

FAMILY GREEN CARD GUIDE 2026

THE JOURNEY FROM
APPLICATION TO
GETTING THE STATUS

A COMPLETE
APPLICATION MANUAL



LAW OFFICES OF
**Prashanthi
Reddy**

Creative
Immigration
Solutions

Message from Prashanthi

Welcome to the invaluable Family Green Card Guide 2026, a comprehensive resource designed to assist you in your family-based immigration journey to the United States.

The journey to reunite with your family in the United States is one of the most critical and personal processes you will ever undertake. While this path holds immense promise, it is also notoriously complex, confusing, and constantly evolving.

We created this guide because we understand the worry and frustration that accompany bureaucratic hurdles. The complexity of the process is not lost on us, and we are here to help you navigate it.

At the Law Offices of Prashanthi Reddy, our mission is simple: to transform uncertainty into clarity. We are dedicated to your success, providing the detailed, up-to-date, and accurate information you need to navigate the U.S. family-based immigration system with confidence.

This resource is designed to serve as your comprehensive roadmap. It breaks down every phase, from the initial I-130 Petition to the final Green Card issuance, equipping you with the knowledge to understand your rights, responsibilities, and timelines.

We hope this guide is helpful to you. Please remember, while knowledge is power, nothing replaces personalized legal counsel. If you have questions about your unique situation, we're here to offer the tailored guidance your family needs.

We are honored to be a part of your journey.

Prashanthi Reddy
Principal Attorney,
Law Offices of Prashanthi Reddy





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Chapter 1 : Introduction & Overview

Family Green Card : Immediate vs. Preference

 IMMEDIATE RELATIVES (IR)	FAMILY PREFERENCE (F) 
 THE FAST TRACK: No Visa Cap	THE WAITING LIST: Annual Quotas Apply
<div style="border: 2px solid green; padding: 10px;"> NO WAIT LIST: Visas are always available. Processing time is determined by agency. In agency efficiency, not the Visa Bulletin. Sponsor: U.S. Citizen ONLY</div>	<div style="border: 2px solid orange; padding: 10px;"> WAIT LIST: Visas are limited annually by law and country. You must wait for your Priority Date to become "current" in the Visa Bulletin. Sponsor: U.S. Citizen OR Green Card Holder</div>
Eligible Relationships <ol style="list-style-type: none">Spouse (IR-1/CR-1)Unmarried Child (under 21) Parent (Sponsor 21+)   GOAL: Wait time is tied to USCIS/ NVC processing speed	Eligible Relationships <ul style="list-style-type: none">F1: Unmarried Sons & Daughters of U.S. Citizens Green Card Holders F2A Spouses & Minor Child Green Card HoldersF2B: Adult Unmarried Children of U.S. CitizensF3: Married & Daughters of U.S. CitizensF4: Brothers of U.S. Citizens   CHALLENGE: Wait time is tied to the the Visa Bulletin and often takes years or decades

THE CRITICAL TAKENWAY
Your Relationship determines your Visa Category.
Your Visa Category determines your Wait Time



What is a Family Green Card?

A Family Green Card, formally known as a family-based immigrant visa, allows foreign nationals to obtain permanent residence in the United States based on qualifying family relationships with U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents. This pathway represents one of the primary routes to U.S. permanent residency, serving hundreds of thousands of families annually.

Chapter 1 : Introduction & Overview

Two Main Categories

Immediate Relative Visas (No Annual Caps)

- Spouses of U.S. citizens (IR1/CRI)
- Unmarried children under 21 of U.S. citizens (IR2)
- Parents of U.S. citizens aged 21+ (IR5)

Family Preference Visas (Annual Caps Apply)

- F1: Unmarried adult children of U.S. citizens
- F2A: Spouses and children under 21 of Green Card holders
- F2B: Unmarried adult children of Green Card holders
- F3: Married children of U.S. citizens
- F4: Siblings of adult U.S. citizens

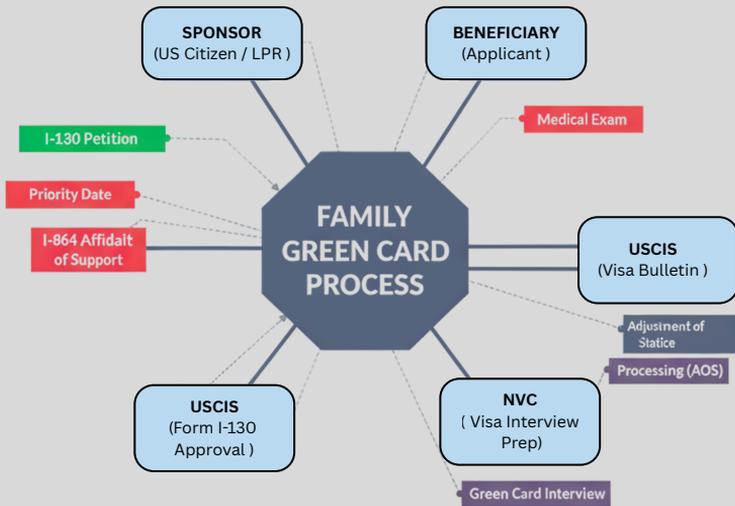
Key Statistics for 2025

The annual limit for family-sponsored preference immigrants is 226,000, with per-country limits set at 7% of total yearly allocations. Processing times vary from 9 months for immediate relatives to over 10 years for some preference categories.



Chapter 2 : Essential Definitions and Terminology

Core Immigration terms



2.1 Immediate Relative: Close family members of U.S. citizens (spouses, unmarried children under 21, parents) who are not subject to annual visa caps.

2.2 Family Preference Immigrant: Foreign nationals eligible for green cards through family relationships but not classified as immediate relatives. Subject to annual caps and waiting periods.

2.3 Priority Date: The date USCIS receives a properly filed I-130 petition, establishing the applicant's place in the visa queue.

2.4 Final Action Date: The cut-off date in the Visa Bulletin showing when applications can be finally processed and decided upon.
Dates for Filing: Earlier dates allow applicants to submit their green card applications while waiting for final processing.

Chapter 2 : Essential Definitions and Terminology

2.5 Visa Categories Explained

IR Categories (Immediate Relatives)

- IR1: Spouse of a U.S. citizen (married 2+ years)
- CR1: Spouse of a U.S. citizen (married less than 2 years)
- IR2: Unmarried child under 21 of a U.S. citizen
- IR5: Parent of U.S. citizen (sponsor must be 21+)

F Categories (Family Preference)

- F1: Unmarried sons/daughters of U.S. citizens (21+)
- F2A: Spouses and children of Green Card holders
- F2B: Unmarried sons/daughters of Green Card holders (21+)
- F3: Married sons/daughters of U.S. citizens
- F4: Brothers/sisters of adult U.S. citizens

Legal Status Definition

A. Petitioner/Sponsor: The U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident filing the I-130 petition.

B. Beneficiary: The foreign national family member for whom the petition is filed.

C. Adjustment of Status: Process for obtaining a green card while remaining in the U.S..

D. Consular Processing: Process for obtaining an immigrant visa at a U.S. embassy/consulate abroad.

Chapter 3 : Eligibility for Sponsors

Family Green Card : Who can Sponsor whom?

Relationship	US Citizen Sponsor (USC)	Green Card Holder Sponsor	Key Takeaways
Spouse	IR 1 / CR 1	F2A	✓ Both can sponsor
Unmarried Children (Under 21)	IR 2	F2A	✓ Both can sponsor
Unmarried Children (Above 21)	F1	F2B	✓ Both can sponsor
Parents	IR 5 (if USC is 21+)	x NO	✓ USC only
Married Children (Any age)	F3	x NO	✓ USC only
Siblings	F4 (if USC is 21+)	x NO	✓ USC only
Green Card Category	Immediate Relative & Family Preference	Family Preference	★ Watch Visa Bulletin (For Family)

U.S. Citizen Sponsors

Basic Requirements

- Must be a U.S. citizen (by birth or naturalization)
- Must be 18+ years old to file petitions
- Must be 21+ years old to sponsor parents
- No criminal disqualifications

Who U.S. Citizens Can Sponsor

- Spouses (no age restrictions)
- Unmarried children of any age
- Married children of any age
- Parents (if sponsor is 21+)
- Siblings (if sponsor is 21+)

Chapter 3 :Eligibility Criteria for Sponsors

Green Card Holder Sponsors

Basic Requirements

- Must be a lawful permanent resident
- Must be 18+ years old to file petitions
- Must maintain permanent resident status throughout the process

Who Can Green Card Holders Sponsor

- Spouses
- Unmarried children under 21 (F2A category)
- Unmarried children 21+ (F2B category)



Significant Limitation: Green Card holders are not eligible to sponsor parents, married children, or siblings.



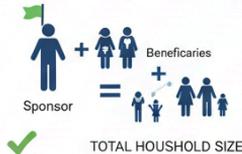
Financial Requirements: The I-864 Bar

Affidavit of Support (Form I-864)

The Rule Household Size Calculation

125%

Minimum Income:
125% of Federal
Poverty Guidelines (FPG)



Household Includes: Sponsor,
Spouse, Children + ALL Beneficiaries



Sample 2025 Income Requirements



INSUFFICIENT INCOME?
Solution: Qualified Joint Sponsor



Financial Requirements for All Sponsors

Affidavit of Support (Form I-864)

- Must demonstrate income at 125% of Federal Poverty Guidelines
- Household size includes the sponsor, spouse, children, and beneficiaries
- Must provide tax returns, employment verification, and bank statements
- Joint sponsors may be used if the income is insufficient

Sample Income Requirements (2026)

- Household of 2: \$21,775 minimum
- Household of 3: \$27,462 minimum
- Household of 4: \$33,150 minimum

Chapter 3 :Eligibility Criteria for Sponsors

Common Sponsor Disqualifications

- Failure to meet income requirements without a joint sponsor
- Outstanding immigration-related debts
- Certain criminal convictions
- Inability to support previously sponsored immigrants

Chapter 4 : Eligibility for Beneficiaries

4.1 Relationship Requirements

4.1.A. Proving the Family Relationship

- Marriage certificates for spouses
- Birth certificates for parent–child relationships
- Adoption decrees for adopted children
- DNA testing in cases of missing documents

4.1.B. Bona Fide Relationship Standards

For marriage–based petitions, couples must prove their relationship is genuine through:

- Joint financial accounts and assets
- Shared residence documentation
- Insurance beneficiary designations
- Photos spanning the relationship timeline
- Travel records and correspondence.

Proving a bona fide marriage: What Documents are necessary?

1 Gold Tier : Most Weight



Joint Ownership
(Property Titles)



Joint Debt (Loans & Lease)



Joint Financial
Accounts

USCIS Requires these!

2 Silver Tier: Strong Weight



Shared Insurance
& Estate



Joint Tax
Returns



Official
Correspondence



Travel & Photo
History

3 Bronze Tier : Supportive Weight



Letter &
Digital Mail



Friends
Affidavit



Affidavit from
Family



Shared Travel
& Photos

STRATEGY: Collect as much from GOLD Tier as possible

Chapter 4 :Eligibility Criteria for Sponsors

4.2 Admissibility Requirements

4.2.A. Medical Examination

- Required medical exam by a USCIS–approved physician
- Vaccinations per CDC requirements
- No disqualifying health conditions

4.2.B. Background Checks

- Police clearance certificates from all countries of residence
- FBI name check and biometric screening
- No disqualifying criminal history

4.2.C. Immigration History

- No prior immigration violations
- Valid entry documentation if in the U.S.
- No outstanding removal orders

4.2.D. Age and Marital Status Considerations

- Child Age Protection Act (CSPA)
- Protects children from "aging out" during processing delays
- Complex calculations involving petition approval dates
- Critical for F2A cases approaching 21st birthday

4.2.E. Marital Status Changes

- Marriage can disqualify the unmarried children category
- Divorce may affect spousal petitions
- The death of a sponsor may allow certain cases to continue

Chapter 5 : Step by Step Application Process

Pathway A: When the beneficiary is Outside US (Adjustment of Status)

	Step	Description	Important forms required
STEP 1	Establish Relationship (The Foundation)	The U.S. Citizen or Lawful Permanent Resident (LPR) sponsor files the petition to establish a legitimate family relationship. This must be approved first or filed concurrently with the I-485 package.	I-130: Petition for Alien Relative (Filed by Sponsor)
STEP 2	AOS and Financial Filing (The Main Submission)	Once the priority date is current (or immediately for Immediate Relatives), the beneficiary files the core adjustment application, along with the required Affidavit of Support from the sponsor. These are typically filed together in one package	I-485: Application to Register Permanent Residence or Adjust Status (Filed by Beneficiary)
STEP 3	Financial Support	I-864: Affidavit of Support (Filed by Sponsor)	
STEP 4	Employment and Travel Authorization	The beneficiary files separate, optional applications to request a work permit (EAD) and advance parole (travel document) while the I-485 is pending.	I-765: Application for Employment Authorization (EAD) (Filed by Beneficiary)
			I-131: Application for Travel Document (Advance Parole) (Filed by Beneficiary)
STEP 5	Biometrics Appointment	USCIS sends a notice for the beneficiary to appear at an Application Support Center (ASC) to have their fingerprints, photograph, and signature (biometrics) taken.	N/A (Appointment Notice is Sent)
STEP 6	Interview and Decision	The applicant may be called for an interview at a USCIS field office (required for marriage-based cases). The officer reviews the entire file, ensures all documents are present, and confirms eligibility before issuing the final decision.	N/A (Interview is Scheduled)
STEP 7	Green Card Issuance	Upon approval, the beneficiary is granted Lawful Permanent Resident status. The physical Green Card is mailed to the beneficiary's U.S. address.	N/A

Chapter 5 : Step by Step Application Process

Key Takeaway for AOS

- The Adjustment of Status process allows the beneficiary to remain in the U.S. throughout the entire application period.
- Forms I-485, I-765, and I-131 (plus the I-864 and supporting documents) are often bundled and filed together with the I-130 petition, especially for Immediate Relatives. This is the advantage of the “One-Step” filing method.

Pathway B: When the beneficiary is Outside US (Consular Processing

	Step	Description	Important forms required
STEP 1	USCIS Petition (The Foundation)	The U.S. Sponsor files the initial petition to prove a legitimate family relationship. This must be approved first before the case moves abroad.	I-130: Petition for Alien Relative (Filed by Sponsor)
STEP 2	NVC Acceptance & Fee Processing	Once the I-130 is approved, USCIS transfers the case to the National Visa Center (NVC). The NVC sends fee bills for processing and the Affidavit of Support.	N/A (NVC Fee Bills)
STEP 3	Financial Support and Application Submission	The Sponsor files the Affidavit of Support. The Beneficiary files the online Immigrant Visa (IV) application, registering their personal and background data.	I-864: Affidavit of Support (Filed by Sponsor)
	DS-260: Immigrant Visa Electronic Application (Filed by Beneficiary)		
STEP 4	Document Submission	The beneficiary must collect and upload all required civil documents (birth certificates, police certificates, marriage certificates, etc.) and the Affidavit of Support evidence to the NVC portal for review.	N/A (Collection of Civil Documents)

Chapter 5 : Step by Step Application Process

Pathway B: When the beneficiary is Outside US (Consular Processing

	Step	Description	Important forms required
STEP 5	NVC Case Completion	The NVC reviews all documents. Once they confirm everything is correctly submitted, they issue a "Documentarily Qualified" notification and queue the case for an interview.	N/A (NVC Notification)
STEP 6	Consular Interview & Medical Exam	The beneficiary attends a mandatory medical examination with an embassy-approved physician and then attends the visa interview at the U.S. Embassy or Consulate in their home country.	Medical Examination Report
STEP 7	Visa Issuance & Travel	Upon approval, the beneficiary's passport is stamped with a temporary immigrant visa. They must travel to the U.S. before the visa expires (usually 6 months).	N/A (Immigrant Visa in Passport)
STEP 8	Admission to the U.S.	The beneficiary presents the immigrant visa packet at the U.S. port of entry. The Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officer reviews the packet and grants LPR status. The Green Card is mailed to their U.S. address.	N/A

Key Takeaway for Consular Processing

- Consular Processing is a two-phase system involving both USCIS and the Department of State's NVC/Consulate.
- The beneficiary must remain outside the U.S. until the immigrant visa is issued and must travel to the U.S. within the visa's validity period.
- Unlike AOS, there is no automatic work or travel authorization during the process.

Chapter 6 : Understanding the Visa Bulletin



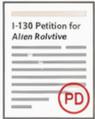
VISA BULLETIN 101 : Your Green Card Waiting time

The Monthly Guide to When You Can "Apply" for your Family Green Card



The Official Monthly report from US Department of State that allocates ** limited number of Family Green Cards based on demand and backlog

YOUR TICKET NUMBER: The Priority Date (PD) THE CONTROL PANEL: The Two Charts



This is the day USCIS received the I-130 Petition. It is your place in line



Can I Get My Green Card Approved?

The date your PD must be earlier* for yerrment to finalize your visa application or Green Card interview.

(Nov 2025): Family-based applicants currently use Chart B



Can I File My Green Card earlier than to allow
U.S. government to falonit final application package get in line soner)

CHART B: Dates for Filing Application (I-485)?

The date your PD must be arllew to elyuiC *submit application... (This allows you get in you get is line soner)

KEY TERMINOLOGY & STRATEGY



CURRENT
Your Priority is earlier than date listed



RETROGRESSION
The Dates has moved backward



ADVANCEMENT
The Date has moved forward, gather document now!

What is the Visa Bulletin?

The Visa Bulletin is a monthly publication by the U.S. Department of State that shows visa availability for family-based and employment-based immigrant categories. It serves as the official guide for determining when applicants can take the next step in their green card process.

Chapter 6 : Understanding the Visa Bulletin

Two Critical Date Charts

Final Action Date (Chart A)

- Indicates when cases will be finally processed
- Used when USCIS announces "use Chart A"
- Shows actual processing capacity

Dates of Filing (Chart B)

- Allows earlier filing of adjustment applications
- Used when USCIS announces "use Chart B"
- Creates a more extended waiting period after filing

Reading the Visa Bulletin

Family-Sponsored	All Chargeability Areas Except Those Listed	CHINA-mainland born	INDIA	MEXICO	PHILIPPINES
F1	08NOV16	08NOV16	08NOV16	22NOV05	22JAN13
F2A	01FEB24	01FEB24	01FEB24	01FEB23	01FEB24
F2B	01DEC16	01DEC16	01DEC16	15DEC07	01OCT12
F3	08SEP11	08SEP11	08SEP11	01MAY01	22SEP04
F4	08JAN08	08JAN08	01NOV06	08APR01	22MAR06

November 2025 Visa Bulletin : Final Action Date
Table for Family Preference Category

Understanding the Impact on your case



Priority Date Current

If your priority date is earlier than the published date, you can go ahead and proceed to the next step.

Retrogression

When dates move backward, indicating increased demand or reduced visa availability.

Advancement

Forward movement of dates, allowing more applicants to proceed.

USCIS Filing Instructions

- Each month, USCIS announces which chart to use:
- Chart A (Final Action): File only when your case is ready for immediate processing
- Chart B (Dates for Filing): File early, but expect a longer waiting period

Chapter 6 : Understanding the Visa Bulletin

Strategic Planning with Visa Bulletin



Document Preparation

You can begin gathering documents when your priority date approaches the published dates.

Country-Specific Strategies: Consider cross-chargeability options for oversubscribed countries.

Timing Decisions: Plan major life events around visa bulletin movements to avoid complications.

Chapter 7 : Processing Times and Timelines

Factors affecting Processing times

USCIS Workload

- Service center assignments vary in processing speed
- Seasonal fluctuations in applications
- Staffing levels and policy changes

Country of Birth

- Per-country limits create disparities.
- India, China, Mexico, and the Philippines face longer waits
- Cross-chargeability may reduce wait times.

Case Complexity

- Prior immigration violations
- Criminal history requiring waivers
- Missing or problematic documentation
- Request for Evidence (RFE) responses

Short-term Preparation (6-12 months before priority date)

- Update expired documents
- Gather financial documentation
- Complete medical examinations
- Prepare for interviews

Long-term Planning (Years in advance)

- Maintain qualifying relationships
- Keep the sponsor's permanent residence status current
- Plan major life decisions around visa availability
- Consider alternative pathways if applicable



Time planning strategies

Chapter 7 : Processing times and timelines

Expedite Requests

Limited Circumstances for Expediting I-130

- Severe financial loss to the company or individual
- Emergencies
- Humanitarian reasons
- Nonprofit organization requests
- U.S. government interests

Documentation Required

- Detailed explanation of the expedited request reason
- Supporting evidence of urgency
- Proof of financial loss or emergency



CURRENT PROCESSING TIMES (2026)

Form I-130 Processing

- USCIS average: 14.5 months
- Varies by USCIS service center
- Premium processing is not available

Immediate Relatives (U.S. Citizens)

- Inside U.S. (concurrent filing): 9.2 months average
- Outside U.S. (consular processing): 20.8 months average
- No visa availability, wait required

Family Preference Categories

- F1 (Unmarried adult children): 2-10 years, depending on country
- F2A (Spouses/children of LPRs): 2-3 years for most countries
- F2B (Unmarried adult children of LPRs): 5-8 years
- F3 (Married children of citizens): 8-15+ years
- F4 (Siblings): 10-20+ years

Chapter 8 : Required Documents and Forms



I-130 Document Checklist

Form I-130 Document Checklist (Generalized)

For All Petitions

- Completed Form I-130 with signatures
- Filing fee payment (\$535)
- Sponsor's proof of U.S. citizenship or permanent residence
- Sponsor's valid government-issued photo ID

Form I-130 Document Checklist (Relation specific)

Spouse Petitions

- Marriage certificate
- Proof of termination of previous marriages (both parties)
- Form I-130A (Supplemental Information for Spouse Beneficiary)
- Evidence of bona fide marriage

Parent-Child Petitions

- Birth certificate showing parent-child relationship
- Adoption decree (if applicable)
- Step-relationship documentation (if applicable)

Sibling Petitions

- Birth certificates of both the sponsor and the beneficiary
- Proof of parents' identity and any name changes

Adjustment of Status Documents (Form I-485)

Primary Forms

- Form I-485 (Application to Register Permanent Residence)
- Form I-864 (Affidavit of Support)
- Form I-693 (Report of Medical Examination)

Supporting Documents

- Copy of approved I-130
- Birth certificate
- Marriage certificate (if applicable)
- Passport-style photographs (2)
- Copy of I-94 arrival/departure record
- Financial documents for I-864

Consular Processing Documents

Civil Documents

- Birth certificates
- Marriage certificates
- Divorce decrees
- Death certificates
- Police clearance certificates
- Military records

Financial Documents

- Sponsor's tax returns (3 years)
- Employment verification letter
- Pay stubs
- Bank statements
- Form I-864 with supporting evidence



Translation Requirements

All foreign language documents must include

- Certified English translation
- Translator's certification of accuracy
- Translator's contact information
- Original foreign language document



Document Validity and Updates

Expiration Dates

- Police clearance: Valid for 2 years
- Medical examination: Valid for 2 years
- Financial documents: Current within reason

Updating Documents

- Could you submit updated documents if originals expire?
- Notify USCIS/NVC of address changes.
- Report significant life changes promptly.

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