



## **OAW Asylum Interview Coordination: A Quick Guide**

Based on Best Practices from the USCCB Network

### **Transportation & Lodging**

*Sample approaches in resource coordination:*

- **Catholic Charities USA Airbnb Funds**  
Members of Catholic Charities USA may request funding through Catholic Charities USA's Airbnb Funds to cover the lodging costs for Afghan clients traveling to their asylum interviews. At this time (9/6/22), funds are only available for clients and may not be used to cover the costs for staff accompanying clients.
- **Partnership with local parish's retreat centers** (for interviews in urban areas) and **camp-ground cabin lodging** (for interviews in rural areas, e.g. Ft Smith field office) for overnight accommodation
- **Flat fee travel and lodging voucher** based on case's household size, if capacity for reservation arrangement and accompaniment is limited
- **Reservation arrangements and accompaniment by staff** if capacity allows

### **Legal Representation**

*Sample approaches if legal representative is unable to attend the asylum interview:*

- **Virtual legal representation (via USCIS-facilitated Microsoft Teams meeting)**  
While asylum applicants must appear in-person for their asylum interview, USCIS currently allows the client's legal representative (attorney or accredited representative) to appear remotely.
  - Legal representative must send a remote appearance notice form "Asylum Office Attorney Opt-in Template" to the asylum office at least 10 days prior to the scheduled interview.
    - Note: Some legal practitioners report that it is best to send the remote appearance notice by email if the option is available for your designated asylum office. Please consult the instructions provided in your designated asylum office's "Attorney Opt-in Template" found on the USCIS webpage: <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-and-asylum/asylum/preparing-for-your-affirmative-asylum-interview> (See Section: "Having Your Attorney or Accredited Representative Participate in Your Asylum or NACARA 203 Interview from a Remote Location via Telephone.")
  - Microsoft Teams meeting will allow visibility of client, legal representative, and asylum officer.
  - Legal practitioners who have shared their experience of appearing remotely have not encountered connectivity issues when appearing remotely.
  - The asylum office will send a Microsoft Teams link either the night before (for morning interviews) or the morning of (for afternoon interviews).
    - Note: Some legal practitioners report that certain asylum officers have preferred telephonic appearance in place of a Microsoft Teams meeting.
  - Best practice for remote legal representation:  
Legal representative may send their closing statement by email to the asylum officer at the end of the interview. If additional supporting documents are needed, the legal representative may send the documents to the direct attention of the asylum officer who conducted the interview.
- **Proxy legal representation**  
In cases where an asylum client's legal representative may not be able to attend the interview remotely or in-person, some offices have opted for a proxy legal representative from a volunteer attorney network in proximity to the asylum office, such as a local chapter of the American Immigration Lawyer's Association (AILA).

- Note: Legal practitioner sets up a meeting with local AILA chapter to communicate needs and gather interest and availability from AILA members. Legal practitioner follows up with identified AILA attorneys once clients' interviews have been scheduled to pair clients with a proxy representative. One USCCB affiliate reports proxy representative coverage for 75% of cases from local AILA chapter.
- **Other best practices**
  - Conduct a practice interview with different staff member(s) to simulate unfamiliar company of an asylum officer, particularly in cases where client is appearing at interview without a legal representative. Please see list of interview preparation materials on [USCCB's APA Legal Resource Library](#) (see section "Asylum" – subsection "Interview"), including sample, verbatim asylum interview questions, webinars, and interview preparation guides.
  - For other best practices related to asylum case preparation, please see [USCCB's Quick Guide: Operational Strategies for Asylum Services](#).

### Delays in Scheduled Interview & Decision

- Per the [Afghan Supplemental Appropriations Act](#), USCIS must:
  - (1) conduct the initial interview on the asylum application not later than 45 days after the date on which the application is filed; and
  - (2) in the absence of exceptional circumstances, issue a final administrative adjudication on the asylum application within 150 days after the date the application is filed.
- USCCB affiliates have reported (8/24/22) several cases of delays in USCIS scheduling initial interview (average *maximum* wait time: 101 days) and issuing final decisions (average *maximum* wait time: 227 days).
- **USCIS guidance if there is a decision delay:**
  - USCIS advises staff to email asylum office where case was interviewed with subject line "OAW interview adjudication" to draw attention to the case.