

F, M, and Academic J Visa Processing and Expansion of Interview Waiver During COVID-19

Which student applicants qualify for an interview waiver?

Applicants seeking F, M or academic J visas may be eligible for an interview waiver. The applicant must have previously been issued any type of U.S. visa. In addition, an applicant's most recent visa application cannot have been refused for any reason and there cannot be any indication of a visa ineligibility.

First-time F, M and academic J visa applicants who are citizens or nationals of Visa Waiver Program countries and who have no indication of potential visa ineligibility may also be eligible. An applicant who has been denied for the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) is not eligible for interview waiver.

Who decides who is qualified?

The decision to allow interview waiver will be made by embassies and consulates on a case-by-case basis.

Where can I apply?

An applicant must be a national of the country where he/she is applying.

Do I still need to make an appointment?

Please check your local [embassy or consulate's website](#) for more information. In some locations, applicants may need to make an interview waiver appointment to submit their passport, fingerprints, and accompanying documents.

What is the Visa Waiver Program?

The [Visa Waiver Program](#) enables most citizens or nationals of participating countries to travel to the United States for tourism or business for stays of 90 days or less without obtaining a visa. Travelers must have a valid [Electronic System for Travel Authorization \(ESTA\)](#) approval prior to travel and meet all requirements explained below. Visit travel.state.gov for more information. <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/tourism-visit/visa-waiver-program.html>

What is an “academic” J visa?

Academic J visa applicants include students, professors, research scholars, short-term scholars, or specialists who are participating in an approved exchange

program. Please see <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/study/exchange.html> for more information on approved exchanged programs.

Does this mean I will be guaranteed a visa?

No. The new policy waives the in-person interview requirement for some F, M and academic J visa applicants. A consular officer will review your visa application and may determine an interview is necessary. All visa applications are adjudicated on a case-by-case basis. The consular officer may deny a visa application if an applicant is found ineligible under the Immigration and Nationality Act or other provisions of U.S. law.

Will my spouse and minor children be eligible for interview waiver for their derivative F, M and J visas?

Yes, derivative visa applicants may also qualify for interview waiver if the principal applicant qualifies.

Where can I find more information?

Travel.state.gov and the website for your local [U.S. embassy or consulate](#) will have more information about whether you qualify and how to book an appointment.

Do I need to get my fingerprints taken?

If you have previously been issued a U.S. visa, you likely will not be required to provide your biometrics again. In some circumstances, such as if the original visa was issued before the applicant was 14 years old, biometrics may be required. For applicants from VWP countries, fingerprints will not be required prior to the F, M or academic J visa application.

How long will this policy last?

This policy is set to expire at 11:59 PM on December 31, 2021.

What if my prior U.S. visa is expired?

The new policy applies to those who previously were issued a U.S. visa regardless of whether the prior visa is expired. Those whose most recent visa application was refused do not qualify.

What if I had a visa refused, but my subsequent visa application was approved?

If a subsequent visa was approved, and the applicant has no apparent visa ineligibilities, you may still qualify for the interview waiver program.

I've previously been issued a U.S. visa in different category than F, M or academic J. Can I still qualify for the interview waiver program?

F, M and academic J applicants who have been issued any type of U.S. visa in the past may qualify for the interview waiver program, as long as they are not otherwise ineligible.

What is a National Interest Exception (NIE)?

A NIE allows a person who has been present in one of the 33 countries subject to COVID-19 travel restrictions to travel to the United States.

How do I apply for a National Interest Exception?

F and M applicants will automatically be considered for a NIE upon submission of their visa application. Academic J applicants should contact their local embassy or consulate for information on how to apply for a NIE.