

# Getting Legal Help



## How To Get Started

It is important to find an immigration attorney (either in private practice or at a non-profit) or Department of Justice (“DOJ”) accredited representative (at a nonprofit organization) who can adequately consult and represent you, especially if you have a complex case. There are two common ways to find an immigration attorney or accredited representative to meet your needs:

### **Non-Profit Legal Service Agencies**

Immigration non-profit agencies offer free or low-cost help to community members. These organizations often have staff that are experts in their fields.

However, non-profit agencies often have many clients and limited resources. This can lead to the non-profit imposing certain limitations on clients. These limitations can include: only taking local clients, limiting services to clients that meet certain requirements (e.g. income level), or generally taking longer to get through a client’s case.

To find immigration non-profit legal help service agencies near you, visit: [ImmigrationLawHelp.org](https://www.immigrationlawhelp.org)

### **Private Immigration Attorneys**

Private immigration attorneys are often able to take on a wide range of cases. They also have more time to discuss and update their clients on their specific cases.

Unfortunately, the greater attention often comes at a higher cost. Private immigration attorneys offer their services at a higher price than non-profit agencies. It is important to research a private immigration attorney’s background to make sure they are a good attorney and a good fit for your case.

To find a list of private immigration attorneys, visit: [aialawyer.org](https://www.aialawyer.org).

# Five Tips For Obtaining A Good Private Immigration Attorney

When it comes to hiring a private immigration attorney, research is key. Below are five tips for finding a good private immigration attorney:

## 1 Get References

Ask family, friends, or colleagues if they know any immigration lawyers. Even if they have not been through the process themselves, they may be able to connect you with someone they know who has retained the services of an immigration lawyer. People are quick to recommend a good lawyer and even quicker to name a poor one, which can be a great help when you are beginning your search.

Questions to ask:

- *Is there an immigration lawyer that you would recommend? If not, do you know of anyone I can speak with to get a recommendation?*
- *What did you like about that immigration lawyer?*

## 2 Search AILA

Search for a lawyer on the [American Immigration Lawyers Association \(AILA\) website](#). AILA is a national association of lawyers and attorneys who teach and practice immigration law, so you can be reasonably certain you are dealing with someone who understands immigration law and policies. If you are starting your research from scratch, you can search for a lawyer in your area. If you have been given the names of a few lawyers, you can look them up to see if they are members. While membership in AILA is not a requirement to practice immigration law, membership can be a good sign of a lawyer's level of commitment to the practice.

## 3 Interview Your Short List

Interview potential lawyers to find one who matches your needs. Ask them if they have any experience with your type of case. Immigration law is a huge specialty, so you'll want a lawyer who is familiar with your type of case.

Questions to ask:

- *Do you have experience with cases like mine?*
- *How long have you been practicing immigration law?*
- *What is the best way to contact you throughout the case? (email/phone/appointment)*
- *Do you have a list of client referrals that I may contact?*

## 4 Compare Fees

Lawyers have different fees with different expectations and dates of how costs and fees are reimbursed/paid. Make sure you understand if your lawyer charges a flat fee or by the hour.

Questions to ask:

- *Do you charge an hourly rate or a flat fee?*
- *Will I be responsible for other costs such as postage and printing?*
- *When will payments be due?*
- *Do you offer a payment plan?*

## 5 Authenticate

Make sure that you are engaging with a licensed attorney that is in good standing. You can check this by contacting your local state bar. It can be dangerous to work with unlicensed individuals (e.g. "visa consultant," "notario") who say they are experienced. Finally, gauge the capability and professionalism of the lawyer. Be wary of any immigration attorneys who solicit business (unethical behavior) or suggest illegal conduct to you. Such action is not allowed under the ethical code for lawyers, and oftentimes is a reflection of the poor quality of service that those lawyers will provide.

Look out for:

- *Unrealistic promises (e.g. guaranteeing you will win your case)*
- *Attorneys that give unethical advice or make illegal offers (e.g. destroying evidence)*
- *Attorneys that approach you at USCIS or other immigration offices*
- *"Visa consultant," "notario," or "petition preparer"*