

# U.S. Department of State Implements Domestic Visa Renewal Pilot Program

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On December 21, 2023, the United States Department of State (DOS) published a [notice](#) detailing the implementation of a domestic visa renewal through a limited pilot program. The pilot program resurrects a process the DOS discontinued in 2004 and will allow certain eligible applicants to renew an H-1B visa in the United States without needing to travel abroad to a United States consulate. The pilot program will be in effect from January 29, 2024 through April 24, 2024, and will be limited to a total of 20,000 H-1B visa applications. Applicants must file the Form DS-160 nonimmigrant visa application online and begin the process at a dedicated DOS domestic renewal website.

## Eligible Applicants for Domestic Visa Renewal are limited to:

- applicants seeking to renew an H-1B visa, as no other visa classifications are eligible;
- applicants whose prior H-1B visa that is being renewed was issued by **Mission Canada** with an *issuance* date from **January 1, 2020, through April 1, 2023**, or by **Mission India** with an *issuance* date of **February 1, 2021, through September 30, 2021**;
- applicants who are **not subject** to a nonimmigrant **visa issuance fee** commonly referred to as a “reciprocity fee;”
- applicants eligible for a **waiver of the in-person interview** requirement;
- applicants who have **submitted ten fingerprints** to the DOS in connection with a previous visa application;
- applicants whose prior **visa does not include a “clearance received”** annotation;
- applicants who **do not have a visa ineligibility** that would require a waiver before visa issuance;
- applicants who have an **approved and unexpired H-1B petition**;
- applicants most recently **admitted** to the United States in **H-1B status** and currently **maintaining H-1B status** in the United States;
- applicants whose period of **authorized admission** in H-1B status has **not expired**; and
- applicants who **intend to reenter** the United States in **H-1B status** after a temporary period abroad.

## Application Period

*Each week during the pilot period, the DOS will release approximately 2,000 application slots for*

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*applicants whose most recent H–1B visas were issued by Mission Canada and approximately 2,000 application slots for those visa holders whose most recent H–1B visas were issued by Mission India. The release dates for these 4,000 application slots will be as follows: **January 29, February 5, February 12, February 19 and February 26.** When the application limit is reached each week, the DOS will close the application website until the next application slot release date. The application period will close when all application slots are filled or on **April 1, 2024**, whichever occurs first.*

## ***How to Apply***

Applicants can apply by accessing the dedicated [domestic visa renewal website](#). From there, applicants will answer a series of questions to complete a self-assessment and determine their eligibility. If qualified, applicants must take the following steps:

1. completing Form DS–160 online;
2. paying the required \$205.00 non-refundable MRV fee via the online portal; and
3. reviewing and following the instructions on submitting their passports and required application documents to the DOS.

Each applicant must submit via the U.S. Postal Service or commercial courier service the following required documents for processing:

1. an electronically filed Form DS–160 Nonimmigrant Visa Application;
2. one photograph taken within the last six months, which meets the DOS standards;
3. a passport valid for travel to the United States, which is valid for at least six months;
4. the original or a copy of the applicant's current Form I–797, Notice of Action and
5. the original or a copy of the applicant's Form I–94, Arrival-Departure Record.

## **Processing Time and Urgent Travel**

Once the visa is issued, the passports and other documents submitted by the applicant will be returned via the U.S. Postal Service or a commercial courier. The expected processing time for a domestic visa renewal application will be six to eight weeks from when the DOS receives the passport and other required documents for processing. The DOS will aim to complete the processing of all applications by May 1, 2024. No expedite requests will be available, but applications can be withdrawn if urgent travel is required. Thus, if an applicant anticipates urgent travel, the applicant should apply for the visa renewal overseas. If the applicant withdraws their application during the adjudication process, it will be refused, but the refusal will not prejudice any future application.

## **Visa Refusals**

Visa applications will be refused if the application fails to satisfy the program requirements or if the applicant fails to provide the required documentation or information. However, the DOS will allow applicants to submit any outstanding documents or information or correct any minor errors in the application by **April 15, 2024**. If the applicant fails to cure the application defects by the that deadline, the application will be refused or denied. If the domestic application is refused, the applicant must apply at an embassy or consulate overseas by filing a new Form DS–160 and submitting a new MRV fee payment. The DOS will not refund the MRV fee for applications returned or refused under the pilot program.

## **Conclusion**

Even though the 2024 domestic visa pilot program is limited, it will significantly benefit some visa applicants by eliminating the need to travel abroad to renew their visas. The DOS also stated that it expects to expand the scope of the program scope in the future to allow the renewal of other visa categories.

### ***U.S. Department of State 2024 Extension and Expansion of Waivers of the Interview Requirement***

On December 21, 2023, the DOS [announced](#) that the visa interview waiver program, for certain nonimmigrant visa applications submitted at U.S. Consulates, has been extended and expanded effective **January 1, 2024**. This program will remain in effect indefinitely and will be reviewed annually.

The current interview visa waiver categories are the following:

1. **first time H-2 visa applicants** (temporary agricultural and non-agricultural workers); and
2. **other nonimmigrant visa applicants** applying for **any nonimmigrant visa** classification who:
  3. were previously issued a nonimmigrant visa in any classification, unless the only prior issued visa was a **B visa**; and
  4. are applying within **48 months** of their most recent nonimmigrant visa's expiration date.
5. Additionally, under a separate waiver program, the DOS may continue, until further notice, waiving the interview requirement for **visa applicants** renewing a nonimmigrant visa **in the same classification within 48 months** of the prior visa's expiration date.

In a change from last year's authority, the interview waiver categories have been expanded to include all nonimmigrant visas, but an individual will no longer be eligible if their only prior visa was a B visa.

The eligibility criteria for an interview waiver for applicants in all the above categories is as follows:

- apply in their country of nationality or residence;
- have never been refused a visa (unless such refusal was overcome or waived);
- and have no apparent or potential ineligibility.

Consular officers may still require in-person interviews on a case-by-case basis or because of local conditions. Thus, applicants are encouraged to check embassy and consulate websites for more detailed information.

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