

— FREE CHECKLIST

Family Immigration Timeline Guide

The stages of every family path — what starts each clock, what you control, and the dated 2026 deadlines that matter.

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This guide maps the stages of the three main family routes — adjustment of status, consular processing, and the K-1 — with what starts each clock and which parts you actually control. The reference times below reflect July 2026 conditions and shift monthly; use them for planning, then verify against the current USCIS processing-times page and the NVC timeframes page before making any life decision (a lease, a job, a wedding date) that depends on them.

Route 1 — Adjustment of Status (spouse already in the U.S.)

Step	What starts the clock	What you control
1. Assemble & file the concurrent package (I-130/I-130A/I-485/I-765/I-131/I-864/I-693)	Nothing — this stage is entirely yours	Everything: document gathering speed, completeness, translation quality. A complete filing is the single biggest time-saver you have.
2. Receipt notices (I-797C)	USCIS lockbox acceptance — typically 2–4 weeks after delivery	Correct fees (electronic only), signatures, current form editions — the causes of rejection-and-refile, which costs a month or more.
3. Biometrics appointment	USCIS scheduling, usually weeks after receipt	Attend as scheduled; rescheduling adds delay.

Step	What starts the clock	What you control
4. Work permit / advance parole	USCIS adjudication of I-765/I-131 — commonly several months in	Little — but filing them WITH the I-485 (fees \$260/\$630 with the package) starts them at day one.
5. Interview at the local field office	Local office workload — this is where most of the wait lives	Interview preparation and updated evidence; responding fast and completely to any RFE.
6. Decision and card production	Officer decision at or after the interview	Nothing at this point except a clean record behind you.

- Overall reference: marriage-based AOS commonly runs 12–24 months end to end (July 2026), varying sharply by field office — Brooklyn/Queens offices run their own pace; check the current time for your office and form on the USCIS processing-times page.
- Clock traps: an RFE stops your case while you respond; an I-693 that ages out (it is valid only while the case is pending) triggers a new-exam RFE near the finish line.

Route 2 — Consular processing (CR-1/IR-1, spouse abroad; parents follow the same shape)

Step	What starts the clock	What you control
1. File I-130 with USCIS	Your filing — the receipt date becomes the priority date	Front-loading relationship evidence to avoid an RFE; filing online (\$625) for a cleaner intake.
2. USCIS adjudicates the I-130	Service-center workload — often the longest single stage	Almost nothing — respond to any RFE fast and completely.
3. NVC stage: fees, DS-260 (\$325), civil documents, I-864 (+\$120)	NVC creating the case after approval — then each document review runs about 44 days per submission cycle (July 2026)	A lot: complete, legible, correctly translated uploads the FIRST time. Every rejected document costs another full review cycle.

Step	What starts the clock	What you control
4. Documentarily Complete → interview scheduled	The consulate's appointment capacity for your post	Nothing on scheduling; use the wait to prepare interview documents and the medical.
5. Panel physician medical + interview	Appointment date set by the post	Timing the medical so results arrive before the interview and nothing expires (police certificates have validity windows).
6. Visa issuance → entry → green card	Passport return with visa; card production after entry + the \$235 Immigrant Fee	Paying the Immigrant Fee promptly and entering before the visa expires — the card mails ~90 days after entry.

- Spouses of LPRs (F2A): the priority date must also be current in the Visa Bulletin — a separate clock nobody controls; check the bulletin monthly.
- Married under 2 years at approval = CR-1 (conditional card, I-751 later); 2+ years = IR-1 (10-year card).

Route 3 — K-1 fiancé(e)

Step	What starts the clock	What you control
1. File I-129F (\$675)	Your filing — remember the met-in-person proof must be within the 2 years BEFORE this date	Meeting evidence, IMBRA disclosures, intent-to-marry statements — completeness here sets the whole tone.
2. USCIS adjudicates the I-129F	Service-center workload — running about 11.5 months (July 2026 reference)	RFE response speed only.
3. NVC transfer + consular stage (DS-160 \$265, medical, police certs; confirm the \$250 K visa integrity fee with the post)	NVC forwarding (weeks) then the post's interview capacity	DS-160 accuracy (5 years of social-media handles; accounts public during vetting), document readiness, medical timing.

Step	What starts the clock	What you control
4. Visa issued → entry → marriage	Entry date starts the hard 90-day marriage clock	Everything — book the wedding logistics before arrival; the K-1 cannot be extended.
5. File adjustment (I-485 \$1,440 + optional I-765/I-131; ≈\$2,330 total, no new I-130)	Your filing after the marriage certificate arrives	Filing promptly and complete; then the AOS timeline above applies.

- Planning comparison: K-1 gets the couple together sooner but costs more in total and adds a second full case (the AOS). Marrying abroad and filing CR-1 is usually cheaper (~\$1,355 in government fees) and arrives with the green card process further along. Run both timelines before choosing.

After the green card — the clocks that keep running

Item	Timing rule
I-751 (conditional residents)	File in the 90 days before the 2-year card expires (\$750); waiver filings anytime. The receipt notice extends status 48 months — processing commonly runs 32–39 months (July 2026).
Naturalization	N-400 eligibility at 3 years as a resident married to and living with a U.S. citizen (5 years otherwise), filable up to 90 days early; can be filed while the I-751 is pending.
Address changes	Report within 10 days of any move, every move, while any case is pending and as a permanent resident.

Key dated deadlines to calendar

- **September 18, 2026 — public charge rule change:** cases FILED before this date are reviewed under the current, narrower standard; filings on or after face the broader rule. If your case is nearly ready this summer, filing before September 18 matters.
- **I-751 window:** opens exactly 90 days before the 2-year card's "Card Expires" date; late filing without good cause risks termination of status.
- **K-1 marriage deadline:** 90 days from the date of entry, no extensions.

- **K-1 meeting rule:** in-person meeting must fall within the 2 years before the I-129F filing date.
- **RFE deadlines:** the date printed on each notice is a receipt deadline at USCIS — one response only.
- **I-693 medical:** valid only while the application is pending — schedule the exam against the filing date, not months ahead of it.
- **Advance parole:** no travel abroad after filing the I-485 until the I-131 is approved — leaving abandons the application.

How to check current times yourself

- USCIS processing times: egov.uscis.gov/processing-times — select the form, category, and office/service center shown on YOUR receipt notice; use the "80% of cases" figure for planning.
- NVC timeframes: travel.state.gov → NVC Timeframes page — shows current case-creation and document-review queues.
- Visa Bulletin (LPR-spouse and preference cases): travel.state.gov, published monthly — compare your priority date (the I-130 receipt date) to the chart USCIS designates that month.
- Your case status: my.uscis.gov with each receipt number; CEAC status for consular cases.
- Re-check all of the above before any major decision — these numbers move every month, and the figures in this guide are July 2026 snapshots.

Notes: Processing times are averages, not promises — plan life around the slow end of the range, and never book non-refundable travel or quit a job based on a projected approval date. The fastest thing in any timeline is the part you control: a complete, correctly translated, properly paid filing. Every RFE avoided saves 2-4 months; every NVC rejection cycle avoided saves ~44 days. For a timeline estimate specific to your facts and filing office, call Usher Law Group, P.C., (718) 484-7510 — flat fees, consultations in English, Russian, and Spanish.

This checklist is general information, not legal advice, and doesn't cover every situation. Fees and rules change — confirm current amounts at our [fee table](#) or uscis.gov before filing. © Usher Law Group, P.C.

