

VA Financial Policies and Procedures
International Travel

CHAPTER 6

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0601 OVERVIEW

This chapter establishes the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) financial policies and procedures relating to international (foreign) travel. This chapter implements and supplements those portions of the Federal Travel Regulation (FTR) pertaining to foreign travel. The FTR is the Federal Government regulation that implements statutory requirements and Executive Branch policies for travel by Federal civilian employees and others authorized to travel at Government expense (41 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Chapters 300 through 304).

This chapter provides guidance on:

- General Rules – Section 060201.
- Official/Diplomatic U.S. Government passports (official passport) – Section 060202.
- Entry visas for foreign countries visited in conjunction with official duties – Section 060203.
- Country clearance requests to the Department of State prior to commencement of official travel to foreign locations – Section 060204.
- Miscellaneous administrative requirements for official passports – Section 060205.

0602 POLICIES

060201 GENERAL RULES.

A. All VA employees who are U.S. citizens and who travel to foreign locations (including Canada and Mexico) in the discharge of official duties must obtain an official passport prior to commencement of such travel. When required by the country being visited, VA employees must also obtain a visa endorsement in their official passports allowing them entry into the country. All foreign temporary duty (TDY) will be approved by the appropriate person as determined in Appendix A, Delegations of Authority for Foreign TDY.

VA travelers will coordinate requests for official passports, visa endorsements on official passports, and country clearance requests through the Charge Card Oversight and Travel Policy Service, Official/Diplomatic Passport Program Office (VA Passport Office), Office of Finance. This process also applies to immediate family members of VA employees who are assigned to permanent duty in foreign locations, based on their permanent change of station (PCS) travel authorizations.

B. Official passports are valid for official travel abroad only while the traveler maintains the official status for which the official passport and/or visa endorsement was issued. For trips that combine official and personal travel, the traveler must have both an official passport and a personal passport.

C. Department of State (DoS) policy is to issue official passports to individuals (VA employees and their dependents) going abroad on official business of the U.S. Government when a specific requirement exists to travel. DoS has provided passport agent training to Official/Diplomatic Passport Program Office personnel. As the passport agent, DoS has authorized the issuance of passports for official foreign travel.

D. Effective October 1, 1997, any individual certified by the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) to the Secretary of State as being in arrears on child support payments in excess of \$2,500 is ineligible to receive any U.S. official passport. This provision was enacted by Congress as part of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Action of 1996 (Public Law 104-193). Once employees have been notified by DoS of their status, they must resolve the issue with the State HHS office (i.e., his or her [State Child Enforcement Office](#), not county office). The DoS will not have any information regarding the details of an individual's situation nor the exact amount owed. The State HHS office will notify DoS when the employee is no longer in arrears. At that time, the employee's passport application may be processed. Refer to Appendix B, Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Reporting of Child Support Payments in Arrears, for additional information.

E. Employees who are approved for temporary duty (TDY) assignments to a foreign country requiring a passport/visa must apply for the passport and/or visa at least 60 days prior to the intended departure or travel date.

F. Employees (and their immediate family members, if applicable) who are authorized for a Permanent Change of Station (PCS) assignment to a foreign country must apply within 60 days from assignment notification in order to ensure passports and visas are issued in time for the PCS. A copy of the PCS travel authorization must accompany the application request.

G. The following are exceptions to using an official or diplomatic passport while on official travel representing the VA:

1. Contractors or volunteers are NOT authorized official (no-fee) passports. They must obtain a tourist (regular-fee) passport and pay the required passport fees. They must also obtain any necessary visa requirements directly through the foreign country embassy. The individual is required to submit a country clearance form for submission by the VA Travel Office to the Department of State.

2. VA employees who are not U.S. citizens are not authorized to be issued any U.S. passport. They must use their passport from the foreign country where they hold citizenship for any VA official travel. They must also obtain any necessary visa requirements directly through the foreign country embassy. The employee is required to submit a country clearance form for submission by the VA Travel Office to the Department of State.

3. VA employees should not request official passports for countries that do not require them. The VA Passport Office will notify employees of the passport requirement for the destination country. The employee would travel using their personal passport. The employee is required to submit a country clearance form for submission by the VA Travel Office to the Department of State.

H. Employees who elect to apply for a tourist (regular-fee) passport are responsible for obtaining their own passport and visas.

I. Employees will ensure their official passports have more than six (6) months validity after projected departure dates to the foreign country. If a passport will have less than six (6) months validity at the time of entry into the country, the employee must renew the official passport prior to beginning official travel.

060202 OFFICIAL/DIPLOMATIC PASSPORTS

060202.01 Custodian of Official/Diplomatic Passports.

A. The VA Passport Office is the custodian of official passports issued to VA employees, or to immediate family members who accompany VA employees on PCS assignments to foreign locations. The VA Passport Office is accountable for safeguarding official passports while employees or immediate family members are not traveling on official business.

B. Employees and immediate family members must return official passports to the VA Passport Office within five (5) days of the end of any official travel to a foreign location.

C. If employees or immediate family members fail or refuse to return the official passport as required, the VA Passport Office will inform DoS, which will take all necessary steps to obtain the official passport. DoS may request assistance from the U.S. Marshals Service, if necessary.

060202.02 Official Passports.

A. VA employees will submit the following forms and information to the VA Passport Office at least 60 days in advance of the departure date to obtain an official passport:

1. Evidence of approval of foreign travel to include the following information:
 - Name, title and grade of traveler;
 - Date of departure from, and approximate date of return to, the United States;
 - Flight Itinerary from U.S. to the foreign travel location; and
 - Purpose of trip.

Foreign TDY approval must be signed in accordance with Appendix A, Delegations of Authority for Foreign TDY.

2. The appropriate DoS passport application form, including the required documentation to accompany the application form (refer to 060202.06).
3. When necessary, a completed visa application form (refer to 060203).
4. Country Clearance Information Sheet (refer to 060204).

B. Additional Requirements for a Permanent Change of Station (PCS). Immediate family members accompanying the employees to a permanent duty station at a foreign location must also provide appropriate evidence of approval documentation to the VA Passport Office at least 60 days in advance of the departure date.

Special Passport Requirements for Children (in conjunction with PCS):

1. In accordance with Public Law 106-119 and 22 C.F.R. 51.27, in order to submit an application for a child under age 14, both parents or the child's legal guardian(s) must appear and present the following:

- Evidence of the child's U.S. citizenship,
- Evidence of the child's relationship to the parents/guardians, and
- Parental identification.

2. If only one parent appears, one of the following must be submitted:

- [Statement of Consent: Issuance of a Passport to a Minor Under Age 16: DS 3053](#)
- Primary evidence of sole authority to apply, or
- A written statement (made under penalty of perjury) explaining the second parent's unavailability.

3. Pursuant to 22 C.F.R. 51.27, each minor child applying for a passport must appear in person, unless the personal appearance of the minor is specifically waived by a senior passport specialist at the issuing passport agency.

C. No-fee passports are issued to persons traveling abroad in the discharge of official duties when passports are required. VA-sponsored dependents are required to have no-fee passports without regard to age or destination abroad. **The bearer of a no-fee passport may not use the passport when leaving the United States for personal travel.**

D. **Holders of Diplomatic or Official Passports are forbidden to use their Passports for incidental travel.** For bearers of diplomatic and official passports, a tourist (regular fee) passport must be obtained for incidental travel. A person may possess a valid regular fee tourist passport and a valid no-fee passport simultaneously. A person may not possess two no-fee passports simultaneously, except where DoS has approved exceptions.

E. VA employees traveling on an official/diplomatic passport and travel authority to any country of assignment who anticipate travel to surrounding countries for leave purposes, should either obtain a tourist passport or possess credible citizenship evidence (i.e., birth certificate, naturalization certificate, report of birth abroad, expired U.S. passport). Citizenship evidence is required for obtaining passports or reporting marriages, births and deaths at U.S. Consulates in the country where they are traveling.

F. No-fee passports may be used only as long as the position or status for which they were issued is maintained. Upon termination of such a position or status, the VA Passport Agent must return the no-fee passports to the Special Issuance Agency (SIA), which is the department within DoS that deals with official travel, within seven (7) calendar days after the passport has expired or after the employee has checked out of the agency. SIA normally destroys the passports; however, they may be canceled and returned for souvenir purposes upon the VA employee's request. Refer to 060205.05 for employees transferring to another Federal agency.

060202.03 VA Processing of Tourist Passports.

As a courtesy to VA employees, the VA Passport Office formerly assisted individuals who were renewing their tourist passports by taking their applications to SIA and having the passports issued quickly. Effective May 1, 2007, SIA requested that VA no longer assist in processing renewal passport applications. Thus, this service is no longer available.

060202.04 Diplomatic Passports.

A. DoS is the final determining authority for issuance of diplomatic passports. Diplomatic passports with the proper justification can only be issued by the SIA in Washington, DC. Employees should not submit requests for diplomatic passports to their regional passport agency. Diplomatic passports may require additional processing time.

B. Diplomatic passports for PCS assignments are issued based on the assignment (position) of the traveler. They are not issued based on the grade of the traveler. If the VA employee is issued a diplomatic passport, each dependent will normally receive a diplomatic passport.

C. Foreign countries may have visa requirements specific to diplomatic passports which may not apply to official or regular passports.

060202.05 Passport Processing.

A. The VA Passport Office requires all applicants and holders of passports/visas, along with their supervisors, to ensure documentation is submitted promptly to the facility visa and passport point of contact (POC) when travel is anticipated but no later than when it

is officially scheduled. The facility visa and passport POC will submit all required documents to the VA Passport Office (see 0605 Procedures section and associated hyperlinks), who will coordinate with DoS to receive and communicate visa and passport outcomes to the VA Passport Office. Prompt notification and timely submission of all DoS passport and visa documents is critical for an effective VA passport and visa process.

B. Two categories of passport processing are provided by DoS. Rules for each category are as follows:

- Routine - applications submitted at least 60 business days prior to the projected departure date with no special circumstances.
- Expedite - only used in cases requiring special justification. This includes applications submitted within 45 days of the projected departure date on a short notice TDY or PCS, or special circumstances that prevented the applicant from applying timely. When expediting an application, an overnight courier is recommended for tracking purposes. Do not use standard mail services to dispatch the documents as this may cause additional delays. Refer to Appendix C, Average Passport Processing Time.

060202.06 Department of State Passport Application Forms and Other Documentation.

A. VA employees should apply for an official passport at least 60 days in advance of travel. Official passports will be processed by the SIA within DoS.

1. Individuals must apply before a local Clerk of the Court, passport agent, or certified post office employee if:

- The individual has never had a passport issued (official or personal);
- The individual is under 16 years of age;
- The individual's previous passport was issued when he/she was under age 16;
- The previous passport was lost, stolen or damaged;
- The previous passport was issued more than 15 years ago; or
- The individual's name has changed since the passport was issued and he/she is not able to legally document the name change.

2. Applicants will need to contact the Official/Diplomatic Program Office for a letter of instruction to be provided to the passport agent. The applicant will take the letter of instruction along with the following documentation to the passport agent:

- A completed Form DS-11, *Application for a U.S. Passport or Registration*. This application must be signed before and certified by a local Clerk of the Court, passport agent, or authorized postal employee;
- Two 2"x2" passport pictures (front facing, white or off-white background) taken within the last six months;
- Birth certificate (must be original with official seal or a certified copy), naturalization certificate, or other approved proof of citizenship;
- A clear photocopy of driver's license or other picture identification document issued by a Federal, State, or local government.

Once the application is certified, the passport agent must put the application, photographs, and other supporting documentation into a sealed envelope with the name of the traveler written on the outside. The envelope should not be opened or the seal broken in any way. The sealed envelope along with other required documentation must be sent to the VA Passport Office by the employee using a tracking mail service.

3. An individual may apply by mail if his/her:

- Most recent passport is undamaged and can be submitted with the application;
- Passport was issued when 16 years of age or older;
- Passport (official or personal) was issued within the last 15 years; or
- Passport was issued in the current name or he/she can legally document any name change.

The following documentation must be submitted to the VA Passport Office using a tracking mail service:

- A completed and signed Form DS-82, *Application for a U.S. Passport by Mail*;
- The passport currently in their possession;
- Two 2"x2" passport pictures (front facing, light background) taken within the last six months; and
- Certified documentation of a name change if applicable (certified copy of marriage certificate).

NOTE. If the traveler is unwilling or unable to submit his/her passport due to personal travel, the application, Form DS-82, *Application for a U.S. Passport by Mail*, cannot be

used. In such cases, the Form DS-11, *Application for a U.S. Passport or Registration*, must be completed instead.

B. VA employees are required to submit 2D Barcode passport applications/forms accessible through the DoS Web site at http://www.travel.state.gov/passport/forms/forms_847.html. The 2D Barcode is encrypted with the information contained in the application and when properly prepared, eliminates the need for data entry at the Passport Agency and speeds up processing time. The online passport wizard assists applicants to select the form needed. Once submitted, the VA employee will need to print the form and submit as indicated above.

VA employees may also obtain passport application forms from the following with justification and approval from the VA Passport Office:

- Post Offices. The DoS Web site (<http://iafdb.travel.state.gov/>) has a search capability to assist travelers in finding the location of post offices that certify passport applications and provide passport application forms.
- DoS Web site. The Form DS-11, *Application for a U.S. Passport or Registration*, and the Form DS-82, *Application for a U.S. Passport by Mail*, can be downloaded from the DoS Web site link above.

C. DoS will not accept photocopies of passport application forms. Passport application forms must be submitted on either an original printed form or on a form downloaded from the DoS Web site. When using a downloaded form, the application must be printed on two pages. Back-to-back applications will not be accepted.

D. Downloaded forms must be clear and sharp. Applications that are blurred or illegible will not be accepted. Downloaded applications must be printed in black print on white paper on one-sided, full pages only. The paper must be 8 ½" by 11", with no holes or perforations, at least medium (20 lb.) weight with a matte surface. Thermal paper, dye-sublimation paper, special inkjet paper, and other shiny papers are not acceptable. Applicants must ensure that the photograph area on the printed application form is 2"x2" so that the passport photograph submitted with the application can be correctly attached. All documentation provided with the official passport application will be returned upon issue of the official passport by DoS.

E. When available, VA employees will use Government resources to obtain passport photographs. Such photographs must meet the following DoS standards:

- 2"x2" in size;
- In color;
- Printed on thin, photo-quality paper;
- Taken within the last six (6) months showing current appearance;
- Full face, front view with a plain white or off-white background;
- Between 1 inch and 1 3/8 inches from the bottom of the chin to the top of the head;

- Taken in normal street attire:
 - Uniforms should not be worn in photographs except religious attire that is worn daily,
 - Do not wear a hat or headgear that obscures the hair or hairline, and
 - If you normally wear prescription glasses, a hearing aid, a wig or similar articles, they should be worn for the picture.
- Dark glasses or nonprescription glasses with tinted lenses are not acceptable unless you need them for medical reasons (a medical certificate may be required), and
- Photographs retouched so that the traveler's appearance is changed are unacceptable, as are snapshots, vending machine prints, and magazine or full-length photographs;

F. VA will reimburse any reasonable cost, incurred by the traveler, as a miscellaneous expense on the travel voucher. These expenses include cost to obtain photographs, birth certificates, or naturalization certificates; have the Form DS-11, *Application for a U.S. Passport or Registration*, certified by a local Clerk of the Court, passport agent, or authorized postal employee; and/or send documents via tracking mail service (when use of station mail facilities is not feasible).

Refer to Appendix D, Official U.S. Government Passport Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), regarding official passports.

060203 VISAS.

A. The VA Passport Office is responsible for obtaining visas for foreign travel. Since different countries have specific entry requirements, VA travelers must contact this office to determine any additional documentation required by the country being visited. Foreign countries requiring visas for official travel must be issued in official or diplomatic passports. The VA Passport Office does not process visa requests for tourist (regular fee) passports.

B. Employees will ensure appropriate visa information applications are complete and signed and any additional photos, payment for fees when applicable, or supporting documentation required by the foreign embassy is included. Contact the VA Passport Office at officialpassports@va.gov for additional forms. Refer to Appendix E, Average Visa Processing Time, for additional information.

Important Notes: Original signatures are required for each visa application. Some foreign embassies will not issue a visa in official or diplomatic passports without a letter from the DoS. For purposes of official travel for VA, all employees are required to use a diplomatic or official passport for the following reasons:

- A diplomatic or official visa cannot be stamped into a tourist Passport.

- A visa will not be granted for entry into a foreign country when the reason for travel to that country is stated as “official business” and the tourist passport is presented. Some countries will deny entry at the border to individuals entering the country on official government business when they arrive with only a tourist passport and not the official passport. Further problems may also occur upon departure from that country.
- Violation of Sovereignty. Use of the tourist passport when traveling in an official capacity misrepresents the true purpose for which the traveler has entered the country. This situation can have serious and adverse effects on the U.S. reciprocal relations with foreign countries.
- Security concerns. Should an emergency situation arise while on official travel in the foreign country, the official passport provides a higher level of support and greater protection by the U.S. Embassy located in the foreign country.

C. VA employees will provide the VA Passport Office information on any in-transit stops anticipated while on official travel to a foreign location, no matter how short their duration. Certain countries will require a transit visa if the traveler is making an airplane connection in that country.

D. Granting a visa is solely at the discretion of the country being visited. Visas are often date-specific. If after applying for a visa, travel dates change, the traveler must notify the VA Passport Office immediately so that the visa application can be amended. Failure to do so may cause the traveler to be denied entry to the country upon arrival. Refer to Appendix E, Average Visa Processing Time, for additional information.

060204 ELECTRONIC COUNTRY CLEARANCE REQUEST.

A. The VA Passport Office will coordinate all country clearances for VA travelers visiting a foreign location on official government business.

B. DoS requires a country clearance for all official travel to foreign locations. The desk officer at DoS must request permission for the traveler to enter the country from the U.S. ambassador assigned to that country. Federal travelers who are on official U.S. Government business may not enter the country until such clearance is requested and obtained.

C. VA employees must complete all the information requested on VA Form 0900, *Country Clearance Information*, to request a country clearance. Submission of the VA Form 0900 acts as notification of pending international/foreign travel and is required at least 60 days prior to departure for official travel. This form may be downloaded from the VA Forms Web site.

D. VA employees may submit the VA Form 0900 separate from the passport application. However, this form must be submitted to the VA Passport Office at least 60

days prior to the start of the official travel. The form submission is the initial notification of the request for foreign travel. The foreign travel process for the VA Passport Office is a separate process from the foreign travel approval process. These two processes should run concurrently.

E. The VA Passport Office will not release any official passports to travelers who fail to submit a completed VA Form 0900 and a signed authorization for travel.

F. Travelers must notify the VA Passport Office immediately if, after submitting the form, the dates of travel change. The VA Passport Office will notify the appropriate desk officer to amend the country clearance request.

G. VA employees who do not apply for country clearances may be denied entry by the U.S. Embassy upon arrival, depending on the specific country being visited and current conditions. Granting country clearances is solely at the discretion of the U.S. Ambassador assigned to the country being visited.

060205 MISCELLANEOUS ADMINISTRATIVE REQUIREMENTS FOR OFFICIAL PASSPORTS

060205.01 Mailing Official Passport, Visa, and Electronic Country Clearance Information.

A. DoS will only process applications for official passports that are submitted by the VA Passport Office. Travelers who submit such applications directly to DoS will either have the applications returned or processing suspended.

B. Applications for official passports, including photographs and other documentation, visa applications, electronic VA Form 0900, and evidence of approval of foreign travel must be shipped by traceable means to the address provided in Appendix D, Official U.S. Government Passport FAQs. Proper care must be taken to ensure passport and/or visa applications are mailed to the correct address. The employee may contact the VA Passport Office at officialpassports@va.gov to obtain the correct mailing address.

C. The documentation involved in applying for an official passport is sensitive and not easily replaceable. Sending passports and other documentation via regular mail may result in the documents becoming irradiated and may delay travel due to visa applications, photos, and the passport application becoming burned and unusable. For that reason, the application package should not be sent through interoffice mail or through non-traceable U.S. Post Office mail. In addition, irradiation of regular postal mail may be harmful to photographs and official documents, such as birth certificates.

D. Travelers at VACO may present application forms in person and may have their applications certified by the VA Passport Office acceptance agents. VACO employees should make arrangements to present their application package by contacting the VA

Passport Office as soon as possible. VACO employees must also call or email the VA Passport Office to ensure the passport acceptance agent is on duty to accept application packages. These packages should never be left unattended in the VA Passport Office.

060205.02 Lost or Stolen Official Passport.

A. If the traveler's official passport is lost or stolen while in the United States prior to or immediately after travel, the traveler must complete a Form DS-64, *Statement Regarding a Lost or Stolen Passport*, and submit it to the VA Passport Office, Office of Financial Policy (047GC3) for processing. Upon completion of the Form DS-64, the traveler may reapply for a replacement passport.

Note: DoS regards the loss of a passport as a serious matter. Lost and stolen passports are often used for fraudulent purposes. VA employees are advised to notify the VA Passport Office, or if abroad, the nearest American Embassy or Consulate, in writing if a passport has been lost or stolen. If it was stolen, they should report the theft to local police authority where the theft occurred.

B. If, after reporting an official passport as lost or stolen, the passport is found, travelers should not attempt to use it. Filing the Form DS-64 invalidates the passport, and it cannot be used for travel. The information provided on the Form DS-64 is placed into the DoS Consular Lost or Stolen Passport System. Anyone using a passport reported as lost or stolen on the Form DS-64 may be detained when presenting the passport to Customs or Immigration personnel. Should travelers locate an official passport previously reported as lost or stolen, they must immediately submit it to the VA Passport Office who will return it to DoS for disposal.

C. Application for Replacement of a Lost or Stolen Passport. If the applicant wishes to obtain another passport, he/she must execute a Form DSP-11, *Passport Application*, present acceptable identification, evidence of citizenship, and two new photographs. In addition, the applicant must submit a completed [DS-64](#), *Statement Regarding Lost or Stolen Passport*, detailing what happened to the previous passport. Brief notations such as "lost", "stolen", or "burned" are not sufficient. The employee must answer each question in as much detail as possible. The traveler should return a temporary passport to the VA Passport Office upon return to the official duty station.

D. VA employees are responsible for safeguarding their official passports while in their possession. Refer to Appendix G, Department of State Tips for Foreign Travel. The loss of the official passport may cause unnecessary travel complications.

060205.03 Re-use of Official Passport.

Official passports are valid from 3 to 5 years from date of issue depending on the official assignment. Upon the completion of each episode of foreign travel, official passports must be returned to the VA Passport Office for safekeeping. A traveler's official

passport is available for use for additional official travel to foreign locations. The official passport will be returned to the traveler upon the receipt of evidence of approval of foreign travel and a completed electronic VA Form 0900.

060205.04 Amending Official Passport for Name Change.

A. A VA traveler may request an amendment for a change of name to his/her official passport by filing the Form DS-19, *U.S. Passport Amendment/Validation Application*. The application must be supported with sufficient documentation, such as a certified court order, marriage certificate, or other satisfactory evidence to support a name change.

B. A VA traveler must submit a completed and signed Form DS-19, *U.S. Passport Amendment/Validation Application*, to the VA Passport Office, as stated in Appendix D, Official U.S. Government Passport FAQs. The VA Passport Office will request amendment of the official passport from the SIA at DoS.

060205.05 Transfer of Custody for Official Passport.

A. Official passports are issued into the custody of the traveler's agency. In the event that a VA traveler transfers to another Federal agency, the traveler will notify the VA Passport Office, who will contact the gaining agency and the DoS and transfer the employee's official passport to the custody of the gaining agency.

B. Before an official passport holder ceases employment with VA, the passport holder must return the official passport to his/her supervisor, who will then return it to the VA Passport Office.

C. The facility visa and passport POC will promptly send the official passport to the VA Passport Office with official correspondence indicating the nature of the cessation (such as employee no longer employed by VA or employee transferred to another agency) and include the official passport holder's name, date of birth, and official passport number (to confirm that the enclosed passport is the correct one).

060205.06 Contacting VA Passport Office.

The VA Passport Office maintains a Passport Outlook mailbox for inquiries on the procedures to obtain official passports, visas, and country clearances. Travelers may contact officialpassports@va.gov for inquiries and assistance.

Refer to Appendix G, Department of State Tips for Foreign Travel.

0603 AUTHORITY AND REFERENCES

[060301 22 U.S.C. 211a-218, Passports](#)

060302 22 C.F.R. Part 51. Passports

060303 Department of Health and Human Services, Passport Denial Program

0604 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

060401 The Assistant Secretary for Management/Chief Financial Officer (ASM/CFO) oversees all financial management activities relating to the Department's programs and operations, as required by the Chief Financial Officers Act of 1990 and 38 U.S.C. 309. Specific responsibilities include the direction, management and provision of policy guidance and oversight of VA's financial management personnel, activities and operations. The CFO establishes financial policy inclusive of travel, systems and operating procedures for all VA financial entities and provides guidance on all aspects of financial management. The Deputy Assistant Secretary for Finance may authorize actual expense greater than 150 percent up to 300 percent for VACO Staff Office employees.

060402 Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, Chief Financial Officers, Finance Officers, Chiefs of Finance Activities, Chief Accountants and other key officials are responsible for ensuring compliance with the policies and procedures set forth in this chapter and will designate one or more persons to answer questions pertaining to the preparation of temporary duty travel and permanent change of station authorities and vouchers. Under Secretaries and the Chairman of the Board of Veterans' Appeals may authorize actual expense greater than 150 percent up to 300 percent for travelers under their jurisdiction.¹

060403 The Office of Financial Policy (OFP) under the CFO's direction, provides Departmentwide financial policy and guidance. OFP is responsible for developing, coordinating, issuing, evaluating and reviewing VA financial policies, to include those that impact financial systems, and procedures for compliance with all financial laws and regulations.

060404 Approving officials will:

- A. Authorize only official travel for travelers under their jurisdiction in advance of the travel.
- B. Determine if the travel is essential for the purpose of carrying out the mission of VA.
- C. Ensure all travel is authorized and performed consistent with the FTR (41 C.F.R. 301-304), VA Travel Policy, and any other agency-specific guidance relating to travel issues.
- D. Ensure adequate funds are available before authorizing travel.

¹ Under Secretaries may delegate this authority to the VISN, MSN. or Area Offices.

- E. Ensure all travel is performed in the most economical and effective manner.
- F. Ensure VA's E-Gov Travel Service (ETS) is used to prepare, process, approve, and route travel authorizations and vouchers for official temporary duty travel, including the requirement to use the ETS for making reservations.
- G. Examine expense reports to ensure the justification, supporting documentation and receipts are attached to ensure that travel expenses for which reimbursement is claimed was performed as authorized and that split-pay was used to pay for all authorized expenses made to the card.
- H. May authorize actual expense up to 150 percent of the per diem rate for travelers under their jurisdiction.
- I. Ensure travelers under their jurisdiction complete vendorizing forms to receive travel payments electronically, file expense reports with electronically attached receipts, and comply with the travel card program guidelines.

060405 Travelers will:

- A. Be knowledgeable of the FTR, VA travel policy, and any other agency-specific guidance relating to travel issues.
- B. Minimize costs of official travel by exercising the same care in incurring expenses that a prudent person would exercise if traveling on personal business and expending personal funds. Excess costs, circuitous routes, delays, or luxury accommodations and services unnecessary or unjustified in the performance of official business will not be reimbursed and are not acceptable under this standard. Travelers will be responsible for excess costs and any additional expenses incurred for personal preference for convenience.
- C. Ensure travel is authorized by the approving official prior to departure.
- D. Arrange travel using VA's ETS, including reservations for transportation, lodging, and rental cars.
- E. Perform timely cancellation of transportation and lodging reservations.
- F. Claim and obtain, where applicable, exemptions of tax imposed on hotel accommodations in locations listed in the Federal Acquisition Service's (FAS) GSA SmartPay Web site. Only certificates issued by the locality granting the exemption may be used.
- G. Submit claim for reimbursement of expenses within 5 business days upon return to the official station, except that travelers in an extended travel status will submit expense

reports currently, i.e., at least once a month in which the travel period exceeds 30 days. Local expense reports may be submitted monthly or quarterly.

H. Liquidate travel advances.

I. Comply with VA Travel Charge Card Program guidance contained in Volume XVI, Chapter 2, *Travel Charge Card*.

0605 PROCEDURES

Procedural and other guidance to assist the traveler can be found either in Section 0202 policies or in the following appendices:

- [Appendix A: Delegations of Authority for Foreign TDY](#)
- [Appendix B: Department of Health and Human Services \(HHS\): Reporting of Child Support Payments in Arrears](#)
- [Appendix C: Average Passport Processing Time](#)
- [Appendix D: Official U.S. Government Passport Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\)](#)
- [Appendix E: Average Visa Processing Time](#)
- [Appendix F: Additional Visa Processing for Certain Countries](#)
- [Appendix G: Department of State Tips for Foreign Travel](#)

0606 DEFINITIONS

060601 Acceptance Agent. A specific Postal Clerk or Clerk of the Court who has been appointed by the DoS to review and counter sign passport applications. Within VA, the Travel Policy Chief appoints the agency Passport Acceptance Agent.

060602 Amendment. A change of information that occurred after the passport was issued (e.g., name changes due to marriage or divorce, corrections in information, and extra visa pages).

060603 Application Form. An official DoS application for a passport and other related forms required to obtain a passport.

060604 Apostille. A simplified process used by numerous countries under The Hague Convention (1968) to verify the authenticity of a seal, stamp or signature that appears on official documents, contracts, or other documents used to do business overseas.

060605 Authentication. The process of determining the authenticity of a seal, stamp, signature or other stamp on a document used for doing business internationally. This process, which can have from three to five steps, is determined by the country where the contract, service or other document is to be used.

060606 Authority. The power given by a country to members of the Diplomatic core based on rank and location for which a Consulate Officer can issue a visa or travel document. *Example:* A Consulate Office may be given authority to issue a visa to any U.S. citizen and anyone residing permanently in the U.S. but to no one else. All others must be referred or denied based on their country of origin.

060607 Bank Letter. A letter from a bank, detailing the traveler's bank relation and account information, and shows their ability to support themselves. Bank letters are used by Consulate Officers as proof that travelers have the funds to support themselves while visiting their country. These bank letters should be notarized.

060608 Bank Statement. A copy of the traveler's current bank statement, showing the balances in their bank accounts, which meets monetary requirements for the visa type and country being visited. Consulate Officers use a bank statement to show proof that travelers have funds to support themselves.

060609 BAR Code (2D). The 2D bar code is a bar scan that contains the information on applications which can be scanned or input into a computer by the U.S. Government (in case of passports) or Consulates of Foreign Governments (as in India) to allow for accurate transmittal of the application from one computer to another.

060610 Certified Birth Certificate. A certificate issued by the county or state of birth. When applying for a first-time passport, a STATE CERTIFIED birth certificate is required.

060611 Certificate of Citizenship. A document issued to U.S. citizens born abroad. At age 16, all U.S. citizens born abroad must decide which country they wish to retain citizenship. When the U.S. is selected, a certificate of citizenship is issued by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). This certificate must be applied for through USCIS.

060612 Citizen(s) Born Abroad. A person born abroad of parents who are U.S. citizens. All U.S. citizens born abroad must be registered at birth with the Consulate Section of the U.S. Embassy or Consulate located in the country of birth or at any U.S. Consulate Office abroad. The Consular Report of Birth Abroad (CBRA, also known as the FS-240) is registered with the DoS and a birth certificate is maintained in Washington, DC.

060613 Consulate Section. A department of an embassy dealing with visas and other travel documents. Consulate offices are also located in areas outside the Embassy. The Consulate Sections provide services to their citizens and to citizens needing assistance in obtaining travel documentation.

060614 Consulate Fees. A fee or fees charged by the Consulate of the country to process visas and for other services offered by the Consulate section.

060615 Denied Boarding. Passengers not meeting the requirements to travel abroad can and will be denied boarding by airlines, cruise lines, rail and other means of transportation. If they transport undocumented passengers, they can be fined.

060616 Diplomatic Passport. A passport issued to certain official VA employees and others on official business. This passport is black and is not to be used for any travel other than that of official business of the U.S. Government or of foreign governments. Diplomatic passport holders may also hold a regular or tourist passport for personal travel.

060617 Embassy. The official diplomatic office that represents a country within another country (e.g., U.S. Embassy in Canada represents the United States in matters involving the two countries). The Ambassador is the official representative of the United States in that country. U.S. embassies are on foreign soil. All foreign embassies in the U.S. are on American soil.

060618 Electronic Country Clearance. The electronic Country Clearance process creates requests for clearance to visit one or more countries. DoS personnel review submitted requests and determine whether they can be approved, declined, or require more information.

060619 Invitation. An official invitation to visit a country for some purpose. Normally, the company or person you are visiting in the foreign country makes the request for you to visit the country. The formal invitation could be in the form of a Government letter, Chamber of Commerce letter, or other type document as outlined by the regulations of the country you plan to visit.

060620 Irradiated Mail. Mail that has been deliberately exposed to radiation, typically in an effort to disinfect it. Irradiation is so high that it often changes the physical appearance of mail by burning or crisping documents and melting photographs. Irradiated mail will also damage passports causing the employee to have to re-apply.

060621 Jurisdiction. The region or area over which the Consulate has authority. Rules are dictated by the Government under which a Consulate can issue a visa or other document.

060622 Legalization. The process of confirming the legality of a document which is to be used for some legal purpose overseas (also known as authentication).

060623 Length of Stay. The time period requested when applying for a visa. These dates of stay on the visa application affect the duration of stay on the visa issued and should be as exact as possible.

060624 Lost Passport. A passport that is lost or stolen prior to the date of expiration.

060625 Military Passport. U.S. Armed Forces and their dependents are issued no-fee passports for the purpose of traveling from the U.S. to a duty station in a foreign country. This passport cannot be used for pleasure or official VA travel. It can be used only for official business while traveling in connection with duty abroad (i.e., living abroad in connection with military duty).

060626 Certificate of U.S. Naturalization. [Form N-550 or N-570](#) is a document issued by the United States Government as proof of a person having obtained U.S. citizenship through naturalization, which is the legal process of obtaining a new nationality. The Certificate of U.S. Naturalization has been issued since October 1, 1991 by the USCIS, and on or before September 30, 1991, it was issued by the Federal Courts and particular State Courts. The U.S. Certificate of Naturalization is proof of an individual's U.S. citizenship through naturalization.

060627 Next of Kin. The person who will be notified in the event of injury or death abroad. This person is listed on your passport application and will be the person contacted in the event a problem occurs abroad.

060628 Number of Entries. Visas are issued as Single or Multi entry. The number of entries and the period of stay for each entry is normally written on the visa stamp; however, it is not always in English.

060629 Official Passport. Passports issued to citizens who are going overseas to do some type of business for the U.S. Government, branches of the Military, or other official travel. It is a requirement that the sponsoring Department request an official passport using a U.S. Government form. This official passport is burgundy and is not to be used for any travel other than that of official business of the U.S. Government or of foreign governments. The DoS' SIA in Washington, DC processes these requests.

060630 Passport. The U.S. passport is a travel document issued under the authority of the Secretary of State, attesting to the identity and nationality of the bearer. It remains the property of the U.S. and is to be returned upon demand. A passport identifies you by name, place, date of birth and country of birth. It is used as proof of citizenship allowing you to pass to and from your home country and other countries.

The types of passports are:

- **Fee:** A regular or fee passport (blue), commonly referred to as a tourist passport, is valid for 10 years from the date of issue for adults age 16 and over and 5 years from the date of issue for applicants less than 16 years of age. It is issued to a U.S. national traveling abroad for personal or private business reasons. *The fee passport may not be used in lieu of an official passport.* This is considered misrepresentation and the bearer may be detained by local authorities when traveling. Tourist passports are issued by any of the DoS Passport Agencies and American Consulates abroad.

- No-Fee: No-fee passports are issued to military personnel, Federal employees, dependents, and non-appropriated fund employees traveling at Government expense.

Types of no-fee passports are:

- Diplomatic: A Diplomatic passport (black) is issued to a person having Diplomatic status either because of the nature of the mission or by reason of office held. Where appropriate, dependents of such persons may be issued Diplomatic passports. The validity of the passport is controlled by the limitation date appearing on the passport, which is determined by the exact length of the tour, plus 2 months, not to exceed 5 years. Diplomatic passports are issued only from Passport Services, DoS, Washington, DC.

- Official: An official passport (burgundy) is issued to an official or employee of the U.S. Government traveling abroad in the discharge of official duties. Where appropriate, dependents of such persons may be issued official passports. It is valid for the duration of the status for which the passport was issued, not to exceed 5 years. Official passports are issued only from Passport Services in the Special Issuance Agency, DoS, Washington DC.

- No-Fee Regular (Tourist): A no-fee regular passport (blue) is normally issued to military dependents traveling at Government expense containing an endorsement indicating the dependent status of the bearer. This endorsement reads: "This passport is valid only for use in connection with the bearer's residence abroad as a dependent of a member of the American military or naval forces on active duty outside the United States." When issued to non-appropriated fund employees, civilian court-martial witnesses, or to individuals on invitational-type orders, the passport will contain the appropriate endorsement. It is valid for the duration of status for which the passport was issued, not to exceed 5 years. All no-fee passports are issued from Passport Services, DoS, Washington, D C.

060631 Parental Permission. The U.S. Government now requires that both parents give permission for a minor child to obtain a passport. If one of the parents is not available, a Form 3053 can be presented in lieu of the parent's presence. This document must be signed in front of a notary. If the parent is divorced and has sole custody, a certified divorce paper stating the custody can be used. If a parent has died, then a certified death certificate can be presented. Both parents must present a driver's license or other acceptable identification.

060632 Passport Photos. Photos accepted by the U.S. Passport Service with the passport application. Two identical photos 2 inches by 2 inches in size with an image size from bottom of chin to top of head (including hair) between 1 and 1 3/8 inches. They must be clear, full front face with white background. Digital images must be clear and photographs must be in color. No uniforms, hats or dark glasses may be worn and photos must have been taken recently. Retouched photos are not acceptable. Home-

made photographs are NOT acceptable. Photo requirements for countries other than the United States may be different.

060633 Processing Time. The time it takes to process a passport, visa or other document.

060634 Proof of Identity. A valid Government-issued document, with photograph, that identifies the person by name, photo, and other information (e.g., State ID, school ID, passport, company ID). An ID must have a number and meet U.S. Government criteria.

060635 Proof of Insurance. A letter, insurance policy, or other evidence that proves that you have health insurance coverage or a travel insurance policy for the period of your trip will usually meet this requirement. This gives medical expense coverage while visiting the foreign country. If medical treatment is required in a foreign country or on a commercial vessel, the passenger could be required to pay full payment for service rendered prior to leaving the country.

060636 Proof of Nationality. A certified document that proves the location of your birth, a citizenship certificate, or other nationalization paper that proves the completion of the application of citizenship.

060637 Permanent Resident. A person who lives permanently in a country other than that of their birth or citizenship.

060638 Restricted Passport. A passport issued for a period of time less than full validity. This document is normally issued to citizens who have not completely satisfied the passport service as to their right of citizenship but who have a need to travel prior to completing the process. Citizens whose passport was stolen abroad and cannot produce their birth certificates, or citizens who have lost several passports will be issued a limited or restricted passport. This term also applies to passport for travel to a specific area (*example*: to travel to a country that does not permit stamps from certain other countries in the passport). In 2005 the U.S. Government started limiting temporary passports abroad due to new laws requiring an I.D. chip. Citizens having passport restrictions will be issued a one year passport which they must extend to full validity upon returning to the U.S.

060639 Refer. A process by which a foreign Consulate requests permission from their foreign department to issue a visa to a person who is not in the proper jurisdiction or over which the Consulate has no authority. This process can take from a few days to a few months depending on the type of visa being requested and the nationality of the person requesting the visa.

060640 Special Issuance Agency. The Special Issuance Agency (SIA) within the DoS, located in Washington, DC issues no-fee passports to citizens traveling abroad for the U.S. Government, their dependents (if permitted to accompany them), and certain

others who are exempt by law from payment of the passport fee. For information, see [Diplomatic, Official, and Regular No-Fee Passports](#) on p. 21.

060641 Transit. Moving through a country without leaving a restricted area.

060642 Transit Visa. A visa allowing limited short stays for a person traveling through one country to get to another country. Onward transportation within a specific time frame plus a visa for the next country being visited must be submitted to obtain a transit visa. Transit visas are also required by most countries for aircraft changes between airports no matter how long the stay in the country may be.

060643 Tourist. A person visiting a destination for the purpose of sightseeing, visiting friends or doing activities purely for pleasure.

060644 Tourist Card. A card required for entry by many countries for all visitors arriving in the country for that purpose. Many tourist cards are obtained from the airline or carrier prior to arrival in the country.

060645 United States Permanent Resident Card. Proof of permanent residence in the United States. These cards are issued by USCIS (United States Citizens and Immigration Service). Most countries have a similar document for people residing permanently in the country. United States lawful permanent residency refers to a person's immigration status (i.e., the person is authorized to live and work in the United States of America on a permanent basis). A United States Permanent Resident Card (USCIS Form I-551), formerly Alien Registration Card or Alien Registration Receipt Card (INS Form I-151), is an identification card attesting to the permanent resident status of an alien in the United States. It is known informally as a “green card” because it had been green in color from 1946 till 1964, and it has reverted to that color since May 2010.

060646 Vaccinations/Inoculations. Inoculations (shots) to protect citizens in foreign countries.

060647 Vaccination Certificate. An International Health Certificate is a yellow card which can be purchased from the County Health Department. It serves as an official record of vaccinations and other shots. It is required, by some countries, prior to granting entry into the country. It is required if traveling from an infectious area.

060648 Validity of Passport. A period of time that the document remains valid. U.S. adult tourist passports are normally valid for a period of ten years. Children's passports are valid for five years. Some passports are not issued for full validity.

060649 Validity of Visa. A period of time for which the visa is issued. This time varies according to country and authority of the issuing Consulate officer.

060650 Visa. A document, normally issued as a stamp or impression placed on a page of a valid passport by a foreign embassy, Consulate, or immigration authority empowered to grant permission as of the date issued for the applicant to enter and remain in that a country for a specific period. The period for which visas remain valid varies from one country to another. The visa is issued and placed inside the passport which allows the holder to do "something" in the country, such as be a tourist or conduct business or work. There are more than 500,000 different types of visas among the 270 countries.

060651 Zone. The area for which a Consulate is responsible. This Consulate can issue visas and other documents for persons living and working in the specified area only.

0607 RESCISSIONS

060701 VA Directive 0631.2, Employee Travel Management – Official United States Government Passports

060702 VA Handbook 0631.2, Employee Travel Management – Official United States Government Passports

0608 QUESTIONS

Questions concerning these financial policies and procedures should be directed as follows:

VHA
VBA
All Others

VHA CFO Accounting Policy (10A3A) (Outlook)
VAVBAWAS/CO/FINREP (Outlook)
Office of Financial Business Operations
Office of Financial Policy
Travel Policy (Outlook)

APPENDIX A: DELEGATIONS OF AUTHORITY FOR FOREIGN TDY

Delegations	VA	VHA	VBA	NCA	BVA
Approval of Foreign Travel*	Assistant Secretary for Management	Under Secretary for Health	Under Secretary for Benefits	Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs	Assistant Secretary for Management
Approval of Foreign Travel to Canada and Mexico**		VHA Medical Center Directors			
Approval of Foreign Travel to the Philippines for VHA VISN 21**		VISN 21 Network Director			

Updated 04/19/2011

* Approval of Foreign Travel, although not a delegated issue, is listed in Vol XIV, Chapter 6, International Travel.

** Approval of Foreign Travel for Canada, Mexico and the Philippines is specified in VHA's Foreign Travel Handbook, 1400_6, dated January 14, 2010.

**APPENDIX B: DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES (HHS) -
REPORTING OF CHILD SUPPORT PAYMENTS IN ARREARS.**

A. Applicants who have been identified to Passport Services by HHS as being in arrears on child support payments in excess of \$2,500, are ineligible to receive a U.S. passport in accordance with 22 C.F.R. 51.70(a)(8). Passport Services recommends that if applicants fall into this category, they should contact the appropriate State Child Support Enforcement Agency to make payment arrangements before applying for a passport.

B. The State agency must certify to HHS that acceptable payment arrangements have been made.

C. HHS will notify Passport Services when it has removed the applicant's name from the electronic list of delinquent child support payers that is provided to Passport Services. Passport Services **cannot** issue a passport until the applicant's name has been deleted by HHS.

Note: It can take 2-3 weeks from the time an applicant has made payment arrangements with the State agency until the applicant's name has been removed from the electronic list. Passport Services will not have any information concerning an individual's child support obligations and no authority to take action until HHS removes the applicant's name from its list.

D. Questions should be directed to the appropriate State Child Support Enforcement Agency. Applicants may go to HHS' State Child Support Enforcement Web site <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/extinf.html> for a listing of HHS state and local agencies.

APPENDIX C: AVERAGE PASSPORT PROCESSING TIME

The following chart provides estimates of how long it will generally take the Department of State (DoS) to process a passport application.

AVERAGE PASSPORT PROCESSING TIMES	
Action	Time in Business Days
Mailing time to VA Passport Office (Official/Diplomatic Passport Program Office)	7-10
Routine Passports	60+
Expedite Passports/with justification	15-20
Diplomatic Passports	30-45
Mailing time to Passport Agent	7-10

NOTE: Unforeseen factors such as DoS workload or foreign political climates can directly impact processing times. Using an overnight courier or overnight mail will significantly reduce mailing times. When overnight mail is used, it still may take approximately 2-3 more days to reach the VA office because of how the mail may be handled in the Washington, DC area. If the travel requirement is urgent, the applicant should use the overnight courier option.

APPENDIX D: OFFICIAL U.S. GOVERNMENT PASSPORT FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

Q. Does a Senior Executive Service (SES) employee have to let security know if he/she is going out of the country on personal travel?

A. Any VA employee having a security clearance of "Secret" or higher should let the Office of Operations, Security, and Preparedness (OSP) know that he/she will be out of the country and whether the travel is of a personal or official business nature. Although this is not currently a written VA-wide policy, OSP has requested to be notified of these events.

Q. What should I do when I receive my passport?

A. Sign it right away and complete the personal notification data (page 3). For the emergency contact, do not include the name of the traveling companion; instead, write in pencil the name, address, and telephone number of someone who is not traveling with you.

Ensure that your previous passport and any other documents that you may have submitted are returned to you with your new passport.

Q. What should I do if I lose my passport or it is stolen?

A. It is important that you safeguard your passport. Its loss could cause you unnecessary travel complications.

- If your passport is lost or stolen abroad, you must report the loss immediately to the local police and to the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate. If you can provide the consular officer with the information contained in your passport, it will facilitate issuance of a new passport. It is a good idea to make two photocopies of the data page of your passport. Keep one copy separately from your passport to take with you on your trip, and leave the other copy with a relative or friend in the United States. It is also a good idea to carry two extra passport size photos with you.
- If your passport is lost or stolen in the United States, contact the VA Passport Office, Office of Financial Policy (047E3) immediately at officialpassports@va.gov, so that this office can facilitate issuing a new passport.

Q. How should I safeguard my passport?

A. Your passport is the most valuable document that you will carry abroad. It confirms your United States citizenship, and an official passport provides additional protections.

However, an official passport is not a diplomatic passport – you must obey the laws of the country you visit.

- Please guard your passport carefully. Do not use it as collateral for a loan or lend it to anyone. It is your best form of identification. In addition to providing it when entering a foreign country and for reentry into the United States, you may need to show your passport when picking up mail, checking into hotels, and prior to boarding aircraft abroad. You should always produce your passport when conducting business at U.S. Embassies and Consulates.
- Carelessness is the main cause for losing a passport or having it stolen. You may find that you have to carry your passport with you because you need to show it when you cash traveler's checks or the country that you are visiting requires you to carry it as an identity document. When you must carry your passport, hide it securely. Do not leave it in a handbag or in an exposed pocket. Whenever possible, leave your passport in the hotel safe, not in an empty hotel room, and not packed in your luggage. One family member should not carry all the passports for the entire family.

Q. How can I guard against thieves when abroad?

A. Coat pockets, handbags, and hip pockets are particularly susceptible to theft. Thieves will use all kinds of ploys to divert your attention just long enough to pick your pocket or grab your purse or wallet. These ploys include creating a disturbance, spilling something on your clothing, or even handing you a baby to hold!

You can try to prevent theft by carrying your belongings in a secure manner. For example, consider not carrying a purse or wallet when going along crowded streets. Women who carry a shoulder bag should keep it tucked under the arm and held securely by the strap. Men should put their wallets in their front trouser pockets or use money belts instead of hip pockets. A wallet wrapped in rubber bands is more difficult to remove without notice.

Be especially cautious in a large crowd, in the subway, on buses, at the marketplace, at a festival, or if surrounded by groups of vagrant children. Do not make it easy for thieves!

Q. May I keep my official passport after my business abroad has been completed?

A. NO. An official U.S. Government passport is a document from our Government to the Government of another country requesting travel privileges for the bearer into, through, and/or from that country. It remains the property of the United States at all times and must be returned to the VA Passport Office by the most expeditious and traceable means. Do not return your passport by regular mail. You should contact the

VA Passport Office at officialpassports@va.gov to receive instructions on returning your passport to VA.

Q. When do I use my official Government passport?

A. You may use your official U.S. Government passport ONLY when going overseas in discharge of your official duties. You must not use the official U.S. Government passport when you leave the United States for personal travel, or when entering countries where you will not conduct official business. For personal travel, you need to obtain a regular personal (tourist) passport.

Q. May I hold both an official U.S. Government and regular tourist passport?

A. YES. You may hold both a valid personal (tourist) passport and a valid official passport at the same time. You may want to take both types of passports with you when traveling abroad on official business. You must take a personal passport with you if you plan to take personal travel overseas. Please be sure you have all appropriate visas for both types of passports prior to your departure.

Q. How can I learn about the countries that I plan to visit?

A. The following suggestions and sources may be useful:

- Foreign embassies or consulates in the United States can provide up-to-date information on their countries. Addresses and telephone numbers of the embassies of foreign governments are listed in the Congressional Directory, available at most public libraries. In addition to their embassies, some countries also have consulates in major U.S. cities. Look for their addresses in your local telephone directory, or find them in the publication, Foreign Consular Offices in the United States, available in many public libraries, or on the Internet at <http://www.state.gov>.
- DoS publishes Background Notes on countries worldwide. These are brief, factual pamphlets with information on each country's culture, history, geography, economy, government, and current political situation. The Background Notes are available for approximately 170 countries. They often include a reading list, travel notes and maps. To purchase copies, you can contact the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402, or call (202) 512-1800. Select issues are also available from the DoS's Bureau of Public Affairs, fax-on-demand, by calling (202) 736-7720 from your fax machine or on the DoS's Internet home page at <http://www.state.gov>.
- The Consular Information Program provides pertinent information for travelers. Dos issues Fact Sheets, known as Consular Information Sheets, on every country in the world. You should obtain the DoS's Consular Information Sheet for any country that you will visit. The sheets contain information about crime and security conditions, areas of

instability, and other details pertaining to travel in a particular country. You may find these Consular Information Sheets at http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/warnings.

- DoS also issues Travel Warnings and Public Announcements. Travel Warnings are issued when DoS recommends deferral of travel by Americans to a country because of civil unrest, dangerous conditions, terrorist activity and/or because the United States has no diplomatic relations with the country and cannot assist an American citizen in distress. Public Announcements are issued as a means to disseminate information quickly about terrorist threats and other relatively short-term and/or trans-national conditions, which would pose significant risks to American travelers.

- Consular Information Sheets, Travel Warnings and Public Announcements may be heard any time by dialing the Office of Overseas Citizens Services, American Citizens Services and Crisis Management, Bureau of Consular Affairs, at (202) 647-5225 from a touchtone phone. The recording is updated as new information becomes available. Consular Information Sheets, Travel Warnings and Public Announcements may also be obtained from any regional passport agency, from most airline computer reservation systems, from U.S. embassies or consulates abroad, or by sending your request, (indicating the desired country on the lower left corner of the envelope), in a self-addressed, stamped envelope to the Office of Overseas Citizens Services, Bureau of Consular Affairs, Room 4811, U.S. Department of State, Washington, DC 20520-4818.

Q: I am preparing for official travel. How do I obtain my diplomatic, official or regular no-fee passport?

A. The Special Issuance Agency, located in Washington, DC issues no-fee passports to citizens traveling abroad for the U.S. Government, their dependents (if permitted to accompany them), and certain others who are exempt by law from payment of the passport fee. For information, refer to [Diplomatic, Official, and Regular No-Fee Passports](#) on p. 21.

Q: How long does it take to get a passport?

A. Processing times can vary depending on workload and occasional unforeseen circumstances, such as natural disasters. During busier times, such as the summer travel season, we encourage customers to expedite their applications if traveling in less than 10 weeks. Refer to [Application Processing Times](#) on p. 27 for more information.

Q: Who should maintain a valid U.S. passport?

A. Passport Services recommends that the following U.S. citizens maintain valid U.S. passports:

- Families living or traveling abroad;

- Families thinking about a vacation abroad; or
- Families with a job that could require international travel.

In the event of an emergency involving a family member abroad, a short-notice airfare bargain, or an unexpected business trip, already having a valid U.S. passport will save time, money and stress.

Q: Where are the instructions for filling out the passport forms?

A. Links to the various forms and instructions include:

- [Form DS-11: Application for a U.S. Passport](#)
- [Form DS-82: Application for a U.S. Passport by Mail \(Renewals only\)](#)
- [Form DS-4085: Application for Additional Visa Pages](#)
- [Form DS-5504: Application for a U.S. Passport - Name Change, Data Correction, and Limited Passport Replacement](#)
- [Form DS-64: Statement Regarding Lost or Stolen Passport](#)
- [Form DS-3053: Statement of Consent - Issuing a Passport to a Minor Under Age 16](#)

Q: How many blank visa pages do I need to travel?

A. Some countries require your passport to have four (4) blank visa/stamp pages. Some airlines will not allow you to board if this requirement is not met. Contact the VA Passport Office for additional questions on blank visa pages.

Q: How long is a passport valid and when should I renew my passport?

A. On tourist passports, if you were **over age 16** when your passport was issued, your passport is valid for **10 years**. If you were **age 15 or younger** when your passport was issued, your passport is valid for **5 years**. The *Issue Date* of your passport can be found on the data page of your passport book or on the front of your passport card.

If possible, you should renew your passport approximately nine (9) months before it expires. Some countries require that your passport be valid at least six (6) months beyond the dates of your trip. Some airlines will not allow you to board if this requirement is not met. If your passport has already expired, you may still be able to renew it by mail. See [How to Renew Your U.S. Passport](#) on p. 13.

Q: I'm renewing my passport. Do I get the old one back?

A. YES. VA will return the old, cancelled passport to you although it may be sent separately from your new passport. It is a good idea to keep it in a safe place, as it is considered proof of your U.S. citizenship.

Q: I was recently married/divorced. How do I change my name on my passport?

A. You will need to complete [Form DS-5504: Application for a U.S. Passport: Name Change, Data Correction, and Limited Passport Book Replacement](#), within one year of the issuance date of your current valid passport and submit along with the following:

- The same data visually displayed on the data page of the passport;
- The passport to be replaced;
- Certified documentation of your name change (e.g., marriage certificate, divorce decree with your new name); and
- Two recent passport photos.

NOTE. After one year of the issuance date, you must submit [Form DS-82: Application for Passport by Mail](#), your current passport, certified documentation of your name change, and two recent passport photos, and pay all applicable fees. Refer to [How to Change Your Name in Your Valid Passport](#) on p. 14 for additional information.

Q: Do I have to provide my Social Security Number?

A. Failure to provide your Social Security Number (SSN) may result in significant processing delays and/or the denial of your application.

Section 6039E of the Internal Revenue Code (26 U.S.C. 6039E) requires you to provide your SSN, if you have one, when you apply for a U.S. passport or renewal of a U.S. passport.

If you have not been issued an SSN, enter zeros in box #5 of the passport application form you are completing. Contact the Social Security Administration to request an SSN. If you are residing abroad, you must also provide the name of the foreign country in which you are residing. DoS must provide your SSN and foreign residence information to the Department of Treasury. If you fail to provide the information, you are subject to a \$500 penalty enforced by the IRS. All questions on this matter should be directed to the nearest IRS office.

Q: I found someone's lost official passport. What should I do with it?

A. Please email the VA Passport Office at officialpassports@va.gov, and the Passport Agent will give directions on how to return the document to the agency.

Q: My passport has been damaged. Can I continue to use this passport?

A. If your passport has been significantly damaged, especially the book cover or the page displaying your personal data and photo, you will need to apply for a new passport. You will need to submit the following in person (refer to [Where to Apply](#) on p. 14):

- The damaged passport;
- [Form DS-11](#);
- All documents required by [Form DS-11](#), including citizenship documentation (e.g., birth certificate).

Water damage, a significant tear, unofficial markings on the data page, missing visa pages (torn out), a hole punch and other injuries may constitute “damage” requiring use of Form DS-11.

Normal wear of a U.S. passport is understandable and likely does not constitute “damage”. Examples include, the expected bend of a passport after being carried in your back pocket or fanning of the visa pages after extensive opening and closing. In most cases of normal wear, you may renew your passport by mail using [Form DS-82](#).

If you try to renew a significantly damaged passport using Form DS-82, you may be asked by the Passport Agency to apply again using Form DS-11 and incur additional fees.

Q: Will I receive my passport and the citizenship documents I submitted with my application back in the same envelope?

A. In most instances, the passport office will send one package with both sets of documents. If the applicant needs to expedite the process, he/she should contact the passport office.

Q: Why can't I use the passport card to fly to Canada and Mexico?

A. A passport card is designed for the specific needs of border resident communities and is not a globally interoperable travel document as is the traditional passport book. The official/diplomatic passport book is the appropriate travel document for most official

international travel. The passport card is not an appropriate document for official travel, but rather for personal ground travel.

Q: My child is too young to sign his/her own passport. How do I sign my child's passport?

A. In the space provided for the signature, the mother or father must print the child's name and sign their own name. Then, in parenthesis by the parent's name, write the word (mother) or (father) so we know who signed for the child.

Q: How do I get information about my child's passport or prevent passport issuance to my child?

A. Parents involved in international custody disputes may receive information about the United States passport of a minor from the Department of State, Passport Services. For passport assistance for parents and information on International Child Abduction see [Passport Assistance - International Child Abduction](#) on p. 35.

Q: Is it true that passport applications for minors under 16 require the consent of both parents and legal guardians?

A. Effective February 1, 2008, Public Law 106-113, Section 236, requires that U.S. passport applications for children under the age of 16 require both parents' or legal guardians' consent. Read additional information on the [Two-Parent Consent Requirement](#) on p. 5.

Q: What is the Children's Passport Issuance Alert Program (CPIAP)?

A. Separate from the Two-Parent Consent requirement for U.S. passport issuance for minors under the age of 14, parents may also request that their children's names be entered in the U.S. passport name-check system. The Children's Passport Issuance Alert Program provides notification to parents of passport applications made on behalf of minor children, and denies passport issuance if appropriate court orders are on file with CPIAP. For more information, contact the [Office of Children's Issues](#) at 1-888-407-4747 or by email at ChildrensPassports@state.gov.

Q: How do I get a certified copy of my U.S. birth certificate?

A. Contact the [Vital Statistics office](#) in the state where you were born.

Q: What do I do if there is no birth record for me on file anywhere?

A. If you were born in the U.S. and there is no birth record on file, you will need several different documents to substantiate your citizenship, as follows:

- A letter of no record issued from the Vital Statistics office of the state of your birth with your name and what years were searched for your birth record.
- Early public records to prove your birth in the U.S. If you were born outside the U.S. and your U.S. parent(s) did not register your birth at the U.S. embassy or consulate, you may apply for a U.S. passport. You will need:
 - Your foreign birth certificate showing both of your parents' names;
 - Evidence of your parent(s) U.S. citizenship; and
 - Your parents' marriage certificate [Learn More](#).

Q: I was born abroad. How do I get one or more copies of my birth record?

A. Request a [Certification of Report of Birth](#) or learn more about [birth records for U.S. citizens and nationals born abroad](#). If you were born in the [Panama Canal Zone](#), learn how to request multiple copies of your PCZ Birth Certificate. As of December 31, 2010, the Department of State no longer issues the Certification of Report of Birth (DS-1350). All previously issued DS-1350s **are still valid** as proof of identity and citizenship.

Q: How do I replace my lost or damaged Consular Report of Birth Abroad (FS-240)?

A: If your Consular Report of Birth Abroad (FS-240) is lost or damaged, learn how to [Request a Replacement](#).

Q: How do I amend my Consular Report of Birth Abroad (FS-240)?

A: To change a name or update your Consular Report of Birth Abroad (FS-240), learn how to [Request an Amendment](#).

Q: Why did the Department of State create a new Consular Report of Birth Abroad (FS-240)?

A: DoS introduced a redesigned Consular Report of Birth Abroad (FS-240) in January 2011. The new design has state-of-the-art security features to help prevent fraud and identity theft. The FS-240 is an official record confirming that a child born abroad to a U.S. citizen parent or parents acquired U.S. citizenship at birth and serves as proof of citizenship. You may now [request multiple copies](#) of your Consular Report of Birth Abroad (FS-240).

As of December 2010, the Certification of Report of Birth (DS-1350) is no longer issued. All previously issued FS-240 or DS-1350 documents are still valid as proof of identity and citizenship, and for other legal purposes.

Q: How to I obtain copies of my Certification of Report of Birth (DS-1350)?

A: As of December 2010, the Certification of Report of Birth (DS-1350) is no longer issued. Instead, you may [request multiple copies](#) of your Consular Report of Birth Abroad (FS-240). All previously issued DS-1350s are still valid as proof of identity and citizenship, and for other legal purposes.

Q: I was married overseas. How do I get one or more copies of my marriage certificate?

A: Request one or more copies of your [Certificate of Witness to Marriage \(Abroad\)](#).

Q: Where can I obtain information on taking passport photos?

A: Technological advances have changed the way passport and visa photos may be taken and the way that the U.S. Department of State processes the photos. Refer to SIA's [Guide for Professional Photographers](#) on the DoS Web site; it can help photographers ensure that:

- Customers are accurately represented; and
- Photos are free of common defects that may cause delays

APPENDIX E: AVERAGE VISA PROCESSING TIME

A. Foreign embassies determine visa processing times and only allow expedite/walk-through processing under extreme emergencies. Therefore, expedite memoranda will only be accepted under these circumstances and **must have prior approval**.

B. Visas are issued by the embassy of the destination country and are processed as expeditiously as possible and given priority based on the estimated date of travel. **Visas cannot be processed any faster than allowed by the embassies involved.**

Unforeseen circumstances such as an Embassy's national holidays, work schedules, home government approval, etc., will delay processing. Applicants should plan accordingly.

Average Visa Processing Time (See Notes)	
Action	Time in Working Days
Mailing time to VA Official/Diplomatic Passport Programs	7-10
Visa Processing (each)	5-25
Mailing time to Passport Agent	7-10

NOTES:

1. Omission of necessary visa information, photos, and visa applications will dramatically delay processing time.
2. Using overnight courier service or overnight mail will significantly reduce mailing times.
3. For expedited visa processing, a justification is required with the request and additional fees may apply.

APPENDIX F: ADDITIONAL VISA PROCESSING FOR CERTAIN COUNTRIES

A. Many countries require a signature on the passport before a visa can be issued. The following countries² follow this rule:

- Bahrain (PCS),
- Brazil,
- Bulgaria,
- Costa Rica,
- Colombia,
- France,
- Guatemala,
- India,
- Indonesia,
- Italy,
- Kenya,
- Pakistan,
- Peru (before entering country with visa),
- Malaysia (for PCS),
- Mexico,
- Uruguay, and
- Austria (for PCS).

B. Numerous countries require home country approval before a visa can be issued. This approval can add an additional two (2) to six (6) weeks to normal visa processing times. The following countries² require home country approval:

- Bolivia,
- Burma (approval from ambassador),
- Colombia (after 90 days),
- Romania,
- Russia (letter of invitation),
- Uzbekistan,
- Vietnam,
- Ukraine (multiple entry only),
- China (letter of invitation),
- Syria,
- Turkey (aliens),
- Taiwan (tourist passport-civilians only are allowed to travel to Taiwan),
- Pakistan (Indian descend - PCS assignment and VIP's),

² This information is subject to change without notice.

- Kazakhstan, and
- Laos.

C. Several countries require original visa forms before a visa can be issued. The following countries² require original visa forms:

- Brunei,
- Coted'Ivoire (Ivory Coast),
- Czechoslovakia,
- Ghana,
- Hungary,
- Madagascar,
- Mozambique,
- Poland (PCS), and
- Ukraine.

D. Processing non-U.S. citizens for Visas. VA's Passport Office does not issue visas for non-U.S. citizens or their family members (depending on individual's nationality and destination country). Normally non-U.S. citizens and their family members require home government approval and can take as long as three (3) to four (4) months for processing, depending on destination country.

APPENDIX G: DEPARTMENT OF STATE TIPS FOR FOREIGN TRAVEL

For detailed information about steps you can take to ensure a safe trip, see [How to Have a Safe Trip](#). Here are some quick tips to make your travel easier and safer:

- Sign up for the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program so DoS can better assist you in an emergency. Let us know your travel plans through the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program, a free online service at <https://travelregistration.state.gov>. This will help us contact you if there is a family emergency in the U.S., or if there is a crisis where you are traveling. In accordance with the Privacy Act, information on your welfare and whereabouts will not be released to others without your express authorization.
- Sign passport and fill in the emergency information. Make sure you have a signed, valid passport and a visa, if required, and fill in the emergency information page of your passport.
- Leave copies of your itinerary, passport data page and visas with family or friends so you can be contacted in case of an emergency.
- Check your overseas medical insurance coverage. Ask your medical insurance company if your policy applies overseas, and if it covers emergency expenses such as medical evacuation. If it does not, consider supplemental insurance.
- Familiarize yourself with local conditions and laws. While in a foreign country, you are subject to its laws. The DoS web site at http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/safety/safety_1180.html has useful safety and other information about the countries you will visit.
- To avoid being a target of crime, do not wear conspicuous clothing or jewelry and do not carry excessive amounts of money. Also, do not leave unattended luggage in public areas and do not accept packages from strangers.
- In case of an emergency, personnel at U.S. Embassies and Consulates abroad and in the U.S. are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to assist U.S. citizens. Contact information for U.S. Embassies and Consulates appears on the Bureau of Consular Affairs Web site at <http://travel.state.gov>. Also note that the Office of Overseas Citizen Services in the State Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs may be reached for assistance with emergencies at 1-888-407-4747 if calling from the U.S. or Canada, or 202-501-4444 if calling from overseas.