



[Home](#) » [Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs](#) » [Bureau of Public Affairs](#) » [Bureau of Public Affairs: Press Relations](#) » [Press Releases](#) » [Press Releases: 2012](#) » [Press Releases: January 2012](#) » [Visa Pilot Program](#)

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Visa Pilot Program

Fact Sheet

Office of the Spokesperson

Washington, DC

January 19, 2012

Today the President announced that the Departments of State and Homeland Security are working together to improve and speed up the visa process for certain categories of travelers.

Since 9/11, the United States has developed an intensive, multi-layered visa screening process, including multiple biographic and biometric checks, all supported by a sophisticated global information technology network. We perform these checks on every visa applicant, without exception.

Under a new initiative, in select circumstances, qualified foreign visitors who were interviewed and thoroughly screened in conjunction with a prior visa application may be able to renew their visas without undergoing another interview. Eliminating interviews for these applicants will save them time and money and encourage them to choose the United States again as their tourism destination. It will also free our resources to interview more first-time applicants.

The pilot program will streamline visa processing for certain low-risk applicants, such as individuals renewing expired visas, or some categories of younger or older first-time applicants. We expect that this will benefit tens of thousands of applicants in Brazil and China; saving them time and money, and encouraging them to choose to visit the United States again. However, given that national security remains this Administration's highest priority, individuals identified as higher-risk will remain subject to interviews – in addition to the full screening and review all visa applicants receive.

For example, this will make it much easier for many Chinese tourists to renew their visas – a group that spends more than \$6,000 per person, per trip, according to the Department of Commerce. Over the course of the year, this policy could open as many as 100,000 interview appointments for Chinese travelers applying for visas for the first time. That increase in tourism could support as many as 1,500 travel and tourism-related jobs.

Consular officers will continue to use their authority to interview any visa applicant as required for national security.

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[Back to Top](#)

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