AIDS 2012 Fact Sheet:
Media representatives travelling to the United States

The purpose of this fact sheet is to inform media representatives who may be considering attending the International AIDS Conference in Washington 22-27 July 2012 about the process to travel to the United States of America.

The following information is intended to help guide potential media representatives through the process, but please note that it is the responsibility of each individual to visit the website of the U.S. embassy or consulate in country, to determine application requirements and to ultimately obtain his or her visa.

The U.S. government is a conference partner and is already preparing as best as possible for an influx of visa applications from conference delegates. Despite that, both the U.S. government and conference organizers expect delays in processing visa applications. **We strongly recommend that all delegates act as soon as possible.**

Remember:
- Review the information on the website of the U.S. embassy or consulate as soon as possible!
- Become informed on the process, costs and timing!
- Apply early!
- Be prepared with appropriate documentation since if your visa is denied there is no appeal process or refund of the visa application fee!

The visa

Media representatives intending to report on the conference need a nonimmigrant visa (hereafter referred to simply as a ‘visa’) to enter the U.S. Individuals will need to apply online for a visa (completing form DS-160, Online Nonimmigrant Visa Application) before scheduling an interview with a consular officer at a U.S. embassy or consulate.
Full details are available at: http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types/types_1276.html.

Media representatives who will report on the conference either while in the U.S. or upon their return should apply for an I visa (media, journalists).

Media representatives who are attending the conference 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 (B-1). For more information see: http://www.aids2012.org/WebContent/File/AIDS2012_Visa_NIV.pdf.

The I visa application form is available at: https://ceac.state.gov/genniv/.

Media representatives must meet specific requirements to qualify for a media (I) visa under immigration law. The consular officer will determine whether the media representative qualifies for the visa. 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, under U.S. immigration laws, 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 activity must be essentially informational and generally associated with the news gathering process, reporting on actual current events, in order to be eligible for the media visa. The consular officer will determine whether or not an activity qualifies for the media visa.

---

**Application process**

Media representatives need to follow the following process:

a) Complete the relevant application form (DS-160 for an I visa).

b) Apply for an interview. See information about the timing of processing.

c) Pay the visa application fee.

d) Attend the interview, with the form/confirmation page, passport, supporting documents and answer all the consular officer's questions.


f) Decision to grant or deny the visa is communicated to the applicant.

The decision on the eligibility of an applicant to receive a visa lies with the U.S. consular officer who reviews the visa application. **Neither the U.S. Department of State nor the conference secretariat can influence this decision.**

The conference secretariat will share the conference registration database with the Department of State on a monthly basis from January 2012 onwards to help facilitate visa review and processing. Consular officers will therefore have access to the registration information through their internal system, but are not obligated to refer to it.

All media representatives should produce the official conference letter of invitation as part of their visa application. The letter can be obtained from the conference registration department once an individual has registered and been approved as a conference media representatives. Further information is available at: http://www.aids2012.org/Default.aspx?pageId=459.

**Timeframe**

All visa applications should be made no later than 90 days (mid-April 2012) before travelling to the U.S.

Most embassies and consulates will be able to schedule the visa interview about 20 working days after the request has been made, however, some embassies and consulates have much longer waiting times (40-100 working days).

Media representatives are strongly encouraged to contact the U.S. embassy as soon as possible to check the current waiting times for interviews and visa processing. Representatives from Afghanistan, Argentina, Brazil, China, Columbia, Demographic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ghana, Guatemala, Haiti, Nigeria, Turkey, Uganda and Venezuela should note that waiting times for interviews in these countries can be very long. See: http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/wait/wait_4638.html.

Media representatives who know that they are likely to have problems obtaining a visa (for example, journalists who have not travelled out of their country previously) should wait until they have all the applicable documentation (scholarship award letter, letter of invitation, flight and accommodation confirmations, etc.) before applying.

**Individuals who are awaiting notification regarding their scholarship submission before making arrangements to attend the conference should note that the timeframe following notification (beginning of April) and applying for the visa (mid-April) is very short so the gathering of documentation and contacting the U.S. embassy in advance of notification are crucial.**

Media representatives who are professionally employed in their country of residence will likely be able to qualify for visas very early.

**Where to apply for your visa**

Media representatives should make early contact with the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate to check on the exact requirements and timing of applying for a visa. Many embassies will be at capacity in processing these applications. The U.S. Bureau of Consular Affairs is working hard to maximize capacity where it can, but for some countries a long process might be delayed even longer due to the volume of applications. It cannot be overstated that potential applicants should apply as early as possible.

A list of the embassies with links to contact details is available here: http://www.usembassy.gov/.

U.S. representation is reasonably comprehensive throughout the world, however, some nationals need to travel outside of their country to apply for a visa and some consulates
are not able to process visas. Full information is available on each of the embassies’ websites: http://www.usembassy.gov/.

The interview

All media representatives will need to have an interview with a U.S. consular officer. Scheduling of interviews must be done directly by the media representative with the embassy/consulate that will process the application. Interviews at most embassies are scheduled through an online system. Media representatives should complete the online application form (DS-160) before scheduling the interview. All visa application interviews must be done in person by the individual applying.


The visa officer will ask a series of questions depending on the visa application form answers. The questions are designed to find out the reason for travelling to the U.S., where the applicant is staying and for how long, details regarding the applicant’s job and family situation and previous travel (to the U.S. and elsewhere), among other questions.

Interview waiting time can be extensive in some embassies (See “Timeframe”).

If the interview appointment date provided is not early enough for the applicant’s intended travel, a delegate should contact the embassy/consulate to request an expedited appointment. The decision by an embassy to expedite an interview appointment is discretionary and depends on several factors. For more information, delegates should check the embassy’s website for the ‘how to’ procedures regarding expedited/urgent/emergency travel.

Documentation

Each applicant for a media visa must submit these forms and documentation as explained below:

- Complete form DS-160 and print out the confirmation page
- a passport valid for travel to the U.S. and with a validity date at least six months beyond the applicant's intended period of stay in the U.S.
- one (1) 2x2 photograph: http://travel.state.gov/visa/visaphotoreq/visaphotoreq_5334.html.
- proof of employment – provide the following:
  - staff journalist: a letter from the employer that gives the employee's name, position held within the company, and purpose and length of stay in the U.S.
  - freelance journalist under contract to a media organization: a copy of the contract with the organization, which shows the employee's name, position held within the company; purpose and length of stay in the U.S. 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 U.S.
  - 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 U.S. and duration of contract.


In addition, the following documentation are suggested:
- Evidence must be provided regarding the purpose of the trip, intent to depart and arrangements made to cover costs of the trip.
- Media representatives who do not have sufficient funds to support themselves while in the U.S. must present convincing evidence that support is provided. Scholarship recipients can use the scholarship award letter to do this.
- The applicant must establish that s/he has a residence abroad to which they intend to return.

Suggested additional documentation for conference delegates include:
- documents relevant to intended travel:
  - return travel confirmation (flight or other)
  - accommodation confirmation
  - scholarship award letter (if applicable)
  - speaker/chair/moderator/performer invitation (if applicable)
- documents relevant to the intention to return:
  - proof of financial connections to the home country (evidence of close family ties or social or cultural associations)
  - proof of housing (e.g., rental contract)

**Costs**

There is a Machine Readable Visa fee that must be paid prior to the visa interview. For the current fee, visit: http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types/types_1263.html. The cost for the I visa is usually US$140.

There might also be an appointment fee (US$ 2-20) and occasionally a reciprocity fee (http://travel.state.gov/visa-fees/fees_3272.html) that must be paid at the time of visa issuance. All information is posted on the individual embassy’s or consulate’s website: http://www.usembassy.gov/.

The application fee is non-refundable, even if the visa application is denied. See: http://travel.state.gov/visa-fees/fees_1341.html.

**Visa denials**

Most visa denials are made on the grounds of the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act Section 214(b), which states that a nonimmigrant visa cannot be issued to an applicant unless that applicant convinces the consular officer s/he will depart the U.S. after a temporary visit rather than stay permanently in the U.S. The consular officer will look for
evidence of a strong financial and/or employment situation and ties to the applicant’s home country.

Potential media representatives should note that if a visa is denied there is no appeal process. The individual can reapply and pay another Machine-Readable Visa fee (usually US$140 plus extras) if they have proof that there is a significant change in their situation.

See: http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/denials/denials_1361.html

The visa application form includes questions about communicable diseases, drug abuse or addiction, arrests, crimes, the use of controlled substances, and prostitution activity, among others. If a media representative answers any of these questions affirmatively, the individual may be found to be inadmissible to the U.S. and therefore the visa application would be denied. Depending on the circumstances the individual may choose to request a waiver of ground of inadmissibility be processed by the consular officer. For more information see: http://www.aids2012.org/WebContent/File/AIDS2012_Visa_Waiver.pdf.

---

**Arrival in the U.S.**

Media representatives should be prepared to wait in line at the U.S. port of entry/airport for a considerable period of time.

At the U.S. port of entry a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) officer will inspect passport and travel documents. The officer will also ask some questions designed to find out the reason for travelling to the U.S., where the traveler is staying, for how long and previous travel to the U.S, among other questions.

Usually this process is brief (two-three minutes), however, some travelers may also be taken to secondary questioning in a separate office which may take considerably longer.

In addition, travelers are required to provide biometrics (digital fingerprints and photographs). Full information about this process is available at: http://www.dhs.gov/files/programs/editorial_0525.shtm.

Even if a traveler has a valid visa, the DHS officer can deny entry at the border. Media representatives are encouraged to ensure they have all their supporting documents with them at the port of entry.