

Ask the U.S. Embassy - March 20, 2018

Q: I am a track coach and I plan to escort some students to compete in the Penn Relays later this spring. What is the proper procedure for obtaining visas to attend this event?

All individuals who plan to travel to the Penn Relays should begin the process of applying for a visa right away, if they have not already done so. The Penn Relays are only a few weeks away, and we would hate to see anyone miss out on the experience just because they did not plan ahead for their visa.

The following applies to members of any athletic group applying for visas to attend an event in the United States. There is no need to apply together as a group; however, we understand team members may find it helpful to schedule their appointments for around the same time. Even though teams have a collective reason for travel, each team member or team affiliate must independently qualify for a visa. A parent or legal guardian should accompany minors to their interviews, and legal guardians must be prepared to show court documentation of their status as guardians. Applicants may also be asked to provide a letter from the school or team listing all team members, and to explain how they will cover the costs of the trip.

One of the most important factors applicants must demonstrate in order to qualify for a visa is strong ties to Jamaica. It can sometimes seem difficult for young people who are still establishing their personal and professional lives to show the kinds of connections to Jamaica that demonstrate strong ties, but many students qualify for visas each year. If you apply for a visitor's visa, at your interview do make sure to mention the reasons you have to return to Jamaica, including your plans after graduating, family ties, part-time jobs or voluntary activities. The consular officer might find it helpful to see your school transcript with your grades to show that you are a serious student. Good prior travel to other countries can also be helpful in showing that you intend to return home.

Q: I want to attend as a spectator. Should I try to apply with a group?

Individuals who wish to attend the Penn Relays as spectators should schedule individual appointments. Like all nonimmigrant visa applicants, they should be prepared to explain to a consular officer how they will finance their trip and what economic and/or social ties will compel them to return to Jamaica after their travel abroad.

Good luck to all of Jamaica's participants in the relays!

You can find more information about how to travel to the U.S. on our website, www.jm.usembassy.gov Keep on top of Embassy news on our Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/USEmbassyJamaica/> and by following @USEmbassyJA on Twitter. We also answer general visa questions on our Facebook and Twitter pages.