



# How to Avoid Immigration Scams and Get Real Help

Scammers know the immigration process is complicated. They use the confusion it causes to try to take advantage of people looking for help. Here are some examples of common immigration scams, advice on how to spot and avoid them, and where to get real help.

## Examples of Immigration Scams

### *Notario or immigration consultant scams*

In the United States only an immigration attorney or someone authorized by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) can give you immigration advice. But scammers try to confuse immigrants, by calling themselves notario, notary public, accountant, or consultant. In Latin American countries, the word notario or notary public means that the individual is an attorney or has legal training, but that's not true in the United States.

**Only attorneys and people who have been accredited by the U.S. Department of Justice working for a recognized organization can give you legal advice.**

Anyone else is just taking your money. Sometimes, their bad advice will hurt your chance to immigrate lawfully or adjust your legal status. The DOJ has a full list of accredited individuals and recognized organizations.

Read this graphic novel, also available in Spanish, to learn more about how to spot and avoid notario scams. Order free copies to distribute in your community.

#### **What to know**

- Don't go to a notario, accountant, or consultant for immigration or legal help. See the advice below on how to get real help.
- Don't sign blank immigration forms, or forms that have false information about you or your situation. A dishonest notario, accountant, or consultant might ask you to do this.
- Don't pay for immigration forms. The official forms from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) are free.
- Don't let a notario or anyone else keep your original documents.

### *Fake Immigration Websites*

When you look for immigration help, you might find websites that look like they're connected with USCIS — but they're not. They may use names like "U.S. Immigration" and show pictures of American flags or the Statue of Liberty. But if the website address doesn't end in .gov, it's not a federal government website and not connected with USCIS. The site might charge you for forms that are free from the government and might also steal your personal information.

#### **What to know**

- Real U.S. government website addresses end with .gov.
- USCIS forms are free. If you have to pay to download government immigration forms, you're not on a legitimate website.
- You'll find real immigration information at the USCIS website.

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## How to Avoid Immigration Scams Continued

### **Get Real Help**

Choosing the right person to help you is almost as important as filling out the right form, or filling it out the right way. Even people who mean well, like a friend or a family member, who want to help you with the immigration process, might cause problems for you later. For example, someone who helps you with forms might be able to write or translate what you ask them to, but not be qualified to give you advice on what to say or which forms to use. Take some time to find the real help you need for your immigration situation.

### **Find people authorized to help**

Only an attorney or an accredited representative working for an organization recognized by the U.S. Department of Justice is authorized to give you legal advice about the immigration process. Working with them can also help protect you from people who might cheat you.

- An attorney must be a member of the professional association in their state. Be sure the attorney you choose is in good standing with the association.
  - To find a free or low-cost immigration attorney, check out this state-by-state list from the U.S. Department of Justice.
  - Check this list from the American Immigration Lawyers Association to find an immigration attorney in your area. These attorneys will charge you a fee.
- An accredited representative is not a lawyer but is someone authorized to give immigration advice. The organizations they work for may charge you a fee.
  - An accredited representative must work for an organization recognized by DOJ.
  - Find the recognized organizations in your area on the Recognition & Accreditation Program page on DOJ's website.