will be transferred to the post. All subsequent communication regarding the case, including rescheduling or transfer requests, must be made with the post and not with the NVC.

Checking for Case Updates in CEAC:

CEAC can also be used to check for case updates. When NVC updates a case or needs additional information, a message will be posted to the applicant's CEAC account and will email every email address associated with the account. Applicants processing online can confirm if their case is documentarily complete by logging into CEAC and reviewing the summary page. There are multiple places on this page to view the location and status of a case. On the top right of the page is a field that says, "Your case is currently at." This field will note whether the case is at NVC, an embassy, or a consulate overseas.¹⁸ At the bottom of the summary page is a chart with information on each visa applicant's status and financial sponsor. If everything says "Paid" or "Complete," NVC has finished reviewing the case, and the case is pending approval for an interview by the embassy.¹⁹

Updating Form DS-260

The DS-260 cannot be reopened and changed after submission until the case has been scheduled for an interview at post.

If you need to update a DS-260, once scheduled for an interview, the attorney should contact post that there are changes that need to be made to the DS-260. Post can reopen the document to allow updates through the CEAC portal.

The applicant should also inform the officer at the interview of any information on the form that has become outdated so that the form can be annotated or reopened to be amended by the applicant to reflect any such changes/updates.

4. Communicating with NVC

NVC will typically only communicate with applicants at the point of case creation, when there is a problem with civil documents, or when the case is documentarily complete. The following are best practices for contacting the NVC.

- **Public Inquiry Form (formerly "Ask NVC")**

At present, NVC only receives inquiries through its online Public Inquiry Form.²⁰ NVC confirmed that as of May 22, 2022, the 1-800 customer service number has been

¹⁸ See AILA DOS Liaison Committee Q&As with DOS National Visa Center, Question 39, available at AILA Doc. No. 22060703 (posted 6/7/2022), <https://www.aila.org/advo-media/agency-liaison/aila-national-agency-liaison-meetings/aila-liaison-qas-with-dos-national-visa-center>.

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ See ASK NVC Form, available at: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/ask-nvc.html>

temporarily suspended²¹, and NVC discontinued the use of the attorney email box in 2019.²² While there is no attorney-specific method for communicating with the NVC, in the Spring 2022 AILA DOS Liaison Committee Q&As with NVC, NVC confirmed that attorneys should use the Public Inquiry Form.²³ When completing the form, members should complete the following steps:

- Select “Attorney of Record” in response to the “Who are you?” question on the Public Inquiry Form. This action will automatically forward the inquiry to NVC’s (formerly publicly available) dedicated attorney mailbox.
 - Include attachments including G-28 forms²⁴ and supporting documents or screenshots of error messages, e.g., at the bottom of the online form.
 - When escalating an inquiry, attorneys should add “ATTN: PI SUPERVISOR” in the comment box at the bottom of the form.
 - NVC also recommends that attorneys summarize key facts at the beginning of the comment, along with the date of each previous attempt to contact NVC, and review average processing times on the NVC timeframes website²⁵ to determine whether an inquiry falls within the current response timeframe.
- **Expedite (Emergency) requests**

If the file is still at NVC, expedite requests for expedited processing or emergency appointments may be sent by email to: NVCExpedite@state.gov. The NVC does not adjudicate expedite requests. It forwards the request to the appropriate post for consideration. The discretion to approve or deny an emergency appointment lies with the individual post. Accordingly, time frames for responses will vary based on local conditions at post. The NVC asks that legal representatives wait at least 30 days before sending a follow-up inquiry on an expedite request on a case.²⁶ NVC reviews emails in the order that they are received.

²¹ See Practice Alert: National Visa Center Suspends Public Inquiry Telephone Line, available at AILA Doc. No. 22053431 (posted 5/23/22), <https://www.aila.org/advo-media/aila-practice-pointers-and-alerts/practice-alert-national-visa-center-suspends>

²² See AILA NVC Liaison Q&As (11/7/19), Question 26, available at AILA Doc. No. 19110833 (posted 6/7/2022), <https://www.aila.org/infonet/aila-nvc-liaison-qas-11-7-19>

²³ See AILA DOS Liaison Committee Q&As with DOS National Visa Center, Question 9, available at AILA Doc. No. 22060703 (posted 6/7/2022), <https://www.aila.org/advo-media/agency-liaison/aila-national-agency-liaison-meetings/aila-liaison-qas-with-dos-national-visa-center>

²⁴ For attorney successor requests, submit a G-28 through the Ask NVC Form. See AILA DOS Liaison Committee Q&As with DOS National Visa Center, Questions 10, 26-28, available at AILA Doc. No. 22060703 (posted 11/7/), <https://www.aila.org/advo-media/agency-liaison/aila-national-agency-liaison-meetings/aila-liaison-qas-with-dos-national-visa-center>

²⁵ NVC timeframes are available at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/immigrate/nvc-timeframes.html>. See AILA DOS Liaison Committee Q&As with DOS National Visa Center, Question 8, available at AILA Doc. No. 22060703 (posted 6/7/2022), <https://www.aila.org/advo-media/agency-liaison/aila-national-agency-liaison-meetings/aila-liaison-qas-with-dos-national-visa-center>

²⁶ See AILA DOS Liaison Committee Q&As with DOS National Visa Center, Questions 10, 26-28, available at AILA Doc. No. 22060703 (posted 6/7/2022), <https://www.aila.org/advo-media/agency-liaison/aila-national-agency-liaison-meetings/aila-liaison-qas-with-dos-national-visa-center>

Please note, if a file is no longer with NVC and has been transferred to post for scheduling, members should contact the post directly requesting an expedited appointment, along with all supporting documents.²⁷

- **No contact from NVC more than 60 days from USCIS approval**

If an Applicant has not received a Welcome Notice or other contact from NVC more than 60 days after USCIS approved a case designated for consular processing, attorneys may email NVCResearch@state.gov and include a copy of the I-797 approval notice, any correspondence with NVC and USCIS about the issue, and any other information that may help locate the case. NVC will then contact USCIS to locate the petition to have it transferred to NVC.^{28,29}

- **Transfers / Change of Venue**

Requests to transfer a case to another post should be made through the Public Inquiry Form, providing all case-specific information and other evidence supporting the request to communicate. The NVC requires a physical address and proof of residence in the new jurisdiction. The applicant should be prepared to demonstrate physical presence in the consular district and permission to lawfully remain in the district for the time it takes to complete their immigrant visa case. If an applicant's residency is in question, NVC will forward the request to the post to approve or deny the transfer request.³⁰ If the case is already at the consular post, the request to transfer should be made to the intended receiving post.

5. One Year Contact Requirement

INA 203(g) provides for termination of registration of the visa petition of any individual who fails to apply for an IV within one year following notification to the applicant of the availability of a visa for those applying on the basis of an approved I-130, I-140, and I-360 for applicants who are immediate relatives, family-preference immigrants, employment-preference immigrants, and special immigrants.

The Department of State has interpreted this requirement liberally and will accept certain forms of contact with the NVC on a specific case as sufficient to avoid termination. In the June 2022

²⁷ See AILA DOS Liaison Committee Q&As with DOS National Visa Center, Question 10, available at AILA Doc. No. 22060703 (posted 6/7/2022), <https://www.aila.org/advo-media/agency-liaison/aila-national-agency-liaison-meetings/aila-liaison-qas-with-dos-national-visa-center>.

²⁸ See AILA DOS Liaison Committee Q&As with DOS National Visa Center, Questions 16-18, available at AILA Doc. No. 22060703 (posted 6/7/2022), <https://www.aila.org/advo-media/agency-liaison/aila-national-agency-liaison-meetings/aila-liaison-qas-with-dos-national-visa-center>. See also AILA Liaison Meeting with DOS (6/9/22), Question 16, available at AILA Doc. No. 22060801 (posted 6/9/2022), <https://www.aila.org/advo-media/agency-liaison/aila-national-agency-liaison-meetings/aila-liaison-meeting-with-dos-6-9-22>.

²⁹ See Current Case File Creation times here: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/immigrate/nvc-timeframes.html>

³⁰ See AILA DOS Liaison Committee Q&As with DOS National Visa Center, Questions 12, 14, and 15, available at AILA Doc. No. 22060703 (posted 6/7/2022), <https://www.aila.org/advo-media/agency-liaison/aila-national-agency-liaison-meetings/aila-liaison-qas-with-dos-national-visa-center>.

AILA DOS Liaison Committee Q&As with NVC, NVC confirmed that the following are the most effective ways to maintain contact with the NVC to avoid termination:³¹

- Pay a fee (tracked in CEAC for electronic cases) and take other qualifying action to apply for a visa for a subsequent year
- Submit a document that can be tracked in CEAC for electronic cases
- Use the Ask NVC Public Inquiry Form (Public Inquiry Form)
- Log into the CEAC account
- Complete form DS-260

If the NVC issues a termination warning notice in error, submit an online inquiry to the Public Inquiry Form as soon as possible, add “ATTN: PI Supervisor” on the question box at the bottom of the form, and attach proof of contact such as emails, screenshots of correspondence, receipts, confirmations, etc.³²

Conclusion:

AILA’s Department of State Liaison Committee continues to engage with the NVC. We have received reports from members concerning, among other issues, lack of communication via the Public Inquiry Form, the temporary suspension of the telephone line, problems uploading or managing documents in CEAC, and more. Unfortunately, given the large backlog of cases and the ongoing global pandemic, it is unclear when the NVC’s operations will return to normal and when services such as the telephone inquiry line will return. The committee will continue to monitor these issues, engage with the NVC, and advocate for policies and procedures that serve our members and their clients. AILA members should continue to report trends and issues via the “Report a Trend” survey on the [DOS Liaison Committee page](#). The committee reviews these reports for issues to raise during future engagements with the NVC and DOS.

³¹ See AILA DOS Liaison Committee Q&As with DOS National Visa Center, Question 4, available at AILA Doc. No. 22060703 (posted 6/7/2022), <https://www.aila.org/advo-media/agency-liaison/aila-national-agency-liaison-meetings/aila-liaison-qas-with-dos-national-visa-center>.

³² See AILA DOS Liaison Committee Q&As with DOS National Visa Center, Question 5, available at AILA Doc. No. 22060703 (posted 6/7/2022), <https://www.aila.org/advo-media/agency-liaison/aila-national-agency-liaison-meetings/aila-liaison-qas-with-dos-national-visa-center>.