

USA Foreign Media Visa Information

The following information appears on the official American government site at http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types/types_1276.html

Foreign Media, Press and Radio

Overview

A citizen of a foreign country, who wishes to enter the United States, generally must first obtain a visa, either a nonimmigrant visa for temporary stay, or an immigrant visa for permanent residence. The type of visa you must have is defined by immigration law, and relates to the purpose of your travel. The "media (I)" visa is a nonimmigrant visa for persons desiring to enter the United States temporarily who are representatives of the foreign media traveling to the United States, engaging in their profession, having the home office in a foreign country. Some procedures and fees under immigration law, relate to policies of the travelers home country, and in turn, the U.S. follows a similar practice, which we call "reciprocity". Procedures for providing media visas to foreign media representatives of a particular country, consider whether the visa applicants own government grants similar privileges or is reciprocal, to representatives of the media or press from the United States.

Changes introduced shortly after September 11, 2001 involve extensive and ongoing review of visa issuing practices as they relate to our national security. Visa applications are now subject to a greater degree of scrutiny than in the past. So it is important to apply for your visa well in advance of your travel departure date.

A visa allows a foreign citizen to travel to the United States port-of entry, and request permission of the U.S. immigration inspector to enter the U.S. A visa does not guarantee entry into the U.S.

Qualifying for a Media (I) Visa

The Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) is very specific with regard to the requirements, which must be met by applicants to qualify for the media (I) visa. Applicants must demonstrate that they are properly qualified to be issued a media visa. Under immigration law, media visas are for "representatives of the foreign media," including members of the press, radio, film or print industries, whose activities are essential to the foreign media function, such as reporters, film crews, editors and persons in similar occupations, traveling to the U.S. to engage in their profession. The applicant must be engaging in qualifying activities for a media organization having its home office in a foreign country. The consular officer will determine whether or not an activity qualifies for the media visa. The activity must be essentially informational, and generally associated with the news gathering process, reporting on actual current events, to be eligible for the media visa. For example, reporting on sports events are usually appropriate for the media visa. Other examples include, but are not limited to, the following media related kinds of activities:

- **Primary employees of foreign information media** engaged in filming a news event or documentary.
- **Members of the media engaged in the production or distribution of film** will only qualify for a media visa if the material being filmed will be used to disseminate information or news. Additionally, the primary source and distribution of funding must be outside the United States
- **Journalists working under contract-** Persons holding a credential issued by a professional journalistic organization, if working under contract on a product to be used abroad by an information or cultural medium to disseminate information or news not primarily intended for commercial entertainment or advertising. Please note that a valid employment contract is required.
- **Employees of independent production companies** when those employees hold a credential issued by a professional journalistic association.
- **Foreign journalists working for an overseas branch office or subsidiary of a U.S. network,** newspaper or other media outlet if the journalist is going to the United States to report on U.S. events solely for a foreign audience.
- **Accredited representatives of tourist bureaus,** controlled, operated, or subsidized in whole or in part by a foreign government, who engage primarily in disseminating factual tourist information about that country, and who are not entitled to A-2 visa classification.
- **Technical industrial information-** Employees in the United States offices of organizations, which distribute technical industrial information.

Spouses and Children

Spouses and/or children under the age of 21 who wish to accompany or join the principal media visa holder in the United States for the duration of his/her stay require media visas (derivative I visas). The application procedure is the same as for a primary media visa applicant. If the spouse and/or children apply for visas at a later date, a copy of the principal visa holder's media visa must be furnished with the application. The spouse and/or children of a media visa holder here in the U.S. may not work. If employment is desired, the appropriate work visa will be required. The spouse and/or children of a media visa holder who are in the U.S. on a media visa may study in the U.S. without also being required to apply for a student (F-1) visa. Spouses and/or children who do not intend to reside in the United States with the principal visa holder, but visit for vacations only, may be eligible to apply for visitor (B-2) visas , or if qualified, travel without a visa under the [Visa Waiver Program](#) .

Applying for a Media Visa - Required Documentation

As part of the visa application process, an interview at the embassy consular section is required for visa applicants from age 14 through 79, with few exceptions. Persons age 13 and younger, and age 80 and older, generally do not require an interview, unless requested by embassy or consulate. Making your appointment for an interview is the first step in the visa application process. The waiting time for an interview appointment for applicants can vary, so early visa application is strongly encouraged. Visa wait times for

interview appointments and visa processing time information for each U.S. Embassy or Consulate worldwide is available on our website at [Visa Wait Times](#) , and on most embassy websites. Learn how to schedule an appointment for an interview, pay the application processing fee, review embassy specific instructions, and much more by visiting the [Embassy or Consulate website](#) where you will apply.

During the visa application process, usually at the interview, a ink-free, digital fingerprint scan will be quickly taken. Some visa applications require further [administrative processing](#) , which takes additional time after the visa applicant's interview by a Consular Officer. Each applicant for a media visa must submit these forms and documentation as explained below:

- **An application, Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-156**, completed and signed. **The DS-156 must be the March 2006 date, electronic "e-form application."** Select [Nonimmigrant Visa Application Form DS-156](#) to access the electronic version of the DS-156. **Important Notice :** At certain U.S. Embassies and Consulates abroad, nonimmigrant visa applicants are now required to apply visa using the new DS-160 Online Nonimmigrant Visa Electronic Application, instead of the nonimmigrant application forms DS-156, 157, 158, and other related forms. [Learn more](#) and find out which Embassies have converted to the DS-160 Online process.
- **A Supplemental Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-157** provides additional information about your travel plans. Submission of this completed form is required for all male applicants between 16-45 years of age. It is also required for all applicants from state sponsors of terrorism age 16 and over, irrespective of gender, without exception. Four countries are now designated as state sponsors of terrorism, including Cuba, Syria, Sudan, and Iran. [Select Special Processing Procedures](#) to learn more. You should know that a consular officer may require any nonimmigrant visa applicant to complete this form. Here is [Form DS-157](#) .
- **A passport valid for travel to the United States** and with a validity date at least six months beyond the applicant's intended period of stay in the United States (unless [country-specific agreements](#) provide exemptions). If more than one person is included in the passport, each person desiring a visa must make an application;
- **One (1) 2x2 photograph.** See the required photo format explained in [Nonimmigrant Photograph Requirements](#).
- **Proof of employment** – Provide the following:
 - **Staff Journalist:** A letter from the employer that gives the employees name, position held within the company, and purpose and length of stay in the United States.
 - **Freelance Journalist under contract to a media organization:** A copy of the contract with the organization, which shows the employees name, position held within the company; purpose and length of stay in the United States and duration of contract.
 - **Media Film Crew:** a letter from the employer which gives the following information: name; position held within company; title and brief

description of the program being filmed and period of time required for filming in the United States.

- **Independent Production Company under contract to media organization:** a letter from the organization commissioning the work which gives the following information: name; title and brief description of the program being filmed; period of time required for filming in the United States and duration of contract.

What are the Required Visa Fees?

- **Nonimmigrant visa application processing fee** - For current fees for Department of State government services select [Fees](#). You will need to provide a receipt showing the visa application processing fee has been paid, when you come for your visa interview.
- **Visa issuance fee** – Additionally, if the visa is issued, there will be an additional visa issuance reciprocity fee, if applicable. Please consult the [Visa Reciprocity Tables](#) to find out if you must pay a visa issuance reciprocity fee and what the fee amount is. If there is a fee for issuance for the visa, it is equal as nearly as possible to the fee charged to United States citizens by the applicant's country of nationality.

Additional Documentation

It is important that you refer to the Embassy Consular Section website in the travelers country of residence to determine visa processing timeframes and instructions, learn about interview scheduling, and find out if there are any additional documentation items required. Learn more by contacting the [Embassy Consular Section](#) .

Working Media Cannot Travel Without a Visa on the Visa Waiver Program

Citizens from a country participating in the Visa Waiver Program (VWP), who want to enter the United States temporarily, as representatives of the foreign media traveling to the United States, engaging in their profession, as media or journalists, must first obtain a media visa to come to the U.S. They cannot travel without a visa on the Visa Waiver Program. Those who attempt to do travel without a visa, on the Visa Waiver Program may be denied admission to the United States by the Department of Homeland Security, U.S. immigration inspector at the port of entry. For more information on VWP, see [Visa Waiver Program](#) .

When Can a Visitor Visa Be Used?

- Media representatives who are going to the U.S. to attend conferences or meetings as a participant and will not report about the meeting, either while in the U.S. or upon their return, can travel on a visitor visa. The distinction in immigration law is whether they will be “engaging in their vocation.”

- When traveling for the purpose of guest speaking, lecturing, or engaging in other usual academic activity, for which they will receive an honorarium from an institution of higher education, a related or affiliated nonprofit entity, a nonprofit research organization, or a Governmental research organization, media representatives will need to travel on a visitor visa to the U.S. However, the speaking activity must last no longer than nine days at a single institution and the speaker cannot have received payment from more than five institutions or organizations for such activities in the last six months.
- A visitor visa can be used by employees to purchase U.S. media equipment or broadcast rights or take orders for foreign media equipment or broadcast rights, since they are considered ordinary business visitors.
- Likewise, a foreign media journalist, who does not have a media visa, can take vacation to the U.S. on a visitor visa, and would not need a media visa, as long as he/she would not be reporting on something newsworthy.

Activities Which Do Not Qualify for a Media Visa

While certain activities clearly qualify for the media visa, as they are informational and newsgathering in content, many do not. Each application must be considered in the full context of their particular case. In making the determination as to whether or not an activity qualifies for the media visa, the consular officer will focus on whether the activity is essentially informational, and whether it is generally associated with the news gathering process.

The activities listed below, are shown as examples, which would not qualify for a media visa, and would require a temporary worker type visa, such as the H, O, or P visa. Select [Temporary Workers](#) to go to the Department of Homeland Security, USCIS Website to learn about temporary worker requirements and procedures for filing the petition, which must be approved by USCIS, prior to applying for the visa. For specific nonimmigrant visa information, select [Visa Types for Temporary Visitors](#) .

- **Material for commercial entertainment or advertising purposes** - A media visa cannot be used to film material, or for employees who will work on a film, which will be used primarily for commercial entertainment or advertising purposes. A temporary worker visa is required.
- **Proofreaders, librarians, set designers** - People involved in associated activities such as proofreaders, librarians, set designers, etc., are not eligible for media visas and may qualify under another classification, such as H, O, or P visas.
- **Stories which are staged events, television and quiz shows** - Stories that involve contrived and staged events, even when unscripted, such as reality television shows, and quiz shows are not primarily informational and do not generally involve journalism. Similarly, documentaries involving staged recreations with actors are also not considered informational. Members of the team working on such productions will not qualify for media visa. Television, radio, and film production companies may wish to seek expert counsel from an

immigration attorney who specializes in media work for specific advice tailored to the current project.

- **Artistic media content production** - Media representatives who will travel to the U.S. in order to participate in the production of artistic media content (in which actors are used) will not qualify for a media visa. Television, radio, and film production companies may wish to seek expert counsel from an immigration attorney who specializes in media work for specific advice tailored to the current project.

The activity listed below is an example, which would not qualify for a media visa, and would require a [Visitor Visa](#) .

- **Guest speaker or lecturer** - Public speaking or other usual academic activities, where an honorarium is paid, would not be considered engaging in journalism, and therefore would not be permitted using the I visa. It should be noted, the speaking activity must last no longer than nine days at a single institution and the speaker cannot have received payment from more than five institutions or organizations for such activities in the last six months. However, a media representative, holding a media, I visa can engage in informal free speaking activities, where no fee for such activities is received, beyond reimbursement of reasonable expenses.

Additional Information

- No assurances regarding the issuance of visas can be given in advance. Therefore final travel plans or the purchase of nonrefundable tickets should not be made until a visa has been issued.
- A media visa holder can travel to the U.S. for media purposes and, as part of the trip, take a vacation in the United States.
- Unless previously canceled, a visa is valid until its expiration date. Therefore, if the traveler has a valid U.S. visa in an expired passport, do not remove the visa page from the expired passport. You may use it along with a new valid passport for travel and admission to the United States.

Misrepresentation of a Material Facts, or Fraud

Attempting to obtain a visa by the willful misrepresentation of a material fact, or fraud, may result in the permanent refusal of a visa or denial of entry into the United States.

[Classes of Aliens Ineligible to Receive Visas](#) , provides important information about ineligibilities.

Visa Ineligibility/ Waiver

The Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-156, indicates some classes of persons who are ineligible under U.S. law to receive visas. In some instances an applicant who is ineligible, but who is otherwise properly classifiable for a certain type of visa, may apply

for a waiver of ineligibility and be issued a visa if the waiver is approved. [Classes of Aliens Ineligible to Receive Visas](#) , provides important information about ineligibilities, by reviewing sections of the law taken from the immigration and Nationality Act.

Visa Denials

If the consular officer should find it necessary to deny the issuance of a visa, the applicant may apply again if there is new evidence to overcome the basis for the refusal. For additional information, select [Denials](#) . In the absence of new evidence, consular officers are not obliged to re-examine such cases.

Entering the U.S. - Port of Entry

A visa allows a foreign citizen coming from abroad, to travel to the United States port-of entry and request permission to enter the U.S. Applicants should be aware that a visa does not guarantee entry into the United States. The Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officials have authority to permit or deny admission to the United States. If you are allowed to enter the U.S., the CBP official will determine the length of your visit on the Arrival-Departure Record (Form I-94). Since Form I-94 documents your authorized stay in the U.S., it's very important to keep in your passport. In advance of travel, prospective travelers should review important information about [Admissions/Entry](#) requirements, as well as information related to restrictions about [bringing food, agricultural products](#) or other [restricted/prohibited goods](#) explained on the Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection website. Upon arrival (at an international airport, seaport or land border crossing), you will be enrolled in the [US-VISIT](#) entry-exit program. In addition, some travelers will also need to register their entry into and their departure from the U.S. with the [Special Registration](#) program.

Staying Beyond Your Authorized Stay in the U.S. and Being Out of Status

- You should carefully consider the dates of your authorized stay and make sure you are following the procedures under U.S. immigration laws. It is important that you depart the U.S. on or before the last day you are authorized to be in the U.S. on any given trip, based on the specified end date on your Arrival-Departure Record, Form I-94. Failure to depart the U.S. will cause you to be out-of-status.
- Staying beyond the period of time authorized by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and being out-of-status in the United States is a violation of U.S. immigration laws, and may cause you to be ineligible for a visa in the future for return travel to the U.S. Select [Classes of Aliens Ineligible to Receive Visas](#) to learn more.
- Staying unlawfully in the United States beyond the date Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officials have authorized, even by one day, results in your visa

- being automatically voided, in accordance with INA 222(g). Under this provision of immigration law, if you overstay on your nonimmigrant authorized stay in the U.S., your visa will be automatically voided. In this situation, you are required to reapply for a new nonimmigrant visa, generally in *your* country of nationality.
- For nonimmigrants in the U.S. who have an Arrival-Departure Record, Form I-94 with the CBP admitting officer endorsement of Duration of Status or D/S, but who are no longer performing the same function in the U.S. that they were originally admitted to perform (e.g. you are no longer working for the same employer or you are no longer attending the same school), a DHS or an immigration judge makes a finding of status violation, resulting in the termination of the period of authorized stay.

How Do I Extend My Stay?

Those visitors who wish to stay beyond the time indicated on their Form I-94 must contact the Department of Homeland Security's United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to request an application to extend status. The decision to grant or deny a request for extension of stay is made solely by USCIS. Learn more about [Extension of Stay](#) . Or select [How Do I Extend My Stay in the United States?](#) to visit the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services' Internet site to find out more detailed information.

Further Visa Inquiries

- Questions on visa application procedures and visa ineligibilities should be made to the American consular office abroad by the applicant. Before submitting your inquiry, we request that you carefully review this website and also the Embassy Consular web site abroad. Very often you will find the information you need.
- If your inquiry concerns a visa case in progress overseas, you should first contact the U.S. Embassy or Consulate handling your case for status information. Select [U.S. Embassy or Consulate](#) , and you can choose the Embassy or Consulate Internet site you need to contact.