



Ethiopia

Dossier Guidelines

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Dossier Guidelines: Introduction

Welcome to the Ethiopia adoption process!

Adoption is a complicated process that involves a lot of paper-work. We know that in the beginning it can feel very overwhelming but want you to be encouraged that with a little focus and perseverance you can and will complete the dossier.

Receiving this packet means it is time to begin gathering paperwork to be submitted to Ethiopia. Your completed paperwork, once it is all gathered and put together, is called a dossier. Once completed, this dossier is submitted to America World and then mailed to Ethiopia in order to be reviewed by The Ministry of Women's, Children's and Youth Affairs (MOWCYA) office. It should take roughly 4-6 months to finish your building your dossier.

Each family is assigned a Family Coordinator to help guide them smoothly through the adoption process. While America World (AWAA) has compiled guidelines that attempt to cover all information necessary for compiling a dossier, please recognize the importance and necessity of using your Family Coordinator as a resource. Your Family Coordinator will notify you of changes and updates in the adoption process, as well as provide tips and helpful hints along the way. Family Coordinators are competent, efficient and trained to ensure that families are kept abreast of Ethiopia's ever-changing policies.

The Dossier Guidelines are designed to help you understand the requirements for all of the documents that make up your dossier. Each dossier document is addressed individually in an effort to allow you to have a smooth paper-chasing process. We strongly encourage you to take advantage of this valuable resource and reference the Dossier Guidelines when gathering or creating any dossier document. We also encourage you to use the Dossier Tracking Sheet that was given to you in your very first email from your Family Coordinator. The tracking sheet will help you know which documents you have complete and which documents still need to be completed.

The information contained in this packet can be overwhelming. Take a moment to pray over this paperwork and remember that your Family Coordinator is available to answer your questions!

Overview of the Dossier Process

Below is an overview of the steps you will take in order to submit your final dossier to AWAA. We have also provided the page of the Dossier Guidelines you should reference to complete the appropriate step.

Note that these steps are in a general order, and it is common practice to work on several steps at the same time.

Paper-Chasing Step	Dossier Guidelines Page
1. Read through the Dossier Guideline and contact your Family Coordinator if you have any questions.	n/a
2. Fax or scan your Dossier Guidelines Agreement, Home Study Agency Agreement, and Post Adoption Agreement to your Family Coordinator.	4
3. Begin the home study process with your Social Worker	4
4. Start your online Hague training.	5
5. Begin collecting dossier documents and fax or scan them to your Family Coordinator to review.	6-14
6. Your Family Coordinator reviews the draft of your home study.	15
7. Finalize your home study.	15
8. Submit the I-600A application to USCIS.	16-17
9. Receive the USCIS approval (I-171H) and notarize a photocopy of it using a Notarized Copy of an Original form.	18
10. Certify dossier document based on the regulations for your state.	19-20
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12. Mail complete dossier and accompanying items to America World.	21

Step 1: Starting Your Home Study

You will work with a Social Worker, assigned through your home study agency, in order to complete your home study. A home study is a report that provides a comprehensive picture of your family's background and current family life, and reflects trainings and adoption education you will receive. AWAA encourages you to start the home study process immediately, as it can take several months to complete.

As part of the home study process you will meet with your Social Worker for at least four face-to-face visits. These visits are designed to be non-judgmental, educational, and beneficial to your preparation for bringing home a child through international adoption. The home study will eventually be submitted to United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). This report will also be included in your dossier.

Below is important information to be aware of before you begin your home study process:

- The home study must be completed by a licensed 501(c)3 non-profit child-placing agency in your permanent state of residence (you cannot use independent Social Workers).
- If your home study agency is **not** HAGUE accredited, America World will have to act as the primary provider and will need to provide your family with a letter to accompany your home study stating that we have provided supervision over your home study process. Please touch base with your family coordinator if this is applicable to you.
- You have already received the Home Study Agency Agreement and Post Adoption Agreement in the Adoption Overview Packet. You must submit these agreements to your Family Coordinator before your dossier can be submitted to Ethiopia.
- To help ensure that your Social Worker includes all the necessary information in your home study, you must give your Social Worker the Home Study Guidelines. A link to the Home Study Guidelines document was included in the first email your Family Coordinator sent you.
- Your Social Worker must complete a minimum of four face-to-face meetings with you and your spouse. While four visits are required, the individual interviews can occur on the same day. Therefore, it is possible to have four visits over the course of three days.
- In order for the home study to be reviewed, you need to submit copies of the following dossier documents to your Family Coordinator to review: employment/non-employment letters, physical exam forms (and doctor's letters if applicable), financial statement, and application letter. These documents are needed in order to confirm that the information in the home study is consistent with the information contained in these dossier documents. Therefore, you will work toward completing your home study and your dossier at the same time.
- The rough draft of your home study needs to be emailed to your Family Coordinator to review before it is can be finalized. Therefore, be sure your Social Worker has your Family Coordinator's contact information.
- You need to be sure your home study agency includes their license and non-profit letter when they provide you with a least three original copies of your finalized home study. The license and non-profit letters do not need to be notarized or certified.
- The home study contains an approval by your Social Worker for a specific gender, age range, and health status of a child(ren). You are encouraged to speak with your Social Worker about receiving as broad an approval as possible. Having a broad approval will reduce the likelihood of you needing to update your home study before travel. At minimum, you should be approved for a child who is

one year older than the child you are requesting, and a child who is healthy or has “minor medical needs.”

***NOTE:** The approval in your home study does not have any bearing on the referral matching process. AWAA will only use the request in your application letter when matching your family with a child. The approval in the home study is for Immigration purposes only.

Step 2: Hague Training

Required Online Training Course:

All families pursuing international adoption are required to complete ten hours of Hague compliant training as part of their home study process.

America World is partnering with Heart of the Matter Education to provide our families with a Training package that includes an interactive online training called ***“Because They Waited”*** plus an additional online course called ***“Transitions, Developmental Challenges or Just Regular Kid Stuff?”***

The cost of this training package is \$179 per couple. To register for this training, click [here](#). Please note you must enter America World as your placing agency.

After completion of the 10 hour online course, the HOTM will send each spouse a Certificate of Completion to the email address input at registration. You must submit a copy of each certificate to your Social Worker and to your Family Coordinator. The certificates do not need to be notarized or certified.

Step 3: Getting Started

The following points contain information that is very important for you to know before you begin gathering your dossier documents. **Carefully read through this section before moving on to Step 4.**

- The paper-chasing process takes roughly 4-6 months to complete
 - This is the only portion of the adoption process where you have control over how quickly it moves forward.
 - You are highly encouraged to create a plan to actively complete your dossier in 4-6 months.
 - At time of dossier submission, all dossier document must be less than one year old, with the exception of birth and marriage certificates.
- You are required to fax or scan copies of dossier documents to your Family Coordinator to review.
 - When possible, you should fax or scan copies of their dossier documents to your Family Coordinator before they are notarized.
 - Modifications to documents are easier and cheaper to make before documents are finalized.
 - You will keep all original dossier documents during your paper-chase. You will not mail your original dossier documents to your Family Coordinator until your full and final dossier is ready to submit.
- All dossier documents, except the birth and marriage certificates, must have an original signature. It is not sufficient for documents to have an electronic or stamped signature.
- **Notarization:** All dossier documents must be notarized. The only exceptions are the birth certificates and marriage license, which will need a raised seal in place of notarization.
 - Notaries ensure the authenticity of signatures. **Therefore, a notary must be present to witness the signature on any dossier document.**
 - When notarizing a document, notaries will sign their name on the document, date their signature, and place their notarial stamp or seal on the document.
 - The following guidelines must be followed when having documents notarized:
 - The signer's signature date must match the notary's signature date
 - The notary's stamp or seal must include the notary's name
 - The notary's commission should be valid for at least another year from the time the document is notarized, but preferably two years
 - Notary regulations differ from state to state. Therefore, it is advised that you use notaries who are familiar with their state's regulations.
 - Some states, such as VA, require additional verbiage to be included with the notary's signature.
 - Some states, such as NC, require notaries to use a separate form to attach to a document when notarizing it. This is often called an acknowledgement or jurat form.
 - A NC Notarial Acknowledgement form is included for NC families to use
 - Notaries are not permitted to notarize documents for anyone related to them.
- You are encouraged to initially focus your dossier building efforts on documents you have to request from outside sources.
 - See the Public Documents section ([page 7](#))
 - See the Dossier Documents Written by Outside Sources section ([pages 8-11](#))

Step 4: Collect Dossier Documents

Your next step is to begin gathering your dossier documents! There are three types of dossier documents: public documents, documents you will obtain from outside sources, and documents that your family will write. Below is detailed information on what needs to be included in each of your documents and how to go about obtaining or writing them.

Public Documents

1. Birth Certificates

- Both spouses need to obtain newly issued birth certificates that are less than 5 years old to include in the dossier.
 - Birth certificates for other adults or children in the home do not need to be submitted in the dossier.
 - You should request a long form when ordering your birth certificates, if given the option.
 - This must have a raised seal.
- You are highly encouraged to order your birth certificates through Vital Chek (www.vitalchek.com). You can also order certificates directly through the state in which you were born.
- If you or your spouse were born on a U.S. military installation base in another country you need to request a FS-240 form from the U.S. State Department (visit the State Department's website for more information).
- If you or your spouse were born a citizen of another country you need to make a copy of your original birth certificate and passport, and notarize both photocopies using a Notarized Copy of an Original form.
 - More information on the Notarized Copy of an Original form can be found on [page 13](#).

2. Marriage Certificate

- You need to obtain a newly issued marriage certificate that is less than 5 years old to submit in your dossier.
- You are highly encouraged to order your marriage certificates through Vital Chek (www.vitalchek.com). You can also order the certificate directly through the state where you were married.
- This must have a raised seal.

3. Divorce Decree

- If either spouse has been divorced, you must obtain a divorce decree that is less than 5 years old to submit in your dossier.
- If either spouse had a marriage that ended due to the death of a spouse, a death certificate that is less than 5 years old needs to be obtained to submit in your dossier.
- This must have a raised seal.

4. Passports

- Both spouses need to make a photocopy of your passports. The photocopies should include the main page (with the photo and passport number) and the signature page.
 - Be sure the passports are signed before making photocopies of them.
 - Both passports should include the individual's full legal name to match the driver's license and BC.
- New passports must be ordered if you do not have a passport or if it will expire within the next six months.
 - For more information on passports, go to the US State Department's webpage: <http://www.state.gov/travel/>
 - You must keep your passports valid throughout the entire adoption process.
- If the wife's maiden name appears on the passport she will be required to have a Name Addendum completed (refer to the above website for instructions).

5. Name Changes (other than marriage)

- If a legal name change has occurred for a reason other than marriage, an official copy of the Certificate of Name Change needs to be included in the dossier.

- The Certificate of Name change should be less than 5 years old and have a raised seal.

Dossier Documents Written by Outside Sources

6. Physical Exam Forms

- Physical exams are required for any person living in the home who is 18 years of age or older.
- The “Date of Exam” listed on this document needs to be less than 12 months old at the time of dossier submission.
- The physical exam form must be signed by an MD or DO.
 - Nurses, nurse practitioners, or doctor assistants may conduct the exam, **but they may not sign the form.**
 - A relative is not allowed to complete the physical exam form or doctor’s letter.
- Over the counter medications do not need to be referenced on the exam form.
- Before leaving the doctor’s office, ensure that every field is filled out on the form. Every test and field on the form must be filled in or circled yes/no, positive/negative, normal/abnormal.
- If the doctor makes a mistake on any part of the exam form, the form will need to be filled out again. White-out is not acceptable on any dossier document.
- The doctor’s signature must be an original signature. A stamp or electronic signature is not acceptable.
- Physical exam forms must be notarized. It is advised that you call ahead to confirm that a notary is available and one whose commission does not expire within the year. If a notary is not available, you will need to arrange for a notary to travel to the doctor’s office.

7. Doctor’s Letters (if applicable)

- A doctor (MD or DO) must write a letter of explanation if anything is circled “yes,” “abnormal,” or “positive” on the physical exam form.
- The letter must be typed on the doctor’s letterhead.
- Each medication, condition, and/or surgery can be addressed in a single letter.
- The doctor who performs the physical does not have to be the doctor who writes the letter.
 - If the same doctor who signs the exam form signs the doctor’s letter, the letter does not need to be notarized. In this case, only the exam form needs to be notarized.
 - If a doctor other than the doctor who signed the exam form signs the doctor’s letter, the letter must be notarized. In this case, both the exam form and letter need to be notarized.
- The letter does not necessarily need to be written by the doctor who prescribed the medication, diagnosed the condition, or performed the surgery.
- The letter should explain all medical terminology in laymen’s terms and avoid using medical abbreviations.
- For medications, the doctor should address the following:
 - Name of the medication
 - Dose (amount and frequency)
 - Reason for prescribing the medication
 - Side effects, if applicable
 - When the medication was prescribed
 - Plans for continued use of the medication
- For medical conditions, the doctor should address the following:
 - Name of condition
 - When the condition was diagnosed
 - Explanation (in laymen’s terms) of the condition
 - How/if the condition affects the prospective parent’s daily life
 - Doctor’s assessment of the condition/future prognosis
- For surgeries, the doctor should address the following:
 - Name of the surgery

- o When the surgery took place
- o Description of why the surgery was needed
- o Assessment of the recovery from the surgery
- All letters must include statements regarding your overall health and ability to care for an adopted child.
- The doctor's signature must be an original signature. A stamp or electronic signature is not acceptable.
- See [Appendix A](#) for guidelines on how to write the doctor's letter. You are welcome to give this guideline to your doctor to use.

8. Police Reports

- Police reports should be original documents issued from a local or state police or sheriff's station that meet the following guidelines:
 - o The report should be on police/sheriff's letterhead
 - o The report should include your name and a statement regarding your criminal history
 - o The report should have an original signature from a police staff member
- In some states, Social Workers are able to obtain additional original copies of police reports that can be used in your dossier. Therefore you should first ask your Social Worker if this is the case for your state.
- If the home study agency does not provide the police report, you should visit your local police station and request a criminal background clearance.
 - o Some offices refer to the police clearance as a letter or certificate of good standing, or a record check.
- Police reports are required in the dossier for any person living in the home who is 18 years or older.
- Each person who is 18 years or older is required to have an individual police clearance letter. Reports may not be combined into one letter for multiple household members.
- We recommend you call ahead to ensure a notary is available in the office to notarize your reports and that the notary has a commission that is valid for at least a year.
- In the case where any person in the household has a criminal record or any involvement with the law a letter of explanation/repentance will need to be written, even if:
 - o The incident does not appear on the police report.
 - o The incident is minor.
 - o The incident was expunged, dismissed, etc. from a person's record.

9. Letter of Explanation/Repentance (if applicable)

- One letter of explanation/repentance can be used to explain multiple offenses.
- If you and your spouse have a record of any kind, each person needs to write their own letter of explanation/repentance.
- This letter should clearly state the following:
 - o An explanation of why/how the incident(s) occurred
 - o The date of the incident(s)
 - o What the charge(s)/violation(s) were
 - o The resulting consequences (ticket, fine, jail time, probation, etc.)
 - o A summary of the lessons you learned from the incident(s).
 - o Statements of repentance and a promise that such incidents will not happen again in the future.
 - o Penalty of Perjury Statement must be included: "I declare and affirm under penalty of perjury that the statements made herein are true and correct to the best of my knowledge, information and belief."
- The letter needs to be notarized.
- See [Appendix A](#) for guidelines on how to write a letter of explanation/repentance

10. Letters of Reference (3)

- A total of three letters of reference are needed for the dossier, from three different references.
- Letters can be written by friends, relatives, church members or other qualified sources.

- Letters must be addressed to The Ministry of Women’s, Children’s and Youth Affairs
- Letters should be limited to one page in length.
- Individuals writing the recommendation letters should send the letter directly to you to include in your dossier. Do not mail letters of reference directly to AWAA.
- Letters should be typed and not handwritten.
- Letters must be notarized.
- Letters must address the following points:
 - Description of the relationship the writer has with your family
 - Assessment of your family’s character
 - Description of your marriage, potential stability
 - Assessment of your family’s ability to parent an adopted child
 - Overall recommendation of your family.
- See [Appendix A](#) for guidelines on how to write a letter of reference. You are welcome to give this guideline to your references to use.

11. Employment Verification Letters

- Each spouse must include an employment verification or non-employment letter. Employment letters can not be combined.
- Employment letters must be written on company letterhead by your direct supervisor or issued by your company’s Human Resources Department.
 - If the address on the letterhead is in a different state than the office where you work, the letter should include the address of your local office.
 - The letter must be notarized in the state where it is signed.
- If either spouse is self-employed or owns their own business, you must have your employment verification letter written by a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) on the CPA’s letterhead.
- Employment verification letters should be addressed *To Whom It May Concern* and must address the following points:
 - Position/title
 - Length of employment
 - Annual income (hourly/bi-weekly/or monthly wages are not sufficient)
 - The prospect of continual employment. Examples include:
 - “Barring any unforeseen circumstances, his/her employment is likely to continue.”
 - “I am not aware of any performance or other issues that would jeopardize his/her continued employment.”
 - “Probability of continued employment is based on economy/work performance.”
 - “The corporation does not allow any statements to be made on the prospect of continual employment.”
 - See [Appendix A](#) for guidelines on how to write an employment letter. You are welcome to give this guideline to your employer to use.
- If either spouse is not employed, a letter of non-employment will need to be written. The letter should contain the following points:
 - Why you are currently unemployed
 - Educational background and employment history.
 - Examples of how you spend your time, including responsibilities, activities, hobbies or interests, etc.
 - A statement that your spouse’s income is sufficient to meet the family’s financial needs.
 - A statement that you are willing to seek employment if the need arose.
 - See [Appendix A](#) for guidelines on how to write a non-employment letter.
- Employment letters must be notarized.

12. Agency Commitment to Post Adoption Services

- A link to this document was given to you in the first email you received from your Family Coordinator.
- This document must be signed by your home study agency’s director.
- This document must be notarized.

- The document includes two blank fields that should be filled in by the home study agency.
 - o The first blank field in the document should contain the name of the home study agency.
 - o The second blank field in the document should contain your family's name.

13. Agency Recommendation

- The Agency Recommendation is a document that is created by America World on behalf of your family.
- This document will be mailed to families who reside in **NC, ND, GA, or IN**, as families in these states must have them in order to complete the certification process (see [page 18](#) for more information on the certification process).
- The Agency Recommendation for all other families will be held at America World and will be added to their dossier when it arrives at America World's office.

14. Application Letter

- The application letter should be one page in length.
- The letter should have a heading with your family's name and current address.
- Address the letter to the Ministry of Women's, Children's and Youth Affairs (MOWCYA).
- The letter should be written in your original words in a respectful tone.
- The letter should include the following:
 - A brief introduction to your family (hobbies, names of biological or adoption children, length/strength of marriage, etc.)
 - Motivation for adoption, including the reason Ethiopia specifically was chosen. Avoid mentioning the plight of the orphan.
 - A clear request to adopt an Ethiopian child including desired sex, age, and health of the child or children. Please note the minimum age request accepted is 0-12 months.
 - A clear promise to comply with MOWCYA's required 3, 6, and 12 month post adoption visits, as well as to submit an annual self report on each child until he/she reaches 18 years of age.
 - A promise not to abandon, abuse, or neglect the child and that the child will enjoy the same rights as birth children. The specific words must be used in the letter.
 - A statement promising to provide proper medical attention and educational opportunities for the adopted child.
- Each spouse must personally sign and date the letter.
- The application letter must be notarized.
- See [Appendix A](#) for guidelines on how to write an application letter

15. Financial Statement

- Every field in the financial statement should be filled in. Write "N/A" or place a dash (--) in the blank if a field is not applicable to you.
- In the Annual Income field, record each spouse's gross annual income as verified in their employment letters.
 - The Annual income recorded on the financial statement must match exactly with the income verified in the employment letters. Therefore, wait to fill in the Annual Income fields until your employment letters have been finalized.
- If either spouse has a source of income other than their primary job, record that income in the "Other annual income" field.
 - Any other annual income greater than \$5,000 must be verified through an employment letter.
 - See [Appendix A](#) for guidelines on how to write an employment letter for other annual income.
- Under "Real Estate" place the estimated **value** of the home, not what has been paid on the house.
- Personal Property is any property owned, other than real estate or vehicles (ex: clothing, furniture, electronics, jewelry, etc.)
- For "Total Owed" under "Home Mortgage", write down the remaining balance due. If your home is rented:
 - White-out "Mortgage" under Home Mortgage and write "Rent"
 - In the Monthly Payment column record your monthly rent. In the Total Owed column multiply the monthly payment by 12 and record that amount.
- Your Net Worth is calculated by subtracting your Total Liabilities from your Total Assets.
- If either spouse has a bankruptcy in their past, a letter of explanation needs to be submitted in the dossier. See [Appendix A](#) for guidelines on how to write a bankruptcy letter.
- If any mistakes are made on the financial statement, please print and use a new form. There should not be any mark outs or white out (other than to change "Mortgage" to "Rent") on the final financial statement.
- The financial statement must be notarized.

16. Proof of Medical Insurance

- Photocopies of two items are needed as proof of your medical insurance:
 - Photocopies of your medical insurance cards
 - Photocopies of the text from your medical insurance policy that confirms an adopted child will be covered by your policy OR a letter from your provider or employer that confirms an adopted child will be covered by your policy.
- If you and your spouse have different insurance plans, you should find these two items using the insurance policy under which your adopted child will be covered.
- Notarize the photocopies of your insurance cards and your policy text/letter using one Notarized Copy of an Original (NCO) form.
 - Either spouse, regardless of who the policy belongs to, can sign the top section of the NCO.
 - The bottom section of the NCO will be filled out by a notary. Notaries only need to sign and place their notarial stamp or seal on the NCO. Notaries do not need to also sign or put their stamp or seal on the photocopies.

17. Proof of Life Insurance

- Make a photocopy of the text from your policy that includes the following pieces of information:
 - Name of your life insurance provider—must be on letterhead
 - Your name
 - Your policy number
 - The face amount of your policy
- If you are unable to find this information in your policy text, you can request a letter from your employer or provider verifying the same four points listed above.
- Notarize the photocopies of your policy text or letter using one Notarized Copy of an Original (NCO) form.
 - Either spouse, regardless of who the policy belongs to, can sign the top section of the NCO.
 - The bottom section of the NCO will be filled out by a notary. Notaries only need to sign and place their notarial stamp or seal on the NCO. Notaries do not need to also sign or put their stamp or seal on the photocopies.

18. Power of Attorney

- The Power of Attorney allows America World staff in Ethiopia to work on behalf of your family in matters pertaining to your adoption. This document had already been created for you.
- Both spouses will need to sign and date the Power of Attorney in the presence of a notary.
- The Power of Attorney, after being notarized, also needs to be state certified. See [pages 18-19](#) of the Dossier Guidelines for more information on certifying documents.

19. Dossier Cover Sheet

- The Dossier Cover Sheet attests that all the documents found listed on the sheet are true and authentic documents that have not been altered.
- Although your dossier documents will be individually notarized, the Dossier Cover Sheet also needs to be notarized and will serve as a second notarization for the individual documents by being under this cover sheet.
- Both spouses will need to sign and date the Dossier Cover Sheet in the presence of a notary.
- The Dossier Cover Sheet, after being notarized, also needs to be state certified. See [pages 18-19](#) for more information on the certification process.

***NOTE:** Due to each state having individual regulations, the U.S. Department of State cannot guarantee this cover sheet will be certified by your state's Secretary of State. See [Appendix B](#) of the Dossier Guidelines for more information.

20. Family Photo Pages

- Photo pages should include photos that are less than a year old.
- The photos should be assembled on no more than four pages of 8 ½" x 11" paper.
 - You can also use digital photos printed in color on photo paper.
- Photos can only be placed on the front of the page (front-and-back pages are not acceptable).
- Your family's name and address must be at the top of every photo page.
- Decorations, such as stickers, are welcome as long as they do not stick out/are not raised.
- Your family photo pages should include the following types of photographs:
 - Two formal photos
 - Formal photos are full-faced photos that include each person residing in the home. Photos do not have to be taken professionally.
 - Formals photos should have a "posed" appearance.
 - Formal photos should be taken on two different occasions.
 - Four family life photos
 - Family life photos should reflect activities you enjoy together as a family and are intended to reflect a candid, comfortable viewpoint of your family.
 - Each family life photo must include at least one or more members your immediate family. Extended family, friends and pets may also be included.
 - One photo of the outside of your home
 - The photo of the outside of your home should not include any people.
 - This photo should be far enough away from your house to encompass the entire home or property owned/rented.
 - One photo of the inside of your home
 - You should choose a room where your family spends the most time together.
 - Three walls, or as much of the room as possible, should be seen in the photograph.
- You must include captions for each photo with the following information:
 - Names of people and your relation to them
 - Where the photo was taken
 - The date the photo was taken

21. Passport Photos

- Each spouse will need 2 small passport photos taken (2 inch x 2 inch) for a total of 4 pictures.
- The passport photos must be taken at a passport photo location.
- These passport photos do not need to match the photos on your actual passports.

Step 5: Review of the Home Study Draft

If your Social Worker has any questions about your home study, s/he is encouraged to contact your Family Coordinator directly. ***It is very important that you send your social worker the home study Guidelines prior to the home study report being completed.**

Your Social Worker will email a draft of your home study to your Family Coordinator to review. Your Family Coordinator will review and eventually approve your home study once it meets all of AWAA's requirements.

Social Workers will ensure that home studies meet all the local, state, and USCIS criteria. Family Coordinators review the home study to ensure that it adheres to all the standards set by America World and MOWCYA. Together, both entities will ensure that your home study will pass the scrutiny of all the organizations which will be receiving its finalized version.

Step 6: Finalizing Your Home Study

Once necessary revisions have been made to the home study, you should have at least three notarized and original copies from the Social Worker for the following purposes:

- One to use in your dossier
- One to send to USCIS with your I-600A application
- One for your personal records

It is important that you clarify with your Social Worker if you are responsible for submitting a notarized copy of the home study to USCIS or if your agency will do that on your behalf.

***NOTE:** The states of Nevada and Colorado have a policy prohibiting home study agencies from issuing notarized copies of home studies to families. Social Workers in these states will mail the home study copies directly to America World and USCIS on your behalf.

Step 7: Submitting the I-600A Application to USCIS

The I-600A is the application submitted to United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) in order to receive approval to adopt internationally and for your child to obtain citizenship. The approval letter you receive after USCIS processes your I-600A application is called the I-171H. The I-171H is one of the last documents you will include in your dossier.

As soon as you have your finalized home study, you should submit your I-600A application to USCIS following the steps below:

- Fill out the I-600A form. Only one I-600A form needed for your family. The I-600A form and instructions were attached to your family’s initial “Welcome to the Program” email.
 - Part 1: Answer questions 1-24 using you and your spouse’s personal information.
 - Part 2:
 - Question 1: Choose according to your specific situation.
 - Question 2: Select option B.
 - Question 3:
 - A: America World Adoption
 - B: Your family coordinators name
 - C: 6723 Whittier Ave. Suite 202., McLean, VA 22101
 - D: 800-429-3369 E: 888-466-8922 F: Family Coordinators Email
 - Part 3:
 - Question 1: Yes
 - Question 2: - Unknown; - Unknown; - Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
 - Question 3: Yes
 - Question 4: N/A
 - Question 5: Ethiopia
 - Question 6: USCIS office located at: n/a; The US Embassy or consulate located at: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
 - Question 7 & 8: Check yes or no. If yes, write the number of children you are requesting to adopt. You can check yes even if you are requesting one or multiple children.
 - Part 4: Leave section blank unless applicable.
 - Part 5-8: Fill in as applicable, sign and date.
 - Part 9-10: Leave completely blank.
- In addition to the I-600A form, you will need to send USCIS the following:
 - Cover letter that includes:
 - The names and dates of birth of all individuals who will need to be fingerprinted (any person in your home who is 18 years or older)
 - a list of all documents included in your application packet
 - A photocopy of your birth certificate and your spouse’s birth certificate
 - Non US citizens should submit a photocopy of their passport and certificate of naturalization, certificate of citizenship, or FS-240.
 - A photocopy of your marriage license
 - A photocopy of your divorce decree(s) and/or death certificate, if applicable
 - If anyone in your household has a criminal record or any involvement with the law (no matter how minor the incident or if the incident was expunged), include a certified copy of the court disposition and a signed, written statement giving details about the incident.
 - An original, notarized copy of your final home study
 - A photocopy of your home study’s and social worker’s licenses (if the license information is not included in the body of the home study)

- **If your home study agency is NOT HAGUE accredited:** you must submit a letter from America World that serves as an approval/supervision letter from a HAGUE accredited agency. Please check with your family coordinator to get this letter.
- If there is an additional adult (anyone 18 years or older) living in your home other than you and your spouse, you will also need to submit the I-600A Supplement 1 form
 - One I-600A Supplement 1 form is needed for each additional adult living in the home
 - I-600A Supplement 1 requires the adult living in the home to physically sign the form.
 - There are no additional fees associated with the I-600A Supplement 1 form, although the fingerprinting fee must be paid separately from the filing fee.
- Include a check or money order made out to the US Department of Homeland Security:
 - The filing fee is \$720 application fee and the fingerprinting fee is \$85 per person
 - The filing fee and fingerprinting fee can be paid in the same check
 - For example:
 - The total fee for households with only two adults (the adoptive parents) is \$890 (\$720 + \$85 + \$85)
 - Households with an additional adult in the home will submit two checks. One check for the filing fee (\$720) and a separate check for the fingerprinting fee for three adults (\$255)
- Where to File:
 - For USPS Deliveries:
 - USCIS
 - P.O. Box 660088
 - Dallas, TX 75266
 - For Express Mail & Courier Deliveries:
 - USCIS
 - ATTN: Adoption
 - 2501 S. State Hwy. 121 Business,
 - Suite 400
 - Lewisville, TX 75067

After submitting the full I-600A application to USCIS, you will receive in the mail a fingerprinting appointment for everyone in the household over 18 years old. After being fingerprinted you should receive your I-171H in the mail a few weeks later.

USCIS can take up to 90 days to process an I-600A application and issue the I-171H. Therefore, it is important that you work toward completing your home study in a timely manner in order to be able to submit the I-600A as quickly as you are able.

NOTE: During the time that USCIS is processing your I-600A application you are encouraged to finish whatever dossier documents you have not yet completed. This will allow you to submit your dossier to AWAA as soon as you receive your I-171H in the mail.

If USCIS has any questions, needs additional information, or has any issue processing your I600A application they may issue a Request for Evidence (RFE) to your family in the mail. If you receive a RFE please contact your family coordinator immediately.

Step 8: USCIS Approval (I-171H)

Although the I-171H appears to look like a simple document, it is one of the most important documents you will receive. This is because the I-171H allows for international children to be brought into the United States.

The I-171H is a two page document. At the top of the first page the document reads “Notice of Favorable Determination Concerning Application for Advance Processing of Orphan Petition.” The first page also includes the date your I-171H will expire and the approval from your home study. The second page notes the dates your fingerprints will expire. The I-171H is valid for 18 months and your fingerprints are valid for 15 months.

You will keep your original I-171H for your personal records. For your dossier, you will make a photocopy of both pages of the I-171H and notarize the photocopy using a Notarized Copy of an Original form.

Step 9: Certify Dossier Documents

Certification refers to a means of authenticating a signature on a document that is recognized by an international body. You will need to certify some of your dossier documents. Which documents need to be certified and the process to certify them is dependent upon the state where you reside. All states require that some dossier documents be state certified through the Secretary of State. In some states, it is also necessary for families to first county-certify their dossier documents in order to then state certify them. It is important to note the term certification is the same as the term authentication and they are often used interchangeably.

When documents are certified, a certification page will be attached to your dossier document. Because you should not remove any fasteners (staples, grommets, etc.) that attach the certification page to your document, you will need to make photocopies of documents before certifying them.

If you live in Georgia, Indiana, North Carolina, North Dakota or Pennsylvania:

- Your documents will need to be certified differently than the rest of the states. For this reason, you should follow the steps in [Appendix B](#) for information on how to certify your dossier documents.

Families living in all other states:

- **You only need to certify their Dossier Cover Sheet and Power of Attorney.** If you live in a state *other* than GA, IN, NC, ND, and PA, you should follow the directions below for how to certify these two dossier documents:
- Most states will state certify the Dossier Cover Sheet and Power of Attorney once these documents have been appropriately notarized.
- **County Certification:** If you live in **AL, GA, HI, KY, MD, NY, OH or TN** you must **County** certify your Dossier Cover Sheet and Power of Attorney before having it **State** certified.
 - To county certify your Dossier Cover Sheet and Power of Attorney you need to take them to the county circuit court or courthouse where the notary is registered.
 - The court will attach a full or half sheet of paper to each document that serves as the county certification.
 - You should not remove any fasteners (staples, grommets, etc.) that attach the county certification page to your Dossier Cover Sheet and to your Power of Attorney.
 - If you do not reside in the states above, you skip county certification and send the notarized documents straight to your Secretary of State.
- To state certify your Dossier Cover Sheet and Power of Attorney, you will take or mail them to your state's Secretary of State.
 - The procedure for submitting documents for state certification varies from state to state. Therefore, you should visit your Secretary of State's website to learn the specific directions for your state. You will usually find this information in the Notary or Authentication section of their website.
 - Most Secretaries of State will certify the Dossier Cover Sheet without needing to also view the documents listed on it. However, this is not always the case.
 - You should visit your Secretary of State's website to learn if you need to also take or mail the individual documents listed on the Dossier Cover Sheet in order to certify the Dossier Cover Sheet.
 - If you do need to submit the documents listed on your Dossier Cover Sheet, it is still the case that only your Dossier Cover Sheet and Power of Attorney need to be state certified. The documents listed on the Dossier Cover Sheet, while they need to be seen, do not need to be state certified.
 - Families that live in Arizona, Washington or Illinois: If you walk-in your documents (versus mailing them), the SOS will likely require you to bring all documents listed on the Dossier Cover Sheet. Thus far, families who mail in their documents in these states have not had to show all documents listed on the Dossier Cover Sheet.
 - In addition to the items your Secretary of State includes in their directions to submit, you should be sure to submit a cover letter with the following pieces of information:

- Your name and contact information
- A list of the documents included in your package
- The fees you have included (fees for certification vary from state to state)
 - Because you are state certifying your Dossier Cover Sheet and Power of Attorney, you should pay for two certification.
- A statement that you are adopting from Ethiopia and your documents need to receive regular state certification.
 - There is a separate form of certification called an Apostille that Ethiopia will not accept.
- Some Secretaries of State will mail your certified documents back to you as part of their fee and some Secretaries of State require that you include a pre-paid envelop in your package in order for your documents to be returned to you. Be sure you follow the directions outlined by your Secretary of State.
- Your Dossier Cover Sheet and Power of Attorney will be returned to you with a certificate page attached to it. Do not remove any fasteners (staples, grommets, etc.) that attach the certification page to your Dossier Cover Sheet and to your Power of Attorney.



Step 10: Make Copies of Your Dossier Documents

You need to make at least two full sets of photocopies of your complete dossier (including photo pages and certifying pages). One set of photocopies you will mail to your Family Coordinator with your original dossier. The second set of photocopies you will keep for your records. Do not remove any staples or other fasteners from your original documents when making your photocopies.

Do not staple your photocopies together. Instead, you should place each set of photocopies of your dossier in the order they are listed on the Dossier Cover Sheet.

If you live in AZ, please make an additional set of photocopies of your original dossier and send it to your Social Worker.



Step 11: Send Dossier & Payments to America World

Once you have gathered all of your dossier documents, you are ready to mail your final dossier to America World! Please be sure to inform your Family Coordinator before you send your dossier to America World, and be sure to follow the instructions below to ensure smooth processing.

- Please send in your **Dossier Information Sheet** along with a check or confirmation of your online payment. If you send a check, please place it in an envelope and paperclip it to Dossier Information Sheet (found in your Welcome to the Program email).
- Place your original dossier in the following order:
 - Photo Pages
 - Passport Pages
 - Power Of Attorney ([certified](#))
 - Dossier Cover Sheet ([certified](#))
 - If you live in NC, ND, or GA you will also need to have all documents listed on the Dossier Cover Sheet certified.
 - Put the remaining documents in the order they are listed on the Dossier Cover Sheet.
 - All documents need to be originals with exception of your I-171H, proof of health insurance, and proof of life insurance (which are notarized under a Notarized Copy of an Original form).
 - Proof of health insurance should include an NCO, copy of your card, and copy of your policy information stating that an adopted child is an eligible dependent.
 - If you have any criminal history (even if it did not show up on your background check), you will need to add a notarized [repentance letter](#) in your dossier.
 - If you have been divorced, a [divorce decree](#) will need to be added to your dossier.
 - Your family will not need to worry about the [agency recommendation](#). Your FC will add it into your dossier once it arrives in our office.
 - If you reside in NC, GA, or ND: you will need to obtain this from your Family Coordinator and send it to the Secretary of State in Virginia to be certified.
 - In addition to the original dossier, you should have two complete sets of photocopies of your original dossier. One set you will mail with your original dossier and the other set you will keep for your personal records.
 - *Original Dossier*: mail to AWAA
 - *Photo Copy of Dossier #1*: mail to AWAA
 - *Photocopy of Dossier #2*: keep for your personal records
 - Lastly, place the following in an envelope and include it in your package:
 - Passport photos
 - Hague training certificates
 - Home study agency agreement
 - Post adoption agreement
 - Address your package to America World Adoption, 6723 Whittier Ave., McLean, VA 22101 to your Family Coordinator's attention.

Doctor's Letter Guidelines

Instructions:

1. Thoroughly review the doctor's letter section of the dossier guidelines on [pages 8-9](#).
2. Anything circled "yes" or "abnormal" on the physical form must be explained in a letter.
3. Explain all medical terminology in laymen's terms and avoid using medical abbreviations.
4. Each medication, condition, or surgery can be addressed in a single letter.
5. The letter must be typed and printed on doctor's letterhead.

Letter Template:

Date: 00/00/0000
To: The Ministry of Women's, Children's and Youth Affairs
Re: Full Name, D.O.B.
Address: Street, City, State, Zip

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is to address the medical history of my patient, Full Name and Date of Birth.

For medications, the doctor should address the following:

- Name of medication and when the patient began taking this medication. Include dosage (amount and frequency) and reason for taking this medication.
- Note if patient will be off medication in the near future.

For medical conditions, the doctor should address the following:

- Name of condition and month/year diagnosed. Diagnosis should be explained in laymen's terms, and any medical terminology should be defined.

For surgeries, the doctor should address the following:

- Name of the surgery and the month/year surgery took place. Describe why the surgery was needed.

Each letter should include the following:

- Future prognosis (see examples below):
 - "The medications will continue as needed (or list end date) and the patient does not report any adverse side effects."
 - "This condition does not affect the patient's daily ability to function and future prognosis for continued good health is excellent."
 - "There were no complications from the surgery and the patient had a complete recovery."
- Recommendation:
 - Address patient's overall health.
 - Address patient's ability to care for an adopted child.

Sincerely,

Doctor's signature

(The signature must be an original. Electronic or stamped signatures are not acceptable.)

Explanation/Repentance Letter Guidelines

Instructions:

1. Thoroughly review the explanation/repentance letter section of the dossier guidelines on [page 9](#).
2. This letter is needed to address incidents that are mentioned in your home study and/or police report.
3. If you and your spouse both have any kind of record, one letter is needed per person.
4. This letter must be notarized.

Letter Template:

Date: 00/00/0000
To: The Ministry of Women's, Children's and Youth Affairs
From: Full Name
Address: Street, City, State, Zip

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to address the incident(s) in my past and to indicate that I regret that these incident(s) occurred. I promise they are in my past and will never happen again.

For any charge or violation, follow the instructions below:

- Clearly state charge(s)/violation(s) including when (month/year) the incident(s) occurred. Mention the number of years it has been since the incident(s) occurred.
- Explain why the incident(s) occurred.
- State resulting consequences (ticket, fine, jail time, probation, etc.).
- Explain the lessons you learned from incident(s).
- Include statements of repentance.

For drug or alcohol related incidents that do not involve addiction, include the following in addition to the instructions above:

- The use of substance was experimental in nature
- Indicate that there has never been a history of addiction to any substance or a pattern of habitual use.

I regret these incident(s) and promise they are from my past. They will not happen again and do not affect my ability to care for my children. Thank you for your concern and understanding.

Penalty of Perjury Statement must be included: "I declare and affirm under penalty of perjury that the statements made herein are true and correct to the best of my knowledge, information and belief."

Sincerely,

Adoptive parent's signature
Name

Reference Letter Guidelines

Instructions:

1. Thoroughly review the reference letter section of the dossier guidelines on [pages 9-10](#).
2. Individuals writing the recommendation letters should send the letter directly to the family to include in their dossier.
3. The letter should not exceed one page in length.
4. This letter will need to be notarized.

Letter Template:

To: The Ministry of Women's, Children's and Youth Affairs
From: Full Name
Address: Street, City, State, Zip

To Whom It May Concern:

- Describe the relationship the writer has with the adoptive family
- Assess the adoptive family's character
- Describe the adoptive family's marriage, potential stability
- Assess the adoptive family's ability to parent an adopted child
- Provide an overall recommendation of the adoptive family

Sincerely,

Reference's signature(s)

Name(s)

Date

Employment Letter Guidelines

Instructions:

1. Thoroughly review the employment letter section of the dossier guidelines on [page 10](#).
2. If you are self-employed or own your own business, your employment letter should be written and signed by a Certified Public Accountant (CPA).
3. The letter must be notarized.

Letter Template:

Date: 00/00/0000
To: The Ministry of Women's, Children's and Youth Affairs
From: Full Name
Address: Street, City, State, Zip

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is to certify that Full Name has been employed with Company for ## years in the position of Position. His/her gross annual income for Current Calendar Year is \$\$. His/her prospect of continued employment with this company is good. (Or, this company does not allow for statements of continued employment to be made.)

Sincerely,

Signature of Official

Title

Non-Employment Letter Guidelines

Instructions:

1. Thoroughly review the non-employment letter section of the dossier guidelines on [page 10](#).
2. Only the parent who is not employed needs to sign the letter.
3. The letter should not exceed one page in length.
4. The letter must be notarized.

Letter Template:

Date: 00/00/0000
To: The Ministry of Women’s, Children’s and Youth Affairs
From: Full Name
Address: Street, City, State, Zip

To Whom It May Concern:

My spouse and I are hoping to adopt a child from Ethiopia. I am writing this letter to explain my reasons for unemployment.

Address the following information in your own words:

- Explain why you are currently unemployed and that your spouse’s income is sufficient to meet your family’s financial needs.
- Provide examples of how you spend your time including responsibilities, activities, hobbies or interests you pursue, etc.
- Mention educational background and employment history.
- State that you would be willing to seek employment if the need arose.

Sincerely,

Adoptive parent’s signature
Name

Other Annual Income Employment Letter Guidelines

Example: Rental Property Income

Instructions:

1. Thoroughly review the employment letter section of the dossier guidelines on [page 10](#).
2. If you are self-employed or own your own business, your employment letter should be written and signed by a Certified Public Accountant (CPA).
3. The letter must be notarized.

Letter Template:

Date: 00/00/0000
To: The Ministry of Women's, Children's and Youth Affairs
From: Full Name
Address: Street, City, State, Zip

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is to certify that Full Name has owned rental property at Address for ## years. His/her gross income for Current Calendar Year from this rental property is \$\$. His/her prospect of continued income from this property is good. (Or, our accounting firm does not allow for statements of continued employment to be made.)

Sincerely,

Signature of Official

Title

Application Letter Guidelines

Instructions:

1. Thoroughly review the application letter section of the dossier guidelines on [page 12](#).
2. Follow the guidelines below for the recommended content of each paragraph.
3. This letter must be notarized.

Letter Template:

To: The Ministry of Women’s, Children’s and Youth Affairs
From: Full Name
Full Name
Address: Street, City, State, Zip

To Whom It May Concern:

Paragraph 1

- Introduce your family and include details such as how long you have been married (if applicable), information on children (if applicable), hobbies, interests, and any other general background information.
- In a sincere statement explain your motivation for adoption as well as the reason(s) for specifically choosing to adopt from Ethiopia. (**Note:** Please refrain from statements that address the plight of the orphans.)

Paragraph 2

- Include a clear statement of intent to adopt a child of Ethiopian heritage, including desired gender, age range, and health of child. (**Example:** Male or female, 6-18 months, healthy or special needs) *The minimum age request accepted is 0-12 months.
- Include a clear promise to comply with the required 3, 6, and 12 month post adoption visits and to submit post adoption reports after completion of these visits, as well as submitting an annual self report on each child until he/she reaches 18 years of age.

Paragraph 3

- Provide a statement promising not to abandon, abuse, or neglect the adopted child and promise that the child will enjoy the same rights as a biological child.
- Make a promise to provide proper medical attention and educational opportunities for the adopted child.
- State your commitment to teach the adopted child about Ethiopian culture.
- Thank the Ministry of Women’s, Children’s and Youth Affairs for considering your family for adoption.

Sincerely,

Adoptive father’s signature
Name
Date

Adoptive mother’s signature
Name
Date

Bankruptcy Letter Guidelines

Instructions:

1. This explanation letter is required for families who have marked “yes” to bankruptcy on the financial statement.
2. Once a draft is approved by your Family Coordinator, this letter should be given to your Social Worker so s/he can include the explanation in your home study.
3. The letter should not exceed one page in length.
4. This letter will need to be notarized.

Letter Template:

To: The Ministry of Women’s, Children’s and Youth Affairs
From: Full Name
Address: Street, City, State, Zip

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter addresses the type of bankruptcy that name of people involved filed in month/year.

- Describe the circumstances and explain why the bankruptcy occurred.
- Included the lessons you learned from the experience.
- Give current examples of how your financial situation has improved since the bankruptcy and the behaviors you engage in to remain financially responsible.
- State specific actions being taken to avoid filing for bankruptcy in the future.
- Include a repentance statement with a promise to avoid bankruptcy in the future.

Sincerely,

Adoptive parent’s signature*

Name(s)

Date

*Only include the name and signature of both adoptive parents if the bankruptcy was filed for jointly. If both spouses have filed for bankruptcy on separate occasions, two letters of explanation will be required.



Appendix B

State Certification in North Carolina, North Dakota, Georgia, Indiana, Pennsylvania

- North Carolina
 - North Carolina Families should use the Dossier Cover Sheet labeled “Dossier Cover Sheet – North Carolina.” This document was attached to the original “Welcome to the Paper Chase” email.
 - North Carolina will not state certify the Dossier Cover Sheet alone, therefore families must have all documents listed on the cover sheet individually certified in the state from which they originated.
 - If your family has documents originating from another state, IE References, Birth Certificates, Marriage License, Agency Recommendation, you must mail these to that state’s Secretary of State to be certified.
- North Dakota
 - North Dakota will not state certify the Dossier Cover Sheet alone, therefore families must have all documents listed on the cover sheet individually certified in the state from which they originated.
 - If your family has documents originating from another state, IE References, Birth Certificates, Marriage License, Agency Recommendation, you must mail these to that state’s Secretary of State to be certified.
- Georgia
 - All documents in Georgia must be first county-certified, then state certified.
 - To county certify your documents, you need to take them to the county circuit court or courthouse where the notary is registered.
 - The court will attach a full or half sheet of paper to each document that serves as the county certification.
 - You should not remove any fasteners (staples, grommets, etc.) that attach the county certification page to your documents
 - Once county certified, all documents must then be state certified.
 - If your family has documents originating from another state, IE References, Birth Certificates, Marriage License, Agency Recommendation, you must mail these to that state’s Secretary of State to be certified.
- Indiana
 - Indiana will not state certify the Dossier Cover Sheet alone. Indiana requires that all documents listed on the cover sheet be seen by the Secretary of State in order for them to certify it. The Secretary of State does not need to certify every document, they just need to see each document listed and will only certify the Dossier Cover Sheet itself.
- Pennsylvania
 - Families in Pennsylvania must have the following documents state certified individually: Power of Attorney, Dossier Cover Sheet, Marriage Certificate, Birth Certificate, Divorce Decree (if applicable) and Agency Recommendation.
 - Any document that originates from a state other than Pennsylvania must also be state certified individually in the state it originated.
 - Families must use the Dossier Cover Sheet labeled “Dossier Cover Sheet - Pennsylvania” found on your original “Welcome to the Paper Chase” email and edit it; deleting any document that is being state certified individually.