

All About DOJ Recognition and Accreditation

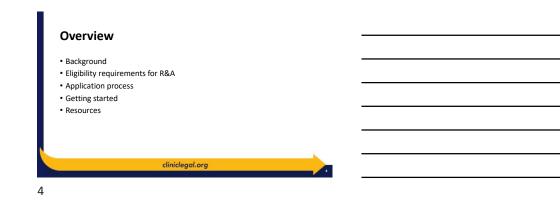
March 8, 2022



CLINIC's Mission Statement

Embracing the Gospel value of welcoming the stranger, CLINIC promotes the dignity and protects the rights of immigrants in partnership with a dedicated network of Catholic and community legal immigration programs.





What is DOJ R&A?

 The recognition and accreditation program permits recognized organizations and their non-attorney accredited representatives to represent clients in immigration proceedings.

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• 8 CFR §1292.11 and §1292.12

Why apply for DOJ R&A?

- Maintain or increase capacity
- Strengthen & professionalize program
- Ensure better client services
- Ensure quality of immigration advice
- Lower staffing costs
- Avoid Unauthorized Practice of Law

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Recognition & Accreditation Roster

<u>https://www.justice.gov/eoir/recognition-accreditation-roster-reports</u>

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- · Must be a non-profit religious, charitable, social service or similar organization
- Must provide services primarily to low-income and indigent clients within the U.S. • If org. charges fees, must have a written policy for persons unable to
- pay
- Must have Federal tax exempt status
- Must have at least 1 accredited rep
- Must have access to adequate knowledge, information, & experience on immigration law & procedure
- Must designate authorized officer to act on org's behalf

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Other Recognition Rules

- Recognition must be renewed every 6 years
- First time recognition is conditional, for 2 years
- Orgs without federal tax exempt status can be approved if they have applied for the status
- Extension of recognition to sub-offices
- Reporting, recordkeeping, and posting requirements
- Use application forms EOIR-31 and EOIR-31A, both mandatory

Extension of Recognition

- In lieu of filing separate application for each sub-office, can file single application for two or more offices
- For each sub-office, must attest that organization periodically conducts inspections, exercises supervision and control over accredited reps, and provides access to adequate legal resources
- OLAP may require separate recognition if distinct operations, management structure, or funding sources

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DOJ Accreditation: 2 Types

- Partial and Full
- Partial allows representation before DHS
- Full allows representation before DHS & EOIR
- · Can request change from partial to full at any time
- Qualifications for full accreditation are greater than partial and will be carefully scrutinized by OLAP

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Must be renewed every 3 years

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Eligibility for Accreditation

- Must be employee or volunteer of organization
- · Must have character and fitness to represent clients
- Must possess broad knowledge and adequate experience in immigration law and procedure
- · Cannot be attorney who is eligible to practice law in the U.S.
- Cannot have resigned while under disciplinary investigation or proceeding
- Cannot be subject to any order disbarring or restricting practice of law
- Cannot be convicted of a serious crime anywhere in the world

What is character and fitness?

• Includes, but not limited to examination of these factors:

- Criminal background
- Prior acts involving dishonesty, fraud, deceit, or misrepresentation
 Past history of neglecting professional, financial, or legal
- obligations

 Current immigration status that presents actual or perceived
- Current immigration status that presents actual or perceived conflict of interest

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The Recognition Application

- Brief cover letter with list of enclosures
- Form EOIR-31, <u>https://www.justice.gov/eoir/file/eoir31/download</u> (Jan. 2017 edition)
- Supporting documentation
- Note: Must also include an application for accreditation of at least one staff person

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Supporting Documentation for Recognition

- Agency mission statement, constitution, charter, by-laws, etc.
- IRS tax determination letter or alternative documentation of federal tax exempt status
- Organizational chart, technical legal support arrangement, staff resumes, training certificates, letters of recommendation, etc.
- List of law library materials
- Budget, fee schedules for all locations, list of membership dues, fee waiver or reduction policy/guidance
- Other documentation as needed

Technical Legal Support

- · For organizations that do not have an attorney on staff
- Demonstrates access to adequate knowledge, information, and experience in immigration law
- Include a letter from attorney or fully accredited representative stating:
 - Background and qualifications in immigration law
 - Knowledge of agency/staff
 - Will answer immigration law and procedure questions for agency
 - If any fees charged for this support
 - Good to recommend agency/staff as well
- CLINIC provides TLS for affiliates. More information: <u>https://cliniclegal.org/find-legal-help/affiliates/subscription</u>
 - cliniclegal.org

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Recognition Renewal

- Must demonstrate that you remain eligible
- Submit Form EOIR-31 with cover letter and updated documentation as needed
- Include Annual Summaries and fee schedules since last recognition date

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Extension of Recognition

- Submit Form EOIR-31 with cover letter and documentation of eligibility:
 - Current org chart
 - · List of law library resources for all offices
 - Current budget
 - Current fee schedule

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The Accreditation Application

- Brief cover letter with list of enclosures
- Form EOIR-31A, <u>https://www.justice.gov/eoir/file/eoir31A/download</u> (Jan. 2017 edition)
- Supporting documentation

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Supporting Documentation for Accreditation

- Resume describing immigration law experience with list of trainings and forms completed
- Copies of certificates, agendas, and other proof of trainings attended
 2 letters of recommendation addressing knowledge and experience in immigration law
- Character reference letter(s)
- For full accreditation: evidence of court skills training and experience

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Accreditation Renewal

- · Must demonstrate that you remain eligible
- Submit Form EOIR-31A with cover letter and documentation:
 Updated resume with list of trainings since last accred. date
 - Proof of trainings;
 - Copy of last letter of accred. approval
 - · Note: Letters of recommendation not required

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The R&A Application Process

- File Form EOIR-31 for agency recognition and Form EOIR-31A for each staff person seeking accreditation
- OLAP reviews application and may request additional information
- USCIS has 30 days to respond
- \bullet OLAP sends letter with decision in writing (separate decisions for R&A)
- Processing time varies

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Application Tips

- Include all supporting documentation in the initial application
- Don't include unnecessary information
- Describe trainings and experience in detail, but don't give hours
- Make sure information is consistent
- Respond to any OLAP requests promptly
- Seek help from FSC before applying, if you're an affiliate

After R&A: Reporting, **Recordkeeping**, & Posting

- Recognized organization has duty to promptly report any changes to OLAP (within 30 days) email $\underline{R-A-Info@usdoj.gov}$
- Recognized organization must compile fee schedules and annual summary and retain for 6 years from date record is created

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• Org. may be required by OLAP to post certain public notices regarding R&A

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What happens if program loses its only accredited rep?

- Must notify OLAP promptly
- Will be removed from roster and placed on inactive status for up to 2 years
- Can no longer file G-28s or provide legal representation unless you have an attorney
- · Must renew recognition by expiration date, even if on inactive status
- Must apply for new staff person to be accredited in order to keep recognition
- · Recommend having 2+ accredited reps on staff

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What's in the annual summary?

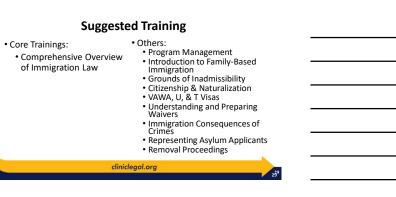
- Total number of clients served (includes client intakes; applications prepared and filed with USCIS; cases in which the organization's attorneys or accredited representatives appeared before the Immigration Courts or the Board; or referrals to attorneys or other organizations);
- Total number of clients served at no cost;
- General description of immigration legal services & other immigration-related services (e.g., educational or outreach events) provided;
- Statement regarding whether services were provided pro bono or clients were charged in accordance with fee schedule;
- Organization's policies/guidance on fee waivers and reduced fees;
- · List of the offices or locations where immigration legal services were provided;
- Fee schedule(s) for reporting period

I would like to get R&A: How do I get started?

- Get training in immigration law & hands-on experience
- Gather supporting documents, especially fee schedule, waiver/reduction policy, and budget
 Reach out to local USCIS office
- Reach out to local USCIS office
- Secure technical legal support if needed
- Gather and purchase law library resources

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Training Tips

- Ongoing training
- Mix of in-person, e-learning, and webinars recommended
- Keep good records of all trainings attended, especially certificates
- List trainings on resume
- List who gave the training, title, date, location, type of training
- Include \$ for ongoing training in annual budget



OIG Report

- Released September 2020
- Based on audit of R&A program
- Recommended changes
- <u>https://oig.justice.gov/sites/default/files/reports/20-109.pdf</u>

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- Resources
- R&A Toolkit and Step-by-Step Guide: <u>https://cliniclegal.org/R&A</u>
- EOIR R&A Website and new FAQs:
- http://www.justice.gov/eoir/recognition-and-accreditation-program
- CLINIC training calendar: <u>https://cliniclegal.org/training/calendar</u>
 IAN training calendar:
- https://www.immigrationadvocates.org/nonprofit/calendar/
- If you are a NAC or Coulter partner/affiliate and would like to receive R&A assistance, please contact Helen Chen, <u>hchen@cliniclegal.org</u>

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Advocacy Resources

- CLINIC comments on revised application forms: <u>https://cliniclegal.org/resources/doj-recognition-and-accreditation/revised-application-forms-recognition-and-accreditation</u>
- CLINIC policy brief: https://cliniclegal.org/resources/federal-administrative-advocacy/policy-brief-severely-under-resourced-ra-program

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- Subscription benefits and request for application:
- https://cliniclegal.org/find-legal-help/affiliates/subscription
- Annual dues for subscription: \$1,500
- Get in-depth assistance on your R&A application

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