**VISA BULLETIN GUIDE: ESSENTIAL CONCEPTS EXPLAINED**

**I. Key Terminology in the Visa Bulletin**

* Priority Date: This denotes the “Received Date” of an I-130 or I-140 Immigrant Petition at USCIS, except for cases based on a labor certification (LC) where it refers to the LC filing date.
* Cutoff Date: The date in Visa Bulletin charts after which dates are not considered “Current.”
* Current: If your priority date is earlier than the one in the Visa Bulletin chart, your case is “Current.”
* C: All Priority Dates are Current.
* Dates for Filing Chart: Individuals with priority dates preceding those in this chart can submit required documents to DOS’s National Visa Center (NVC) and potentially apply for a green card with USCIS.
* Final Actions Dates Chart: People with priority dates earlier than those in this chart can file a green card application with USCIS, which can approve a pending Form I-485, or a consulate can issue the green card.
* Visa Retrogression: This happens when a previously Current priority date is no longer Current in the subsequent month.

**II. Understanding the Visa Bulletin**

The Visa Bulletin is a vital tool for the U.S. government to manage the limited annual allocation of green cards (or immigrant visas). It serves as a chronological guide for applicants, indicating when they can apply and anticipate approval, functioning as a schedule.

**III. How It Functions**

The Visa Bulletin helps applicants understand when they can initiate the final green card application stage. It guides when to file Form I-485 with USCIS within the U.S. or engage in consular processing through the Department of State (DOS) overseas.

To use it, find your Priority Date from your Form I-797 Approval Notice. Then, locate your visa category under your Country of Birth (or under “all chargeability areas except those listed” for specific countries) on the Visa Bulletin. If the date in that box is later than your Priority Date, progress in your case may be possible, depending on the Final Action or Dates for Filing charts.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Family- Sponsored** | **All Chargeability Areas Except**  **Those Listed** | **CHINA-mainland born** | **INDIA** | **MEXICO** | **PHILIPPINES** |
| F1 | 01DEC14 | **01DEC14** | 01DEC14 | 01APR01 | 01MAR12 |
| F2A | 08SEP20 | 08SEP20 | 08SEP20 | 01NOV18 | 08SEP20 |
| F2B | 22SEP15 | 22SEP15 | 22SEP15 | 01JUN01 | 22OCT11 |
| F3 | 22NOV08 | 22NOV08 | 22NOV08 | 01NOV97 | 08JUN02 |
| F4 | 22MAR07 | 22MAR07 | 15SEP05 | 01AUG00 | 22AUG02 |

**Sample Chart:**

For example, if you have applied for a green card in F1 category with a priority date of 1st October 2013, and you are a Chinese citizen, you can move forward with your case as your priority date is earlier than the cut-off date.

**IV. Applying with the Dates for Filing Chart**

For U.S.-based applicants, approval from both DOS (via the Visa Bulletin) and USCIS (via their Adjustment of Status Filing Chart) is necessary. When USCIS lists the Dates for Filing Chart and your Priority Date is current, filing Form I-485 becomes feasible.

**V. Special Significance of the October Visa Bulletin**

The October Visa Bulletin is significant as it marks the beginning of the new fiscal year for the U.S. government. Typically, it leads to increased visa numbers due to the annual visa allocation, ensuring a surge in visa availability.

**VI. Navigating Changes in Subsequent Visa Bulletins**

A new Visa Bulletin is released monthly. If your Priority Date is not "Current" in the new Bulletin:

* The consulate cannot approve your green card.
* Form I-485 submission is not possible.
* USCIS cannot approve your application if already submitted.

For instance, if your Priority Date is Current in October, you can apply with USCIS. However, if the November Visa Bulletin retrogresses your date, USCIS cannot process your application that month. Applications received before November will be held until the Priority Date becomes current again. Meanwhile, you may be eligible for work authorization, travel, and job changes.

**VII. Takeaway**

Understanding the Visa Bulletin intricacies is essential for effectively navigating the green card application process. Stay informed and be prepared.