

How to navigate BLS International for visa applications to Spain - Chicago

Location

The BLS appointments are located in the AON Building (200 E Randolph St, Chicago) on the 51st floor. Students should arrive promptly but if they arrive too early they will need to wait until a few minutes before their appointment to be admitted. Reception on the entry floor will print them a barcode ticket which will allow them to scan up to the BLS offices in the elevators. The student noted there were plenty of friendly staff pointing her in the right direction. Students should take care to enter the correct elevator bank, as some elevators only access odd or even floors or certain subsets of floors.

Once she arrived at the BLS office, the reception employees directed her to a waiting room and a BLS employee came around and did a document pre-check before she was called to her interview room. The interview took about 25 minutes and included a full document review and some verification questions. The interviewer did ask her to make a couple of small updates to her materials to make sure everything went smoothly at the consulate.

Documents and Application Materials

All the materials listed by the consulate's website are necessary, with one exception, it seems.

BLS does not use USPS, so even though the consulate website for Chicago instructs students to bring a prepaid self-addressed USPS envelope in order to have their materials returned, this will not be accepted by BLS. Instead, students should plan to purchase the courier envelope provided by BLS if they would like their visa materials returned via mail. This costs \$40 (\$35 for the envelope itself and \$5 for the required SMS tracking). The student confirmed the SMS tracking system does work and had already received a couple of updates on her application by the time we debriefed a few days after her BLS appointment. Students also receive a tracking number that can be entered on BLS' website.

Payment

BLS confirmed they accept cash, money order, debit card, and credit card. At their appointment, students should expect to pay the \$20 processing fee to BLS, the \$40 courier shipping fees (if getting their materials returned via mail), and submit their money order for \$160 (for US passport holders) made out to "Consulate of Spain" along with the rest of their materials.

Process

Students submit everything to BLS during their scheduled appointment. BLS takes the materials to the Chicago consulate for processing. Once finished, BLS picks up the materials from the consulate and returns them to the student (via mail or the student may opt to pick them up). Currently, the consulate is operating at about 5 weeks processing time. If students wish to expedite the processing occurring through BLS, they should discuss this with their interviewer at the time of the appointment. My student was told it is free and just requires an email to your BLS interviewer to make the request.

Appointment Availability

BLS understands that appointments are very limited. They are available on a first-come, first-serve basis. For students who are still in need of a visa appointment, they may opt to choose the Prime Time visa appointment at an additional \$70 cost. It allows them to be seen as early as 8:00am, and paying the fee gives them access to being seen first and potentially snag an appointment. If you have students desperate for an appointment, I encourage them to consider this option if possible.