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News & Types: Client Advisories

Diversity Visa "Green Card" Lottery Program for Fiscal Year 2026

10/1/2024

Practices: Immigration

The U.S. Department of State (DOS) has released its instructions for the Diversity Immigrant Visa "Green Card" Lottery Program (DV-2026) for fiscal year 2026 (October 1, 2025 through September 30, 2026). The Lottery Program for DV-2026 registration will be open for only 34 days from October 2, 2024 at noon (EST) through close at noon (EST) on November 5th. There are no significant changes from last year's Lottery Program.

The DOS makes 55,000 "green cards" available annually to persons from countries with low rates of immigration to the United States. Applicants for Diversity Visas are chosen by a computer-generated random lottery drawing. The DOS will notify a participant's selection exclusively online in May 2025. Applicants can check the status of their registration online in May 2025 via Entry Status Check at https://dvprogram.state.gov to determine whether they were selected. Entry Status Check will also notify selected participants and provide them with instructions on the procedures for the application process and will confirm appointments for visa interviews. The Entry Status Check is the ONLY manner in which entrants will be notified of their selection. The DOS will NOT mail any correspondence to the selected applicants, nor will it send out an email. Furthermore, the Entry Status Check will be the only way in which selected individuals will be provided further instructions on immigrant visa procedures.

The Diversity Visa "green cards" are available only to citizens of countries with lower rates of immigration and no visas are available to citizens of countries sending more than 50,000 immigrants to the United States in the past five years. Within each region, no country may receive more than 7% of the available Diversity Visa "green cards" in any one year.

COUNTRIES INELIGIBLE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE DV-2026 LOTTERY PROGRAM

For the DV-2026 Lottery Program, natives of the following countries are ***not eligible*** to apply because they are the principal source countries of Family-Sponsored and Employment-Based immigration, or "high admission" countries: Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, The People's Republic of China (including mainland and Hong Kong born), Colombia, *Cuba*, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, India, Jamaica, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Republic of Korea (South Korea), Venezuela, and Vietnam. Natives of Macau SAR and Taiwan *are* eligible. New to the ineligibility list for the DV-2026 Program is Cuba.

NOTE: Even if you were born in one of the ineligible countries you may still qualify for a Diversity Visa if your spouse was born in an eligible country (and you are applying for the visa together) or if one of your parents was either born in, or at the time of your birth was a legal resident of, an eligible country.

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REGISTRATION PROCEDURES

The entries for the DV-2026 Lottery Program must be submitted electronically between 12:00 pm (noon), Eastern Daylight Time (EDT) (GMT-4), Wednesday, October 2, 2024, and 12:00 pm

(noon) Eastern Standard Time (EST) (GMT-5), Tuesday, November 5, 2024. The DOS will only accept entries made on an electronic diversity entry form which will be available at https://dvprogram.state.gov/ during the registration period. The DOS will not accept mail-in entries. Only one entry by and for each person during each registration period is permitted. Receipt of more than one entry per person will disqualify the person from registration, regardless of the source of the entry.

The procedures for submitting an entry in the DV-2026 Lottery Program are as follows:

Entry Form Contents. The DOS will only accept completed Electronic Diversity Visa Entry Forms submitted electronically at https://dvprogram.state.govduring the registration period. All entries by an applicant will be disqualified if more than one entry for the applicant is received, regardless of who submitted the entry. The entry form will ask the applicant to submit the following information:

- Full name; (exactly as shown on your passport);
- Date of birth;
- Gender;
- City/town and Country of birth;
- Country of eligibility or chargeability under the DV program;
- Photograph according to the specifications described below;
- Current mailing address;
- Country where you live today;
- Phone number (optional);
- Email address;
- Highest level of education completed;
- Marriage status;
- Number of children that are unmarried and under the age of 21 years of age and each child's information including name, date of birth, gender, city/town of birth, country of birth and photograph that meets the previously described specifications (failure to list all children who are eligible, will result in disqualification of the principal applicant and refusal of all visas in the case at the time of the visa interview); and
- Spouse's information, including name, date of birth, gender, city/town of birth, country of birth and spouse's photograph that meets the previously described specifications (failure to list your spouse will result in disqualification of the principal applicant and refusal of all visas in the case at the time of the visa interview).

Photograph Requirements. The entry will be disqualified if photographs are not submitted of the applicant, his/her spouse and each child under the age of 21 (including all natural children as well as legally-adopted and stepchildren, except a child who is already a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident) even if the child no longer resides with the applicant and does not intend to immigrate under the Lottery Program. The photographs must be submitted electronically with the entry form. Group or family photos will not be accepted.

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There must be a separate photo for each family member. Each applicant, his/her spouse and each child will therefore need a computer file containing his/her digital photograph which will be submitted online with the entry form. The image file can be produced either by taking a new digital photograph or by scanning a photographic print with a digital scanner. The submitted digital images must conform to the following specifications:

New Digital Image

1. The image must be in the Joint Photographic Experts Group (JPEG) format;
2. The image must be in color - 24 bits per pixel (black and white or 8-bit images will not be accepted);
3. The maximum image size accepted is 240 kilobytes (240KB);
4. The minimum dimensions accepted are 600 pixels (width) by 600 pixels (height) and the height must equal the width;

Scanning a Submitted Photograph

5. Scanner Resolution must be at least 300 dots per inch (dpi);
6. The image must be in the Joint Photographic Experts Group (JPEG) format;
7. The maximum image file size accepted is 240 kilobytes (240KB);
8. Image resolution must be 600 by 600 pixels;
9. The image must be in color - 24 bits per pixel (black and white or 8-bit images will not be accepted);

Additional Specifications

10. The applicant, spouse or child must be directly facing the camera;
11. The head of the person being photographed must directly face the camera and should not be tilted up, down or to the side;
12. The head should cover about 50% of the area of the photograph;
13. The photograph should be taken with the person being photographed in front of a plain white or off-white background (photographs taken with a very dark or patterned background will not be accepted);
14. Photographs in which the face of the person being photographed is not in focus will not be accepted;
15. Photographs in which the person being photographed is wearing sunglasses or other paraphernalia which detracts from the face will not be accepted;
16. Photographs of applicants wearing head coverings or hats are only acceptable due to religious beliefs and still may not obscure any portion of the face of the applicant; and
17. Photographs should have been taken within the past six months.

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DOS PROCESSING OF ENTRIES

After an applicant submits his/her entry, the applicant's name and a unique confirmation number will appear. The applicant should print this screen. Applicants will be selected at random by computer from among qualified entries.

All entrants must check on the DOS website via the Entry Status Check (link) on or after May 3, 2025 to see whether they have been selected to participate in the Lottery. The Entry Status Check is the ONLY manner in which entrants will be notified of their selection. The DOS will NOT mail any correspondence to the selected applicants, nor will it send out an email. The DOS normally notifies approximately 100,000 applicants that they have been selected through the DV Lottery Program. However, only 55,000 "green cards" are available annually.

The green cards based upon the DV-2026 Lottery Program will be issued between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026. However, because more individuals will be registered than there are immigrant visas available, a registered applicant who wishes to receive his/her immigrant visa must be prepared to act quickly after being notified, especially if he/she is assigned a favorable lottery number in the random selection process. The DOS emphasized that random selection in the lottery process does NOT guarantee that an applicant will receive a "green card."

Education or Work Experience Required

In order to qualify for a "green card" through the Diversity Visa Lottery Program, each applicant must have at least a high school education or its equivalent or, within the past five years, have two years of work experience in an occupation requiring at least two years of training. A high school education or its equivalent is defined as successful completion of a 12-year course of elementary and secondary education in the United States or successful completion in another country of a formal course of elementary and secondary education comparable to a high school education in the United States. Evidence of educational work experience should not be submitted with the lottery entry but must be submitted to the consular official or U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) officer at the time of the visa or adjustment of status interview. In order to determine eligibility based on work experience, definitions from the Department of Labor's (DOL) O*Net Online database will be used.

The DOS Does Not Charge to Enter the DV Lottery Program

There is no charge to enter the annual DV Lottery Program. The DOS does not employ outside consultants or private services to operate the program. A qualified entry submitted electronically directly by the applicant has an equal chance of being selected by the computer at the DOS Kentucky Consular Center as does an entry submitted electronically through a paid intermediary who completes the entry for the applicant. However, if an applicant or a paid intermediary submits more than one entry per person, the person will be disqualified from the program. A special DV Lottery Case processing fee will be payable later to the DOS by persons who "win" the lottery and are processed for a "green card" based upon the lottery program.

Additional Questions

Answers to many additional questions can be found in the online FAQ published on the DOS website.

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