



# TCG

THEATRE COMMUNICATIONS GROUP, INC.

## CENTERPIECE

### FOCUS ON:

## THE VISA PROCESS

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## A QUICK GUIDE TO SUCCESSFUL VISA APPLICATIONS

BY CAROLELINDA DICKEY

Artists have historically been on the cutting edge of social change; their work has repeatedly signaled a changing order in the world. If one assumes that our world is moving toward a shared planetary identity bursting with diverse and rich cultures, then support and promotion of a continued increase in cultural exchange between the United States and the rest of the world is critical. The last decade of the 20th century saw a growth in presentations of international artists by U.S. presenters and a broadening in the scope of such presentations. While globalism is not the exclusive domain of the nonprofit cultural field, arts organizations have nevertheless been among the world's leaders in encouraging and fostering the movement. True cultural exchange encourages the import of non-U.S. artists and the export of U.S. artists. To be most effective, exchange should be unrestrained and equitable. Unfortunately, and at variance with much of the world, the United States classifies all touring artists as potential immigrants, and it subjects them to a visa procurement process that is both a barrier to increased cultural exchange and a potential impediment to continued export of American work. What is the visa process? And how can arts professionals successfully negotiate it?

### **Understanding the Context**

In the spring of 2000, with the support of the Rockefeller Foundation, Arts Presenters reviewed the barriers and obstacles — as well as the potential opportunities — facing the cultural community in the application and processing of non-immigrant visas for foreign touring artists. I was contracted to help develop a set of recommendations to ease the challenges that many have encountered.

Topical Issues *Centerpiece* Curator: Christopher Shuff, Director of Management Programs, TCG. Copyright © 2001 by Theatre Communications Group, Inc. All articles reproduced by permission of the authors. No portion of this publication may be reproduced in any form, or by any means, including photocopying, without written permission from the publisher or author. Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 355 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017, telephone (212) 697-5230, fax (212) 983-4847, website: [www.tcg.org](http://www.tcg.org). Ben Cameron, Executive Director; Joan Channick, Deputy Director; Laurie Baskin, Director of Government and Education Programs; Rachel Ford, Management Programs Associate.

As with most things, the key to understanding the context of the challenge is to navigate it successfully. It is important to know who the players are. The parties involved in securing a visa are: the petitioner (U.S.-based manager or presenter); the applicant (non-U.S. artists); the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), including personnel at INS Service Centers and at ports of entry; the U.S. Department of State, including personnel at the visa services office of a U.S. Embassy or Consulate overseas; and the labor unions that represent U.S. artists and stage personnel.

The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and the Department of State are concerned first and foremost with preventing illegal immigration. They accomplish this through the processing and enforcement of visas that classify the applications of foreign nationals. Through the visa application process, the agencies make a judgment as to whether a foreign national is a qualified applicant for a specific visa category and whether he or she is coming to the United States for the stated purpose, or intends to immigrate. In order to tour in the United States, a foreign artist must apply as a temporary worker for a non-immigrant visa. For

artists, the most widely used non-immigrant visa categories are the “O” and “P” visas (see Sidebar 1 on this page).

The INS and the Department of State each play different roles in the process. The INS rules on eligibility, while the Department of State makes a determination on non-immigrant intent. In other words, the INS processes the petition and the Department of State issues the visa. The process is:

- ❖ The petitioner, i.e. the presenter or manager, is responsible for the preparation and submission of the visa petition to the INS using Form I-129.
- ❖ The INS processes the petition and approves or denies it using Form I-797.
- ❖ Upon approval by the INS, the applicant, i.e. the artist, submits an application on Form OF-156 to the visa office in his or her country.
- ❖ If the visa office approves the application, they issue a visa.
- ❖ The artist, subject to further INS review at the port of entry, enters the United States.

Those wishing to bring foreign touring artists to this country must meet two goals. The first is to compile a strong petition to the INS demonstrating that the artist meets the criteria of the visa category for which an application is being made. The second is to help the artist provide the Department of State with sufficient documentation (or “proof of binding ties”) to support the artist’s intention to return to his or her home country on completing the tour. Since labor unions are concerned with the optimal employment of U.S. workers, immigration law requires that the visa petitioner requests a written advisory opinion (or an advisory letter, also referred to as a letter of opinion or consultation letter) from a labor union with expertise in the applicant’s artistic discipline. In the past, some people have assumed that the labor unions were the main barrier to obtaining artist visas. This is not the case, but they do play a specific role.

For the most part, obtaining the advisory letter is a routine matter. Strategies for dealing with unions are outlined in Step Two. Breaking down and organizing the visa application process into five steps will help to keep the process clear and manageable:

- ❖ **Step One:** Working with the artist to gather information
- ❖ **Step Two:** Securing an advisory letter from a labor union
- ❖ **Step Three:** Preparing and filing the petition with the INS
- ❖ **Step Four:** Applying for the visa from the visa office
- ❖ **Step Five:** Educating the artist on how to present himself or herself to the INS personnel at the port of entry

There are several forms that you will use in this process (see Sidebar 2 on the next page). As in any complex process, there are many points at which mistakes can be made. Unfortunately, errors and mistakes are rarely found or corrected by the INS or the Department of State. Managing the process and staying abreast of developments is the

### **SIDEBAR 1: Pertinent Visa Categories**

- ◆ **O-1 classification** applies to persons who have extraordinary ability in the sciences, arts, education, business or athletics, or extraordinary achievements in the motion picture and television field.
- ◆ **O-2 classification** applies to persons accompanying an O-1 alien to assist in an artistic or athletic performance for a specific event or performance.
- ◆ **P-1 classification** applies to individual or team athletes, or members of an entertainment group that are internationally recognized.
- ◆ **P-2 classification** applies to artists or entertainers who will perform under a reciprocal exchange program.
- ◆ **P-3 classification** applies to artists or entertainers who perform under a program that is culturally unique.
- ◆ **Q-1 classification** applies to participants in an international cultural exchange program for the purpose of providing practical training, employment and the sharing of the history, culture and traditions of the alien’s home country.

role of the manager or presenter. Before beginning, identify a resource where you might go for expert advice. You will probably not have the luxury of time to shop for it if a problem arises.

## STEP ONE: Working with the Artist to Secure Materials and Information

It is essential that the artist understands what he or she needs to provide. The beginning of the process is also a good time to determine who pays for the filing and application /issuance fee, as well as other expenses that might arise, such as overnight delivery. (Warning: express overseas document delivery service will probably be necessary, and it is a cost that should be anticipated.)

It is vital to compile the required documentation early. Depending on the visa category, it is possible that you will also need letters of support from leaders in the field, government agencies, non-government organizations and journalists (this is in addition to the advisory letter from a labor union). Support documentation may include press clippings, publicity materials, award letters, list of personnel with beginning employment dates (P-1 only), biographies for all personnel, signed contracts and agreements, and tour itineraries. Request these materials from the artists as soon as possible to allow yourself time to evaluate their appropriateness for the requirements of the visa category and supplement them with additional information. Don't forget that translation services may sometimes be needed (another cost to be anticipated).

Regardless of the stature that the cultural field might accord to an artist, it must be properly documented. Analyze the support materials to determine the visa category that best describes your artist. The P-1 category is often the most difficult in that "internationally renowned" is a highly subjective term. If there is a question about whether or not the available documentation makes the case, then you should consider a P-3 classification for culturally unique artists.

### SIDEBAR 2: A Guide to Visa Forms

- ♦ **Form I-129:** Visa petition form submitted to INS by applicant
- ♦ **Form I-797:** INS form that gives approval or denial of application
- ♦ **Form OF-156:** Application form submitted by non-U.S. artist to a visa office

A string quartet of emerging artists performing contemporary Viennese waltzes could be considered culturally unique. Likewise, a dance company led by a single choreographer of international repute could qualify if the artist director/choreographer applies for an O-1, and the dancers and tour personnel apply for an O-2.

Applicants for temporary work visas should generally apply at the American Embassy or Consulate with jurisdiction over their place of permanent residence. Although visa applicants may apply at any U.S. consular office abroad, it may be more difficult to qualify for the visa outside the country of permanent residence.

*The following questions should be discussed with the artist as soon as possible after a commitment is made to the engagement. Some of the issues are not in themselves barriers to gaining a visa, but without proper forethought they might become barriers. If the INS determines the artist is ineligible for a visa, then he or she can apply for a waiver if proper procedures are followed in a timely manner.*

- ❖ **Q: Does everyone in the company have a valid passport that extends at least six months beyond the end of the tour?**

The length of the applicant's passport can act as a red flag that calls into question the artist's intent. Make sure you check this item early in the process. If you are asking this

question six to nine months before the tour, then the passport must have a life of at least 12 to 15 months. In addition, some visa offices require two available blank pages in the passport. Thus, if extra pages or inserts need to be added, the passport holder should attend to that in advance.

- ❖ **Q: Do you anticipate making any personnel changes before the tour?**

A change in personnel causes two problems. It is a red flag to the Department of State that suggests someone has signed onto a tour with the sole intention of remaining in the United States. In addition, both the INS and the visa offices are often backlogged, and you cannot be certain that they will be able to process a new visa application in time. If changes are absolutely necessary, artists should attend to them early; he or she should document the reasons for the changes, and include the information with the application to the visa office.

- ❖ **Q: Have you or has anyone traveling with you ever been arrested and/or convicted of any offense or crime, including but not limited to drunk driving, civil disobedience, drug use or assault?**

The consular officers (U.S. Department of State) and the INS personnel at ports of entry will run computer checks against everyone seeking entry. If someone is identified as having been arrested or convicted AND they deny it on their Form I-156, then their visa or entry will be denied. Arrests or convictions, depending on the details, will not automatically make someone ineligible. Your failure to disclose it certainly will. Having a drug arrest or D.U.I. conviction — even as a teenager — has been the undoing of many applications. If an artist has an arrest or conviction on his or her record, it may be best to

*Cont'd on page 8*

## Strategic Tools: SAMPLE LETTER #1

### Questionnaire to Artist for Petition to Apply for a Visa

[Date]

[Name]

[Company Name]

[Address]

[City, Country and Postal Codes]

Dear [insert artist or artist group name]:

We are very pleased that you will be performing in the United States [next season, or insert appropriate time reference]. To enter the United States as a temporary worker, you must apply for a non-immigrant visa. We need to ask you a series of questions in order to prepare for the petition and application of your non-immigrant visa. In each case, the issues raised in the questions could affect the ease with which we are able to make an application.

**Please answer all questions completely and truthfully.** Your responses will be kept confidential. If your answers pose any potential reason for ineligibility, we will need to request a waiver from the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service. If a waiver is needed, then we will need additional information from you.

1. Will you be in the country of your permanent residence for the month prior to your departure for the United States?
2. Have you or anyone travelling with you ever been arrested and/or convicted of any offence or crime, including but not limited to drunk driving, civil disobedience, drug use or assault?
3. Do you intend or anticipate making any personnel changes before the tour?
4. Which category (O, P1 or P3) can you best document?
5. Does everyone in the company have a valid passport that extends at least 6 months beyond the end of the visa period?

In addition, we need to begin to compile information from you to be used in the preparation of our petition to the INS on your behalf. Once our petition has been approved, we will forward to you a form (I-797) that will allow you to make an application to the visa office of the U.S. Consulate with jurisdiction for your country. We need to receive by [insert date] the following information from you:

1. Biographies of all personnel
2. Signed contracts and agreements
3. Tour itinerary
4. List of personnel with beginning employment dates (P-1 only)
5. Support letters or affidavits attesting to your prominence as an artist in your country
6. Press clippings
7. Publicity materials

Our immigration process is lengthy, so we ask that you begin now to prepare with us what is needed. Thank you.

Sincerely,

[Name]

[Title]

## Strategic Tools: SAMPLE LETTER #2

### Letter to Chief of Visa Services

[Date]

Chief of Visa Services

U.S. Embassy

[Address]

[City, Country and Postal Codes]

Dear Chief of Visa Services:

Enclosed please find promotional and informational material on [insert the artist or the artist group name].

On behalf of presenters in [insert states, cities, etc.], we have petitioned the INS for a [select appropriate category] visa. We expect approval of our petition shortly. At that time, [insert artist or artist group name] will make an application to your office. We are providing this additional information to assist you in that process. This packet contains information on the artist as well as information on the theatres and presenters with whom they will be performing while in the United States.

We believe deeply in the positive power of international cultural exchange and look forward to hosting these wonderful artists. If we can be of assistance during the review and processing of their visa application, please feel free to contact us. In addition to the contact information on our letterhead, I can be reached at [insert any additional contact information that might speed up the process, such as email addresses, cell phone, or home numbers that you would like to provide]. Thank you in advance for your consideration of [insert artist or artist group name]'s visa application.

Sincerely,

[Name]

[Title]

## Strategic Tools: SAMPLE LETTER #3

### Letter to Artist Outlining Procedures for Visa Application

[Date]

[Name]

[Company Name]

[Address]

[City, Country and Postal Codes]

Dear [insert artist or artist group name]:

As you are aware, in order to enter the United States as a temporary worker, you must apply for a non-immigrant visa. On your behalf, we have petitioned the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service for a [insert visa category] visa. Our petition has been approved! You now need to make an application to the U.S. Embassy with jurisdiction over your permanent residence. To apply you will need the following for **each of the people** travelling on your tour:

1. A completed Form OF-156. The form is available either through the U.S. Embassy or can be downloaded from the Internet. A PDF file can be downloaded at <http://www.ambusa.fr/consul/of156.htm> or an interactive form can be accessed at <http://travel.state.gov/acrobatof156.html>.
2. A valid passport that extends at least 6 months past the end of your U.S. tour.
3. One passport-type photo that shows a full face on a light colored background and measuring 37x37 mm. There needs to be at least two blank and available pages in the passport.
4. The enclosed original notice of approval (Form I-797).
5. A prepaid fee receipt of [insert country-specific information found on U.S. Mission website], which can be paid at [insert country-specific information found on U.S. Mission website].

The U.S. Embassy address in [insert applicable city] is [insert address]. Their hours for visa services are [insert applicable hours found at the U.S. Mission website]. You must [insert any specific procedures for this country found at the U.S. Mission website]. We have alerted the visa office at the U.S. Embassy that you will be making an application. If you have any problems or questions, I can be reached during business hours at the contact information on our letterhead or at [insert any additional contact information that might speed up the process, such as email addresses, cell phone, or home numbers that you would like to provide]. Kindly inform me when your visas are secured.

Sincerely,

[Name]

[Title]

*Please note: Form OF-156 is about to be revised. Check the Department of State website for updated versions.*

## Strategic Tools: SAMPLE FAX #1

### Fax to Chief of Visa Services

#### BY FAX

TO: Chief of Visa Services, U.S. Embassy, *[insert city]*

FROM: *[insert your name and title]*

DATE: *[insert date]*

REF: *[insert visa category]* Visa Application for *[insert artist's name]*

Dear Chief of Visa Services:

On *[insert date that the letter to Chief of Visa Services and press kit was sent]* our office sent you promotional and informational material on *[insert artist or artist group name]*. At the time, our Form I-129 was pending with the INS. The INS has now approved the petition, and we have forwarded Form I-797 to *[insert artist or artist group name]*. We expect them to make an application to your office shortly.

We appreciate your attention to this application. If, in the course of your review, you need to reach us, please contact us at the address or telephone number listed above, or at *[insert any additional contact information that might speed up the process, such as email addresses, cell phone, or home numbers that you would like to provide]*.

Thank you in advance for your prompt attention to *[insert artist or artist group name]*'s visa application.

Sincerely,

*[Name]*

*[Title]*

seek legal advice from an attorney in the United States before proceeding.

❖ **Q: Will you be in the country of your permanent residence for the month prior to your departure for the United States?**

If the artist will not be at his or her permanent residence at the time an application needs to be made, he or she can arrange to apply at another visa office, even though this will be complicated and will certainly add time.

**STEP TWO: Working with a Labor Union to Secure an Advisory Letter**

Each labor union has its own procedures and requirements for issuing an advisory letter. It is a good idea to call and ask if they have an instruction sheet that spells out their requirements, and have them fax it to you (the American Federation of Musicians has an excellent one). Generally speaking, the unions are organized and thorough in providing the letters; and several unions are able to fax them back within a day or two.

Make the request in writing and keep a copy; and include a copy of your request letter with the petition. If the union fails to respond or responds negatively, then you can demonstrate intent — which may be sufficient for the INS since the law only requires that you request the letter.

Requesting an advisory letter from the union that is best able to provide an accurate and fair opinion can save valuable time during the process. Classifying a production will determine which union has jurisdiction. When touring certain contemporary, interdisciplinary work, you should evaluate carefully whether the production is a dance work, an opera, or a theatre work. Many dance companies call themselves theatre companies when they are not. Several dance companies mount opera productions. Some theatre companies are

**SIDEBAR 3:  
Timeline for Processing Visa Application**

This timeline was prepared with the advice of those responsible for moving along the petitions. Since the INS and the Department of State control the process, it is best to follow their advice even if it feels excessive. The process should start when the artist is contracted.

- ❖ **Confirmation of Artist Booking**
  - ◆ Establish who the petitioner will be.
- ❖ **6 Months Prior to U.S. Entry**
  - ◆ Send artist an immigration packet and questionnaire (see example on page 4).
- ❖ **5 Months Prior to U.S. Entry**
  - ◆ Compile all personnel data from artist.
  - ◆ Compile all information and documentation to support the criteria of the visa category.
  - ◆ Request an advisory letter from labor union and non-labor organizations.
- ❖ **4 Months Prior to U.S. Entry**
  - ◆ Prepare and file completed I-129 petition with the INS.
- ❖ **3 Months Prior to U.S. Entry**
  - ◆ Research country-specific procedures and prepare packet to go to artist with instructions.
- ❖ **2 Months Prior to U.S. Entry**
  - ◆ Send cover letter (see example on page 5) and press kit to visa office at the consulate where the application will be made.
- ❖ **Receipt of Form I-797**
  - ◆ Send letter (see example on page 6) to artist outlining procedures for the INS visa application, including contact information, hours, addresses and fees. Be sure to include Form I-797 approval notice.
- ❖ **With Dispatch of Form I-797**
  - ◆ Send fax (see example on page 7) to consulate visa office reminding them that artist will make an application.
- ❖ **4 Weeks Prior to U.S. Entry**
  - ◆ Artist makes an application to the U.S. Embassy or Consulate with jurisdiction.
- ❖ **2 Weeks Prior to U.S. Entry**
  - ◆ Send fax to artist outlining port of entry procedures.

highly movement based and draw fans and critical press from both the dance and theatre worlds.

Supplementing the petition with advisory letters from non-labor experts can be very helpful, especially if you are dealing with the absence of a labor union letter or a negative letter. In securing a union advisory letter, you may occasionally hit snags. Situations that may cause snags include the following:

- 1) The applicant tries to use international cultural exchange as a way to sidestep an existing labor problem. This occurs often during current or upcoming contract negotiations. The performing arts field has generally had a long and positive relationship with labor, so most performing arts professionals would agree that using international cultural exchange to sidestep an existing labor problem would be inappropriate.
- 2) Foreign support staff that do not meet the visa category criteria are being employed, especially in less strategic roles or positions. This is a highly subjective issue, and the onus is on the petitioner to make the case that all performers and personnel in a given production are vital to that production. Detail and specificity are extremely important in making the case.
- 3) The production for which the application has been made includes English-speaking actors. This is a more problematic issue and requires a high level of planning and negotiation with the artist and the Actors' Equity Association.

### **STEP THREE: Preparing the Petition for the INS**

Armed with materials from the artist, an advisory letter from a labor union and/or non-labor source and your own information, you are ready to prepare the Form I-129. Think tax return. Think grant application. Think of any bureaucratic application and you are ready to begin. Get your materials organized and block out dedicated time!

There is a reason for this high level of organization. Based on my research, 90 percent of the petitions that are turned back for additional information, or are denied outright, suffer from poor organization, careless mistakes, miscalculations of fees, missing information or — most common — rushed preparation that results in the petitioner not making the best case for the category. Be sure to:

- ❖ Fill out the form, and triple check to make sure it is complete and accurate.
- ❖ Organize the materials so that they are easy to read.
- ❖ Include a cover letter that outlines what is in the package.
- ❖ Calculate the filing fee, and write and sign the check.
- ❖ Make copies of everything.
- ❖ Check the INS Service Center's website at [www.ins.usdoj.gov/graphics/fieldoffices/statemap.htm](http://www.ins.usdoj.gov/graphics/fieldoffices/statemap.htm) for additional instructions and address information.
- ❖ Include a self-addressed stamped envelope or a Fed-Ex return envelope with the "bill recipient" box checked off. Request that your petition approval notification or any communication be sent back in that envelope. There is no guarantee that the service center will use it, but if they do, at least it will be properly addressed.
- ❖ Send your completed packet.

### **STEP FOUR: Applying for the Visa from a Visa Office**

The INS will notify you of approval via Form I-797. The artist may now apply for a visa. Each visa office has great leeway in determining procedures for issuing visas. You must research on a country-by-country basis what, when, how and how much is required by the artist applicant. Forward the original Form I-797 to the artist using a courier such as Fed-Ex or DHL (overseas air mail may be too slow) and include instructions on how to make the applica-

tion. Don't forget to make several good copies of the Form I-797 in case the original is lost or damaged — you probably will not have time to return to the service center for another original form.

There are some strategies that will help when the artist is applying for the visa. Do all the footwork for the artist by providing detailed instructions on how to proceed with the visa office. It's a good idea to do the research in advance, and have everything prepared to go when Form I-797 arrives. In addition, you should prepare the visa office for the artist's application. Two months before the beginning of the tour, you should send the visa office a letter and press kit to give them some familiarity with the artist and the context for the application. Then, you should follow up with a fax that updates them on the pending application. If you find yourself traveling abroad to countries where you regularly work with artists, it is a good idea to make an appointment with the visa office and introduce yourself.

Ideally, the artist will apply at least 30 days before departure for the United States. Unfortunately, this step is often the nail-biting step, because something has caused you to run out of time. If you have run out of time, stay calm and think strategically. This is the one area where miracles do happen, so do not give up. Ask yourself, "Who can assist me?" and "Do I need an attorney?" The Department of State and the INS (to a lesser extent) have recently upgraded their websites. For a list of pertinent webpages, see Sidebar 4 on page 10.

### **STEP FIVE: Going to America!**

You may think you are home free, but the artist may have one more potential hurdle. Artists should be aware that a visa does not guarantee entry into the United States. At ports of entry, the INS personnel have the authority to deny entrance into the United States. Remember that they are still concerned about stemming illegal immigration. Although all ports should be equal, they are

manned by individuals and have been known to greet touring artists with some variation. A strategic approach is to avoid the ports of entry in large cities, if possible. Landing or arriving in a secondary city where the port staff is less harried can make the process easier on the artist.

There are some things that send a red flag to all the INS personnel. For example, artists who travel with large contingents of support personnel, especially with members of their families, may appear to have less reason to return home; and artists who enter with large quantities of household goods, photos, special foods and excessive clothing give the appearance that they intend to stay.

If there is a concern that a particular artist may be greeted with suspicion, encourage the artist to adopt some of the traveling standards that the INS is

accustomed to recognizing. Standard touring cases look better to the INS than cardboard boxes and endless numbers of personal suitcases. If the artist requires a special diet, then find ways to purchase the food in the United States.

### Some Final Thoughts

There are those within the touring field who believe the visa process is onerous, complicated and unpredictable. They are correct; but aside from major legislative and/or regulatory changes there is little that can be done about it. The best approach is to allow plenty of time to prepare and file and to anticipate problems before they arise.

The opening of borders for performing artists should be a far-reaching goal for the field — one that likely will require endless incremental steps with a full share of victories and setbacks. The same efforts and resources that go into

the creation of programmatic initiatives to support cultural exchange need to be directed into the creation of an infrastructure that can bolster and sustain the myriad of cultural exchange programs that exist.

In the meantime, those who work with international exchange will have to take the lead in ensuring that the path to performing in the United States is as smooth as possible for the artists we invite to become part of our world.

*Originally published by the Association of Performing Arts Presenters in Inside Arts, March/April 2001.*

## SIDEBAR 4: Useful Web Addresses

### *Important Pages on the INS Website*

- ◆ **INS Forms and Fees:** This page lists the fees for filing petitions and provides links to downloadable forms. Visit [www.ins.usdoj.gov/graphics/formsfee/index.htm](http://www.ins.usdoj.gov/graphics/formsfee/index.htm).
- ◆ **Form I-129 Petition for a Non-Immigrant Worker:** This page will take you directly to a very important list of instructions that may include updates to the form itself. From this page, you can then download the form. Visit [www.ins.usdoj.gov/graphics/formsfee/forms/I-129.htm](http://www.ins.usdoj.gov/graphics/formsfee/forms/I-129.htm).
- ◆ **List of Field Offices:** This page identifies which service center is designated for your area, and connects you to the homepage of each of the INS Service Centers. Visit [www.ins.usdoj.gov/graphics/fieldoffices/statemap.htm](http://www.ins.usdoj.gov/graphics/fieldoffices/statemap.htm).

### *Important Pages on the Department of State Website*

- ◆ **U.S. Missions:** From here, you can link to all of the embassies and consulates that have websites and subsequently to visa services, which provides information on non-immigrant visa application procedures. Visit [//usembassy.state.gov/](http://usembassy.state.gov/).
- ◆ **Tips for U.S. Visas:** This page also provides an excellent overview of the entire visa program, including a summary of all categories of temporary workers. Visit [www.travel.state.gov/visa\\_services.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/visa_services.html).
- ◆ **Reciprocity Tables:** This page provides a searchable database to calculate issuance fees, which must be paid in addition to the standard \$45 application fee. Visit [www.travel.state.gov/reciprocity/index.htm](http://www.travel.state.gov/reciprocity/index.htm).
- ◆ **Form OF-156 Non-Immigrant Visa Application:** This page will take you directly to a PDF form generator. Follow the instructions to complete Form OF-156. Visit [www.travel.state.gov/acrobatof156.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/acrobatof156.html).

## Strategic Tools: PROCEDURAL CHECKLIST

The key to this process starts with TIME. You can probably never have enough of it. The first rule of immigration is to start early and document everything. How early? The process should begin when the artist is being contracted. The following check-off list is offered as the optimum guide.

### Getting Started

- Establish between artist, manager and presenter who will be the petitioner.
- Identify expertise, especially an immigration attorney, you can use if your petition and application run amok.

### Preparing Form I-129 Petition to the INS

- Collect and compile all personnel data information from artist.
- Request advisory letters from corresponding labor unions and non-labor organizations.
- Compile all information and documentation in support of the appropriate visa category.
- Prepare Form I-129.
- Calculate and write check to accompany petition.
- File completed I-129 petition with your designated INS Service Center.

### Preparing Artist for Visa Application with Consulate

- Send cover letter and press kit to visa office at the U.S. Consulate of jurisdiction.
- Research U. S. Department of State website for hours, fees and procedures for the specific country of jurisdiction.
- Send letter to artist outlining procedures for visa application, including contact information, hours, addresses and fees.
- Forward I-797 approval notice to artist.
- Send fax to U.S. Consulate reminding them that artist will make an application.