

THE U.S. VISA PROCESS

ACS External Affairs & Communications

The American Chemical Society (ACS) supports timely visa screening for visiting scientists and students. The Society continues to monitor visa delays and denials and the concomitant adverse effects on major scientific conferences, public and private research efforts, and other scientific and educational collaborations. In its statement about visa restrictions and scientific progress, the American Chemical Society registered its concern about the increasing number of delays and denials of visas to international students, scientists, and engineers and the concomitant adverse effects on major scientific conferences, public and private research efforts, and other scientific and educational collaborations.

International chemical scientists (and accompanying family members) planning to travel to the United States should start the process as soon as they know of their intent to travel and be well informed and adequately prepared for the U.S. visa application process. These tips provide information about the temporary visa application process and how to prepare for it.

THE PROCESS

Step one: Determine the appropriate visa category for your travel.

The first step of the process is to determine if your country qualifies for the Visa Waiver Program (VWP), which enables nationals of certain countries to travel to the United States for tourism or business for stays of 90 days or less without obtaining a visa. [Learn more.](#)

- If you are eligible to travel under the VWP, you are still subject to enhanced security requirements. You must apply online for authorization by going to the Electronic System for [Travel Authorization website](#). The Department of Homeland Security recommends that travel authorization applications be submitted at least 72 hours prior to travel.
- If your country does not qualify for the Visa Waiver Program and you plan to visit the United States to attend a professional meeting you will most likely need to apply for a B-1 visa. However, you may need to apply for a visa under a different category if you will be receiving any compensation for your activities (e.g., honoraria for lectures and presentations). [Go to the U.S. Department of State Visa Home Page](#) to learn more about visa categories. Read on for additional information.

If you cannot determine your visa category from the link above, please contact the nearest [U.S. Embassy or Consulate](#).

Step two: Scheduling a U.S. Consulate Interview

For countries not participating in the Visa Waiver Program, most U.S. Consulates now require all nonimmigrant visa applicants to appear in person for interviews prior to visa approval and issuance. The appointments are also used to collect biometric data, fingerprints and photographs, which will appear encoded on the machine-readable visa which is issued.

- **Allow plenty of time for processing your visa application**
Some U.S. Embassies or Consulates may have a long wait for an interview. As soon as you know you need to travel to the United States, contact the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate to schedule an appointment. Be sure to ask how you can get application forms, what fees are required and how they can be paid, and how and when to schedule an interview. ACS recommends that you begin the visa application process at least three to four months in advance of planned travel. You can now get an estimate on visa waiting times at your local U.S. consulate or embassy.

Advance travel planning and early visa application are important, since visa applications are subject to a greater degree of scrutiny than in the past. If you plan to apply for a nonimmigrant visa to come to the United States, we know you'd like to estimate how long you will have to wait to get an interview appointment to apply for a visa. You can find current estimated wait times for various categories of visas at United States embassies and consulates worldwide at <http://www.usembassy.gov/>

You will also want to know how long it will take for your nonimmigrant visa to be processed at the Consular Section, after a decision is made by a Consular Officer to issue the visa and the visa is available for pick-up by you or the courier at the embassy. It is important to review thoroughly all information on the specific embassy's consular section website for local procedures and instructions, such as how to make an interview appointment. Consular websites will also explain any additional procedures for students, exchange visitors and those persons who need an earlier visa interview appointment.

- **Third Country Nationals – allow additional time**

If you are not a citizen of the country where you currently reside, you will need to allow for more time to apply for a visa to enter the U.S. Please contact your local U.S. Embassy or Consulate to ask about visa application procedures for third country nationals.

- **Allow additional time if you are working on sensitive technology projects**

Certain areas of science involving sensitive technologies are subject to greater attention and a lengthy review process. If you have such a background through graduate-level studies, teaching, conducting research, participating in exchange programs, receiving training or employment, or engaging in commercial transactions, your application will undergo a security review. Applicants should take this into consideration and apply as early as possible.

- **Previous visa denials**

If you have previously been denied a visa to the U.S. you may need to allow more time for your application.

Step three: Prepare for your U.S. Consulate Interview

- **Make sure your paperwork is in order**

To prepare for the application and interview, be sure that your passport is valid (six months or longer) and, if applicable, is visa waiver program compliant; that you have completed the appropriate visa application forms; that your given and family names on all documents match what is in your passport; and that you have a passport-type photograph, proof of payment of fees, and evidence of funds to cover your expenses while in the United States.

- **Document your ties to your home country**

As part of your visa application and interview, you will need to show proof that you have binding or sufficient ties to your home country or permanent residence abroad. You will need to present documentation showing evidence of:

- family ties to the home country or permanent residence abroad;
- property ownership;
- bank accounts;
- employment (contract or letter from your employer specifying length of employment, position, and salary, for example);

- the entire trip itinerary, including travel to countries other than the United States;
 - an announcement from the meeting organizer specifying the subject, location, and dates of the event;
 - and documentation showing whether you have submitted or have had accepted a proposal to deliver a technical paper.
- **Provide proof of your professional, scientific, or educational status**
A curriculum vitae and copies of diplomas will serve this purpose. If you are presenting at the meeting, bring copies of any documents or correspondence confirming that you have submitted and/or have had a paper accepted.
 - **Apply for early approval if necessary**
If you cannot apply three to four months in advance of your travel, on your application communicate that your ability to attend the meeting will depend on early approval of the visa application.

Step four: Attend your U.S. Consulate Interview

- **Be prepared for long lines**
U.S. Consulates schedule several interviews each day resulting in long wait times for interviews. Although your interview may only last a few minutes be prepared to spend several hours at the U.S. Consulate.
- **Know how to explain your science**
Be prepared to give your information and explain your science quickly and completely. Certain areas of science involving sensitive technologies are subject to greater attention and a lengthy review process. You have the right to ask for an interpreter. Get the name and contact coordinates for the visa officer with whom you interview.
- **Dress to impress**
Wear appropriate business attire for the visa interview.
- **After your interview**
If you have not heard back from the U.S. Embassy or Consulate within sixty days, you should contact the U.S. Embassy or Consulate and request information about the status of your visa application.

Step five: Why was my visa denied? What can I do?

- Be prepared to deal with delays or a denial
If your visa application is still pending after sixty days and you are at risk of not arriving in time to present a paper, contact the scientific meeting organizers. You can also register your visa delay with the U.S. National Academy of Sciences at https://sites.nationalacademies.org/PGA/biso/visas/PGA_048197
 - Make sure 60 days have past o Provide application submission date
 - Provide interview date
 - If applying for H1B have your employer send a letter to the State Department

All visa denials are reviewed by the consular officer's superior and must be accompanied by a written statement citing the reason for the denial. There are several categories for Visa Denials, but the most frequent is that the prospective visitor or student has not demonstrated strong enough ties abroad to compel him or her to leave the United States at the end of the temporary stay.

Strong ties differ from country to country, city to city, individual to individual. Some examples of ties can be a job, a house, a family, or a bank account. The law places this burden of proof to show strong ties on the applicant. A visa applicant must qualify for the visa according to his or her own circumstances, not on the basis of assurance from an organization. U.S. immigration law delegates the responsibility for issuance or refusal of visas to consular officers overseas. An applicant can influence the post to change a prior visa denial only through the presentation of new and convincing evidence of strong ties. For specific documentation requirements please check with your embassy or consulate.

Step six: My visa was issued and I am coming to the U.S.

Know your visa validity date

This is the time period during which the applicant must use the visa to enter the United States. A person with a multiple-entry visa valid for one year can make several trips to the United States during that year. Some people will be issued single-entry visas only; therefore, if they travel outside the United States they must apply for another visa before they return. The visa validity date has nothing to do with the length of stay which is determined by the immigration official at the port of entry.

Anticipate more processing when you arrive

A U.S. visa will usually allow you to travel from your country to a port of entry in the United States. Under the U.S. Visit Program, all visitors traveling on visas to the United States will be interviewed, will have their documents reviewed, will have two fingerprints scanned by an inkless device, and will be photographed by U.S. immigration officials upon entry at U.S. air-and seaports.

Summary of Helpful Information

Official U.S. Department of State information about U.S. Visa Policy and Procedures is available on the following sites. Use these sites to learn about the visa application process, understand current requirements, and get updates on recent developments.

U.S Embassies and Consulates abroad

<http://www.usembassy.gov/>

Consular Affairs

<http://travel.state.gov>

Visa Services (for Foreigners Traveling to the United States)

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas.html>

Visitor Visas for Business and Pleasure

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/tourism-visit.html>

Visa Waiver Program

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/tourism-visit/visa-waiver-program.html>

Visa Application Forms

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/forms.html>

Nonimmigrant Visa Photo Requirements

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/photos.html>

Visa Services Fees

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/fees/fees-visa-services.html>