





# CAMBRIDGE

## Immigration Law

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Immigration Law

## **Family-Based Immigration Starter Checklist:** *Documents to Gather Before You Meet with Your Attorney*

Getting ready for a family-based immigration case can feel overwhelming, especially when it comes to documents. This checklist is designed to help you feel more organized and prepared before you speak with an immigration attorney. Not every item will apply to every case, and you may be asked for additional documents based on your specific situation, but this is a strong place to start.

**Important:** This checklist is for general information only and is not legal advice. Always confirm with your attorney what is needed for your specific case.

### **Universal Documents (For Both Sponsor & Family Member)**

These are the core documents almost everyone will need:

### **For the Petitioner (U.S. Citizen or Green Card Holder Sponsoring a Family Member):**

- **Government-issued photo ID**
  - U.S. driver's license or state ID
  - Or other government photo ID
- **Proof of U.S. citizenship or permanent residence**
  - U.S. passport (biographic page)
  - U.S. birth certificate
  - Certificate of Naturalization or Certificate of Citizenship
  - Permanent Resident Card ("green card"), front and back



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- **Social Security card** (if available)
  - **History details** (you do not need to print these yet, but be ready to provide):
    - Address history for the last 5 years
    - Employment history for the last 5 years
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### **For the Beneficiary (Family Member Being Sponsored):**

- **Passport**
  - Current passport (biographic page)
  - Copies of expired passports, if available
- **Birth certificate**
  - Long-form birth certificate with parents' names, if available
  - Certified translation if not in English
- **Government-issued photo ID**
  - National ID card, driver's license, or similar
- **Current U.S. immigration documents (if in the U.S.)**
  - I-94 record (printout if electronic)
  - U.S. visa page from passport
  - Any approval notices (I-20, DS-2019, I-797, etc.)
  - Employment Authorization Document (EAD), if any
- **History details:**
  - Address history for the last 5 years
  - Employment/school history for the last 5 years
  - Dates of all entries and exits from the U.S. (as best you can recall)





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### B. Parent–Child Cases

Depending on who is sponsoring whom, you may need:

#### U.S. Citizen or Green Card Holder Sponsoring a Child:

- Child's **birth certificate** showing the parent's name
- If the child was adopted:
  - Final adoption decree
  - Evidence of legal custody and physical custody (as required)
- If the child is a stepchild:
  - Marriage certificate showing the parent's marriage to the stepparent
  - Proof of termination of any prior marriages for the biological parent and stepparent

#### Child Sponsoring a Parent:

- U.S. citizen child's **birth certificate** showing the parent's name
- If there were name changes:
  - Legal name change orders, if any
- If there is a stepparent involved:
  - Marriage certificate and, if relevant, proof that the marriage creating the stepparent relationship occurred before the child's 18th birthday

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### C. Sibling Cases (U.S. Citizen Sponsoring a Brother or Sister)

- U.S. citizen's **birth certificate**
- Sibling's **birth certificate**
- Documents showing at least one **common parent**
- If applicable:



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- Marriage, divorce, or name change documents for parents or siblings that explain differences in names
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### **Financial & Sponsorship Documents (Affidavit of Support)**

Most family-based cases require the petitioner (and sometimes a joint sponsor) to show they can financially support the beneficiary.

#### **For the Petitioner (and Any Joint Sponsor):**

- **Most recent federal tax return** (Form 1040)
    - Prior 2 years of tax returns, if available
  - **W-2s, 1099s, or K-1s** for the same years, if available
  - **Recent pay stubs** (typically last 3 months)
  - **Employment letter**
    - On company letterhead, stating position, start date, and salary
  - **Proof of other income**, if any
    - Social Security benefits
    - Pension or retirement income
    - Rental income (with lease agreements)
  - **Proof of assets**, if income alone may not be enough
    - Bank statements (savings and checking)
    - Investment account statements
    - Property deeds and appraisals
  - **Status documents** for the sponsor
    - U.S. passport, naturalization certificate, or green card
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#### **Prior Immigration & Legal History (If Applicable)**

These documents can be very important for your attorney to review before filing anything.



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### **For the Beneficiary (and Sometimes the Petitioner):**

- **All prior immigration applications and decisions**
  - Copies of any past petitions (family, employment, asylum, etc.)
  - USCIS, NVC, or consulate decision notices (approval, denial, RFE, NOID, etc.)
- **Any immigration court documents**, if you have ever been in removal proceedings
  - Hearing notices
  - Court decisions or orders
- **Travel history documents**, if available
  - Old passports with entry/exit stamps
  - Airline tickets or itineraries

### **If There Has Been Any Criminal History (Anywhere in the World):**

- **Certified court records** for each incident
- **Police reports**, if available
- **Disposition records** showing how the case ended (dismissal, conviction, etc.)

It is very important to be honest with your attorney about any past immigration or criminal issues. There is usually a way to work with the truth; hiding information can cause serious problems later.

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### **Other Helpful Documents & Notes**

Depending on your situation, it may also help to gather:

- Name change documents
  - Marriage certificates
  - Court-ordered name changes



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- **Military records**, if you or your sponsor served in the armed forces
  - **Evidence of hardship**, if your case may involve a waiver or special consideration
    - Medical records
    - Psychological evaluations
    - Letters from doctors, counselors, or community leaders
  - **Letters of support** from family, friends, employers, or community members
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### **Next Step: Talk with an Immigration Attorney**

Once you gather as many of these documents as you can, you'll be in a strong position to start your family-based immigration case.

Cambridge Immigration Law can review your situation, explain which documents are truly needed for your case, and help you move forward with a clear plan. If you're ready to discuss your options, call 617-714-4375 to schedule a consultation and discuss this checklist.



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