

Priority Interview Program

Embassy of the United States
Manila, Philippines

Updated: January 22, 2004

Preferred Interview Program Objectives:

To create a mutually beneficial relationship between the US Embassy consular section and established business community in Philippines that will:

- Allow bona fide applicants traveling on business to obtain timely interview slots at the US Embassy.
- Ensure that businesses in the Philippines which have a high “frequency” and “volume” of travelers to the US for business purposes have the capability for fast turnaround on visa applications.
- Promote commercial activities between the US and Philippines by ensuring timely visa interview availability.
- Facilitate travel for qualified applicants to the advantage of the organization and the Government of the United States.

General Framework

Business organizations in the Philippines which meet the certification criteria are welcome to apply for participation in the Priority Interview Program. This can be initiated by writing a letter and attaching all supporting documentation that would help establish their certification eligibility. The letter should be addressed to:

Preferred Interview Program Coordinator
Consular Section
Embassy of the United States
1201 Roxas Boulevard
Manila, Philippines

The embassy will review the attached materials and contact the organization within 1 month of receiving the application.

If this is a first time application, the Embassy will reserve the right to have one or more officers go to the organization for a site visit.

If this is a re-certification application, the Embassy will generally not require a site visit, unless 5 years have passed since the last site visit.

At the site visit, the Embassy staff should:

- Introduced to key managers/staff at the organization who have business dealings with the US.
- Understand the business objectives and future plans for the organization
- Understand the relationship between the organization and US based entities.
- Understand the 3-5 year projections for the business and the likely impact on travel plans to the US.

Based on the site visit and other documentation provided to the Embassy, a determination will be made on including /not including the organization in the PIP.

If the organization is certified for inclusion, a reference number will be issued to the organization for making PIP appointments.

At the end of the year the organization will need to reapply for re-certification for the PIP. Unless 5 years have passed since the last site visit, no new site visit will generally be necessary.

How does it work?

Once certified, the organization will need to:

1. Provide an annual projection for the number of applicants who will be travelling for business purposes. (This will need to be provided every year upon application for re-certification to the PIP coordinator.)
2. When an applicant needs to travel at short notice to the US for business purposes, the organization provides the organization reference number to the call center and asks for a PIP appointment.
3. The earliest available PIP appointment is provided to the organization / applicant. The following Internet link should be used for applicants to fill their application forms online: <http://evisaforms.state.gov/>
4. The applicant comes to the Embassy at the appointment time and is interviewed for the visa application by the consular officer. All supporting documentation for the travel and the applicants personal information should be brought by the applicant.
5. The applicant is either issued or denied a visa based on the adjudication by the consular officer.
6. If the visa is issued, the consular officer at his/her discretion might give the application a Report Back letter. This letter requires the applicant to return to the Embassy upon return to the Philippines and register their return.

Minimal Certification Criteria:

- ***Frequent*** business travel required by Philippine business to US. This typically requires that the Philippine business has ***sent at least 20*** business staff to the US for each of the ***last 2 years*** and has plans to continue to do that for the foreseeable future.
- ***Established profitable business*** – for both publicly traded and privately held enterprises this is typically demonstrated by:
 - annual revenues in excess of 50 million pesos
 - minimum of 300 employees
 - minimum of 3 years of profitable business activity.
- ***Strong business ties with the US***. This is typically evidenced by factors such as a large customer base in the US, meaningful partnerships, subsidiaries or supplier relationships that have existed for at least 3 years.
- ***Audited financial statements*** for last 3 years.
- ***Positive community awareness and reputation*** in the Philippines – the business is well known in its industry, and business community and enjoys a strong positive reputation.
- ***3 References in the United States*** – customers and/or suppliers and/or business partners.
- ***Low rate of non-return*** among applicants from PIP organizations applying for re-certification. (Will be measured by Report Back letters, company disclosures and Embassy spot checks).

PIP Responsibilities:

<i>PIP Certified Organization</i>	<i>US Embassy Consular Section</i>
Provide all supporting documentation when applying for PIP certification or re-certification.	Review application and respond to organization applying for PIP.
Host a site visit when requested by US Embassy	Visit organization and understand business objectives and plans.
Provide annual projections of applicants expected to travel to US in next 4 quarters	Review annual projections to ensure sufficient PIP appointments are available.
Provide quarterly summary of all applicants who were interviewed by the US Embassy with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Visa adjudication - Travel dates (in case of visa issuance) - Return date - Call back letter status. 	Review travel undertaken and call back percentage.
If there are material changes to the business / business plans / applicants employment status – inform the US Embassy.	Inform the PIP organizations / applicants if there are any changes to the PIP program
Provide list/samples of official signatories for organization and sample supporting documents.	

Frequently Asked Questions

1. *If I do not meet all the certification criteria, do I still have a chance to be included in the PIP?*

If the organization meets the majority of the certification criteria and still believes it has a compelling reason for inclusion in the PIP, it is encouraged to apply. It should also be noted that the Embassy provides for an early appointment request capability for applicants who need to travel at short notice. Hence, a business which does not qualify for the PIP but needs to send a traveler at short notice to the US can avail of the early appointment request capability.

2. *Why do we need to host a site visit by Embassy Staff?*

This is done to give the Embassy staff a better understanding of the organizations business objectives and ties to the United States which require frequent travel. Additionally, when the organizations PIP applicants apply for visas, the adjudicating officer will have better information to allow visa issuance to qualified applicants and visa denial to unqualified or fraudulent applicants.

3. *Does inclusion in the PIP guarantee my bonafide applicants a visa?*

No it does not. PIP facilitates an early visa adjudication appointment. It does NOT guarantee a visa issuance. Every applicant will still be evaluated on the merit of their application and personal circumstances. However, inclusion in the PIP does give the visa adjudicating officer more knowledge of the work circumstances of the applicant.

4. *Can the PIP be used for Personal Travel by applicants if they are employed by an organization that is a PIP member?*

The PIP is restricted for travel for business purposes. An applicant who needs to travel for personal reasons will need to apply for a visa adjudication appointment using the normal application process. If a PIP organization is found to be using PIP appointments to facilitate personal travel for its employees, that will lead to permanent disqualification from the PIP program.

5. *If an employee who was issued a visa using the PIP program does not return, what ramifications will that have for the PIP certified organization ?*

If there is a high rate of applicants not returning (as measured by report back letters, company disclosure, or Embassy spot checks), that could potentially result in disqualification from the PIP program.

6. *Does the PIP always results in a long-term, multiple entry visa for applicants? Can it be used for any type of business/work visa?*

The PIP is only to be used for visa applications for applicants traveling for short-term business reasons to the US. This is commonly referred to as B1 visas. Any other type of work visas – H, L or E classifications, or any personal travel cannot be accommodated under the PIP.

The issue of validity and number of entries in an issued visa will be based on the interview and adjudicating officers decision. Typically, any applicant who is issued a report back letter will be issues a single entry, limited validity B1 visa.

7. *Does the DS-156 application form have to be filled in using the electronic form, or will a handwritten form be accepted?*

The Embassy will only accept application forms that have been filled in electronically and printed with a barcode. The barcode allows the Embassy to scan the information accurately into the computer and reduces errors for the Embassy and the applicant. Applicants must also complete the DS-157 application form by hand.