

MARRIAGE GREEN CARD GUIDE:

Everything You Need to Know About the Marriage-Based Green Card Process



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A man and a woman are walking together on a rooftop, holding hands and smiling. The man is wearing a grey blazer over a light blue shirt and light-colored trousers. The woman is wearing a tan blazer over a white shirt and matching trousers, and she is holding a folder with documents. In the background, there is a city skyline with several tall buildings under a clear sky. The text "Step-by-Step Guide to Sponsoring Your Spouse, Fiancé(e), or Child" is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font. Two vertical white lines with circular endpoints are positioned on either side of the text.

Step-by-Step Guide to Sponsoring Your Spouse, Fiancé(e), or Child

Introduction

This comprehensive guide walks U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents (green card holders) through sponsoring a spouse, fiancé(e), or child for lawful permanent residence (a green card) or a fiancé(e) visa. It compares the K-1 fiancé visa vs. the CR-1/IR-1 spouse visa, details the I-130 petition process, explains adjustment of status vs. consular processing, provides current (as of May 2026) timelines and costs, and highlights red-flag scenarios that lead to denials.

Important Notices!



- ✓ Immigration rules, fees, and processing times are constantly changing. Always check the most up-to-date information on the official websites [USCIS.gov](https://uscis.gov) and travel.state.gov or consult a qualified immigration attorney.
- ✓ This guide is for informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice. Every case is different; professional assistance is strongly recommended for complex situations (e.g., prior immigration violations, criminal record, or inadmissibility).
- ✓ The goal is to reunite your loved ones quickly and safely by preparing solid and genuine evidence from the start.

1. Quick Overview: Who Can Sponsor Whom?



1.1

U.S. Citizens (USCs): Immediate relatives (spouse, unmarried child under 21, parents) have no visa backlog or numerical limits. You can also sponsor fiancés via K-1.

1.2

Key Requirement for All: You must prove a qualifying relationship and meet financial support obligations (Form I-864 Affidavit of Support) to avoid “public charge” concerns.

1.3

Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs / Green Card Holders): Can sponsor spouse or unmarried child under 21 (F2A category), but there are backlogs and longer waits. LPRs cannot file K-1 fiancé petitions.



2. K-1 Fiancé(e) Visa vs. CR-1/IR-1 Spouse Visa: Which Path Is Right?

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Aspect	K-1 Fiancé(e) Visa (USCs only)	CR-1/IR-1 Spouse Visa (USCs or LPRs)
Eligibility	Engaged; intend to marry in U.S. within 90 days of entry. Must have met in person within 2 years (waiver possible in rare cases).	Already legally married. CR-1 = married <2 years at green card issuance; IR-1 = married 2+ years.
Initial Petition	Form I-129F (\$675)	Form I-130 (\$625 online / \$675 paper)
Entry Status	Nonimmigrant K-1 (temporary); must marry within 90 days or depart.	Immigrant visa → enters as conditional (CR-1) or permanent (IR-1) resident with green card.
Green Card Process	After marriage: File Form I-485 adjustment of status (extra step).	No separate adjustment needed if using consular processing.
Typical Total Time to U.S. Entry	8–12 months (faster initial entry)	12–24+ months (but faster to full green card)

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Aspect

K-1 Fiancé(e) Visa (USCs only)

CR-1/IR-1 Spouse Visa (USCs or LPRs)

Total Time to Green Card

18–30+ months (due to post-marriage I-485)

12–24+ months

Work/Travel Rights

Limited until I-485 approved (file I-765/I-131 concurrently for EAD/AP).

Immediate work/travel rights upon entry as resident.

Cost (Approximate Total Government Fees)

\$2,300–\$3,300+ (I-129F + DS-160 + I-485 + biometrics/others)

\$1,300–\$2,000+ (I-130 + DS-260 + Affidavit + immigrant fee)

Best For

Couples wanting to marry in the U.S. and reunite quickly.

Couples already married who want direct permanent resident entry and fewer steps.

Pro Tip: Many experts note CR-1/IR-1 is often more cost-effective and straightforward long-term, while K-1 gets your partner here sooner but adds post-entry paperwork. Choose based on your marriage status and urgency.

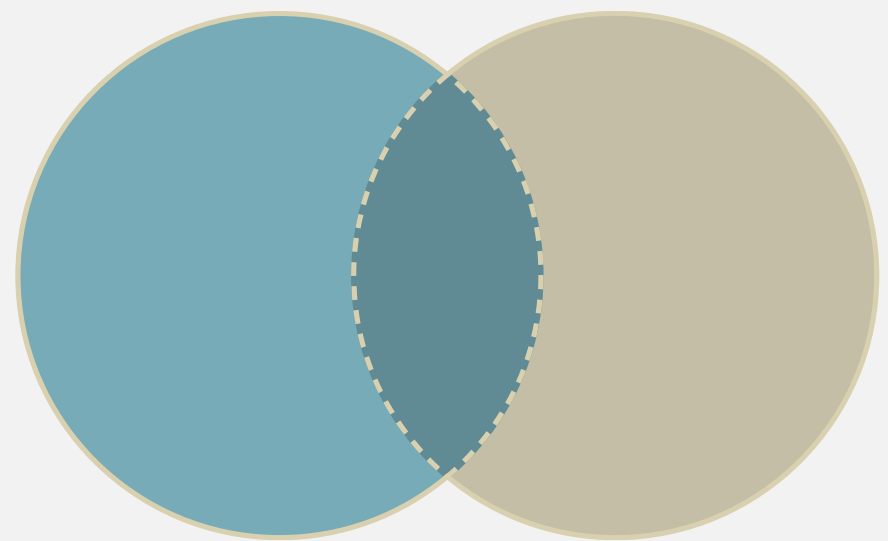
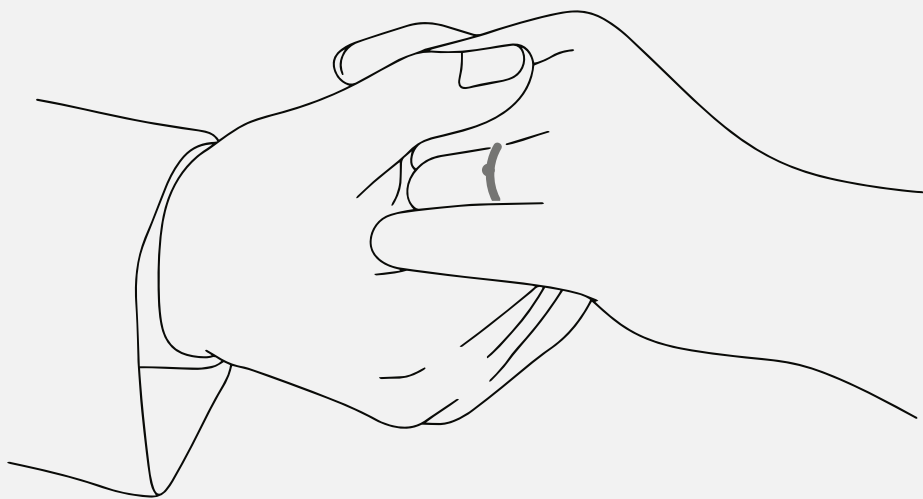
3. THE I-130 PETITION PROCESS (CORE STEP FOR SPOUSES & CHILDREN)

The Form I-130, Petition for Alien Relative establishes the qualifying family relationship. It is the starting point for most spouse/child cases (and required before consular processing or adjustment).

Who Files: The U.S. sponsor (petitioner). Eligibility Proof Needed:

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- Spouse: Marriage certificate + Form I-130A (Supplemental Info for Spouse) + evidence of bona fide marriage (joint finances, photos, affidavits, etc.).
- Child: Birth certificate showing relationship.
- Prior marriages: Divorce/death/annulment documents.



Filing Options (2026):

02

- Online (preferred for speed/receipt notice): \$625.
- Paper (mail to lockbox): \$675.
- Concurrent filing with I-485 (if beneficiary is in U.S. and eligible) is allowed for immediate relatives.

Steps:

03

- Gather evidence of relationship and sponsor's U.S. status (citizenship/green card proof).
- File I-130 (select adjustment of status or consular processing—choose only one).
- USCIS reviews (may issue Request for Evidence/RFE).
- Approval → Case moves forward (to NVC for consular or stays with USCIS for adjustment).

Processing Time

(Approximate, May 2026): 10–15 months for immediate relatives of USCs (varies by service center; check egov.uscis.gov/processing-times for your location). LPR sponsors face longer F2A waits.

4. FULL K-1 FIANCÉ(E) PROCESS (STEP-BY-STEP)

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File I-129F with USCIS →
Approval (6–12 months typical).

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NVC/Embassy: Case forwarded; fiancé
files DS-160, pays fees, attends
medical exam and interview.

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Enter U.S. on K-1 (valid 6 months;
single entry).

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Marry within 90 days.

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File I-485 (adjustment) + I-765 (work
permit) + I-131 (travel) → Biometrics,
interview → Green card (conditional if
marriage <2 years at approval).

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2 Years Later: File I-751 to remove
conditions.

Children: Include on I-129F for K-2 visa; they adjust separately.



5. Spouse/Child Process After I-130 Approval

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Option A: Adjustment of Status (AOS) – If Beneficiary Is Already in the U.S. Legally

- File I-485 concurrently with I-130 (if immediate relative) or after approval.
- Stay in U.S. during processing.
- Benefits: Can get work/travel authorization sooner.
- Processing: 8–18+ months after filing.

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Option B: Consular Processing (CP) – If Beneficiary Is Abroad (or Ineligible for AOS)

- I-130 approved → Sent to National Visa Center (NVC).
- Pay fees, submit DS-260, Affidavit of Support (I-864), civil docs, medical exam.
- NVC schedules embassy/consulate interview → Visa issued → Enter U.S. as green card holder.

💡 CR-1 vs. IR-1: Determined by marriage length at the time the visa is issued (not filing date).





6. Timelines & Costs (2026 Estimates)

K-1 TOTAL TO ENTRY.

8–12 months (I-129F dominant).

SPOUSE/CHILD (CR-1/IR-1) TOTAL:

12–24+ months (I-130 + NVC/embassy).

AOS AFTER ENTRY:

Additional 8–18 months to green card.

EXACT TIMES:

12–24+ months (I-130 + NVC/embassy).

COSTS (GOVERNMENT FEES ONLY; ADD ATTORNEY/MEDICAL/TRAVEL/DOCS):

- I-130/I-129F: \$625–\$675.
- I-485 (AOS): \$1,440 (standalone).
- Immigrant visa (DS-260): ~\$325 + Affidavit \$120 + USCIS immigrant fee \$220.
- Medical exam: \$200–\$500+.
- K-1 Path Total: Often \$2,300–\$3,300+.
- CR-1/IR-1 Path Total: Often \$1,300–\$2,000+.

**FEE WAIVERS ARE LIMITED;
USE USCIS FEE CALCULATOR.**



7. Red-Flag Scenarios That Cause Denials (and How to Avoid Them)

Common denial reasons (based on **USCIS** and consular data):

Insufficient proof of bona fide relationship

(biggest issue): Lack of joint documents, photos, affidavits, communication records, or shared life evidence. Fix: Submit strong, consistent evidence showing a genuine relationship from the start.

No in-person meeting (K-1 specific):

Must prove meeting within 2 years. Fix: Provide clear evidence (tickets, photos, stamps) or qualify for a rare waiver.

Inadequate financial support (I-864):

Sponsor's income/assets below 125% poverty guidelines. Fix: Use joint sponsor if needed; provide recent tax returns, pay stubs, employment letter.

Inadmissibility:

Criminal history, prior overstay, fraud, health issues, or public charge concerns. Fix: Disclose everything; file waivers (e.g., I-601/I-601A) where possible.

Incomplete/missing documents or inconsistencies:

Typos, untranslated foreign docs, discrepancies at interview. Fix: Double-check everything; use certified translations.

Eligibility issues:

Not legally free to marry, sham relationship indicators (very short courtship, large age gap without explanation, prior immigration violations).

Interview problems:

Unable to answer basic questions about each other or relationship.

Denial Impact: Can create permanent bars or increased scrutiny on future applications. Many RFEs (Requests for Evidence) can be overcome with quick, thorough responses—prevention is best.





8. Special Notes for Sponsoring a Child

01 **USE I-130 (SAME AS SPOUSE).**

02 **UNMARRIED, UNDER 21
FOR IMMEDIATE
RELATIVE (USCS).**

03 **PROVIDE BIRTH
CERTIFICATE + PROOF
OF PARENT-CHILD
RELATIONSHIP.**

04 **K-2 FOR FIANCÉ'S
CHILDREN (MUST REMAIN
UNMARRIED/UNDER 21).**

05 **CUSTODY/PRIOR
MARRIAGES MAY REQUIRE
EXTRA EVIDENCE.**



9. TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL SPONSORSHIP

**OVER-DOCUMENT THE RELATIONSHIP
(TIMELINE, EVIDENCE FROM DAY ONE).**

Start Strong

FASTER RECEIPTS AND TRACKING.

**File Online
When
Possible**

BE CONSISTENT AND HONEST.

**Prepare for
RFEs/Interviews**

**USE USCIS CASE STATUS,
NVC PORTAL, AND
EMBASSY WEBSITES.**

**Track
Everything**

**ATTORNEY FEES (\$2,000–
\$5,000+ FOR COMPLEX
CASES), MEDICALS,
TRAVEL.**

**Budget for
Extras**

**DON'T RUSH A MARRIAGE
JUST FOR IMMIGRATION;
FRAUD IS HEAVILY
SCRUTINIZED.**

**Avoid
Common
Pitfalls**

**OVERSTAYS OR VIOLATIONS
COMPLICATE EVERYTHING.**

Stay Legal

**CONCURRENT FILING (WHERE ALLOWED) AND
STRONG INITIAL PACKETS REDUCE DELAYS.**

For Speed

10. Official Resources

- **USCIS:** uscis.gov/i-130, uscis.gov/i-129f, uscis.gov/green-card, Processing Times Tool.
- Department of State: travel.state.gov (NVC, DS-260, embassy info).
- Visa Bulletin (for any preference categories).
- USCIS Fee Schedule & Calculator.

Bringing your loved one through family immigration is a rewarding but detailed process. With thorough preparation, genuine evidence, and patience, most eligible cases succeed. Start by reviewing your specific situation on the official sites, gather your documents, and consider professional guidance for peace of mind.

If your case has unique factors (e.g., prior denials, LPR sponsor with backlog, or inadmissibility), consult an immigration attorney early. Safe travels and best wishes for your family's future in the United States!

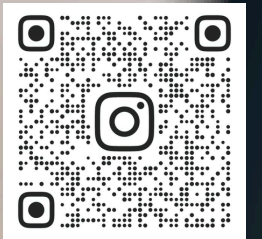
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