

PGP Sponsorships Soon to Reopen

In January 2019, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) is expected to relaunch the online form where permanent residents and Canadian citizens can express interest to sponsor parents or grandparents (PGP) for permanent residence under the family class. The old lottery system for PGP sponsorships had been eliminated and will be replaced by a first-come, first served system. That is, IRCC will issue invitations to apply to those who have submitted their intent to sponsor based on the order that they were received, until the new annual quota of 20,000 applications had been reached.

The detailed guidelines for the revised PGP sponsorship application process have not been issued by IRCC as of this writing. Nonetheless, it is expected that as in the current system, the sponsors who have been invited to sponsor their parents or grandparents will be given 60 days within which to submit the complete sponsorship and permanent residence application packages to IRCC.

This change is a welcome departure from the old lottery system where prospective sponsors face the frustration and uncertainty of waiting year after year to be invited to apply, if they are not fortunate enough to be have been picked in previous lotteries.

Meanwhile, the increased quota of 20,000 for 2019 is a four-fold increase from the time that the PGP sponsorship program was reopened in 2014 with an annual intake limit of only 5,000. The annual quota was increased to 10,000 in 2016, then to 17,000 in 2018.

When the PGP sponsorship program was reopened but prior to the introduction of the lottery system, the quotas were usually met in a matter of days (i.e. the first few days of January). Thus, many applicants would even hire couriers to queue outside the CPC Mississauga office to be able to submit their complete sponsorship and permanent residence application packages for their parents or grandparents in a desperate effort to make the cut.

When the lottery system was introduced in 2016, other types of problems arose. For instance, even though IRCC initially invited 10,000 prospective sponsors, only a handful were able to submit the complete sponsorship application packages within the specified timeline (90 days which was later reduced to 60 days). Of those who submitted, many prospective sponsors failed to meet the minimum necessary income to qualify. Thus, IRCC had to pick further batches from the lottery pool who were invited to sponsor their parents or grandparents.

Hence, the introduction of further changes by IRCC to the 2019 reopening of the PGP sponsorship program.

The new PGP sponsorship system is expected to begin in early January 2019. As in the past years, the IRCC will reopen the parent-grandparent sponsorship program by allowing prospective sponsors to fill up an online form for this purpose. Completion of this form is not equivalent to an application but is only an expression of interest to sponsor and will form part of the pool of prospective applicants.

Unlike in the previous years however, where one's fate was left to chance, the timing of the invitation will now depend on when the sponsor completed the online form and how many applications IRCC is able to process at a time until it reaches the annual quota of 20,000.

According to IRCC, the increased quota is due to the continuing high demand for PGP sponsorships as well as the significantly reduced inventory in this class of applications which has "dropped from a peak of 167,000 people in 2011, to just under 26,000 people in June 2018."

It must also be noted that while those who will complete the form will be invited on a first come, first served basis, the sponsors or applicants who fail to qualify can still be refused or their applications returned.

Therefore, when completing the online form, the sponsor must provide complete and accurate information to avoid problems such as the possibility of being charged with misrepresentation. In early 2018, the online interest-to-sponsor form asked for detailed information, including the names, dates of birth, family size and incomes of prospective sponsors for the past three taxation years. This was meant to weed out prospective sponsors who are not qualified to sponsor due to lack of the minimum necessary income.

IRCC also clarified that one can only sponsor his/her own parents and grandparents. An invitation to apply received from IRCC cannot be used to sponsor the spouse' parents or grandparents. If one is a co-signer in his/her in-law's PR application, it is the spouse or partner who must have received an invitation to apply as a sponsor.

Overall, the new system appears more fair than the lottery system for PGP sponsorships imposed in the past years. However, it remains to be seen whether this will improve the current processing times and/or allow more sponsors to be reunited with their parents and grandparents at the soonest possible time.

The increased income requirement for sponsors and the higher likelihood that elderly relatives are deemed medically inadmissible due to a potential to cause an excessive demand on Canadian health and social services, still prove to be the biggest stumbling blocks for family reunification under the PGP sponsorship program.

Thus, if the Canadian government is truly serious about family reunification without any form of discrimination, the income and medical screening requirements must be reconsidered, if not totally eliminated. After all, empirical studies have shown that the positive impact of family support and unity go far beyond arbitrary economic indicators. The presence of parents and grandparents benefit families and societies in valuable but often intangible ways, such as wisdom gained from life experiences, among others. Thus, the Canadian government has to do a lot more to become truly inclusive and welcoming, especially for the elderly members of immigrant families.

Meanwhile, here's wishing everyone – children, parents and grandparents - a wonderful Christmas/holiday season and a blessed new year!

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