

Renewal of H-1B Nonimmigrant Visas in the United States

The Department of State announced last month that it would unveil a domestic visa renewal pilot program for some H-1B holders. Currently, all visa holders are required to travel to consulates abroad to renew the visa stamps on their passports. The pilot program aims to alleviate massive backlogs and wait times at the consulates abroad.

The Department of State's initial Domestic Visa Renewal Pilot program will run from January 29, 2024, through April 1, 2024. Applicants who meet the requirements may choose to participate during the application window by applying [online](#). Currently, the program will only service H-1B holders (not their dependents) to limit the scope of applicants during this initial trial period. To control the number of applications received, each week, the Department will release approximately 2,000 application slots for applicants whose most recent H-1B visas were issued by Mission Canada and about 2,000 application slots for those whose most recent H-1B visas were issued by Mission India (about 4,000 total each week) on the following dates:

- January 29,
- February 5,
- February 12,
- February 19, and
- February 26.

Once the limit is reached, the online portal will be locked until the next tranche of slots is released for each participating Mission group on the next application date. The application period will close when all application slots are filled or on April 1, 2024.

Requirements for Participation

Applicants may participate if they

1. are seeking to renew an H-1B visa; during the pilot phase, the Department will not process any other visa classifications;
2. have a 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;
3. are not subject to a nonimmigrant visa issuance fee (Note: this is commonly referred to as a "reciprocity fee");
4. are eligible for a waiver of the in-person interview requirement;
5. have submitted ten fingerprints to the Department in connection with a previous visa application;
6. do not have a prior visa that does not include a "clearance received" annotation;
7. do not have a visa ineligibility that would require a waiver before visa issuance;
8. have an approved and unexpired H-1B petition;
9. were most recently admitted to the United States in H-1B status;
10. are currently maintaining H-1B status in the United States;
11. do not have a period of authorized admission in H-1B status that has expired, and
12. intend to reenter the United States in H-1B status after a temporary period abroad.

Applicants will complete a series of questions in the self-assessment tool to help applicants determine if they qualify under the above criteria. Qualified applicants will then complete the DS-160 and pay the MRV fee. Applicants will then be provided with an address to send their documents for processing, including one passport-style photograph, their original passport, a copy of the current I-797 approval notice, I-94, and receipt of fee payment. Note that the self-



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assessment tool to determine eligibility is only capable of screening out some unqualified applicants. If an applicant is determined unqualified after paying the MRV fee, their payment will NOT be refunded.

The Department of State expects visa processing to take 6-8 weeks, with all applications completed by May 1, 2024. Urgent travel applicants are encouraged to apply for a visa at the consulate in their home country.
