

SCNO AND ASSOCIATES



Apostille and International Document Guide

Apostille Facilitation | Authentication | Embassy Legalization

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What This Guide Covers

If you need a document accepted in another country, it likely needs to be apostilled or authenticated. This guide explains the difference, which process applies to your situation, what to prepare, and how SCNO and Associates coordinates the full process on your behalf.

Apostille vs. Authentication: Know the Difference

Apostille	Authentication
For Hague Convention member countries	For non-Hague Convention countries
Issued by the Secretary of State (state documents) or U.S. Department of State (federal documents)	Involves state certification, U.S. Department of State authentication, and embassy or consulate legalization
Single certificate attached to the document	Multi-step process coordinated by our partners
Examples: Italy, Spain, Mexico, Germany, France, Brazil, many more	Examples: countries not party to the 1961 Hague Apostille Convention

Not sure which applies to your country? Contact us before you prepare anything. We will confirm the correct process for your specific document and destination country.

State vs. Federal Apostille

This is one of the most common sources of confusion and rejection. The key rule:

1 State Documents

Apostilled by the Secretary of State in the state where the document was issued. A birth certificate from Illinois goes to the Illinois Secretary of State. A document from Texas goes to the Texas Secretary of State. We coordinate all 50 states.

2 Federal Documents

Apostilled by the U.S. Department of State in Washington, D.C. Federal documents include FBI background checks, federal court documents, naturalization certificates, IRS documents, and documents issued by federal agencies. We coordinate these through our Washington, D.C. partners.

True Copy Apostille: The Most Efficient Method

For many document types, you do not need to send original documents. Instead, we use a process called Copy Certification by Document Custodian.

1 You provide a photocopy of your original document

This copy remains in your possession throughout the process. You never mail originals.

2 You sign a Copy Certification by Document Custodian statement

This notarial form certifies that the photocopy is a true and accurate copy of the original document in your possession.

3 We notarize your signature on that statement

You must be physically present for this step. We verify your identity and witness your signature.

4 We submit the notarized document for apostille

The apostille is obtained for the notarized certification and the copy together. Expedited service is available for urgent requests.

Pre-Apostille Checklist: What to Prepare

Proper preparation significantly reduces the risk of rejection. Work through this checklist before contacting us, or bring your documents to your consultation and we will review them.

- **Identify the exact document type (birth certificate, power of attorney, diploma, corporate document, etc.)**
- **Confirm the destination country and whether it is a Hague or non-Hague country**

- **Confirm whether your document is state-issued, federally issued, or privately created and notarized**
- **Ensure the document is an original or certified copy issued by the appropriate authority (not a photocopy alone)**
- **Check that all signatures and seals on the document are original and not expired or outdated**
- **Confirm the document is in good physical condition with no tears, markings, or damage**
- **Do not write on, highlight, or annotate the document in any way**
- **Identify whether a notarization step is needed before apostille (most private documents require this)**
- **Confirm whether the receiving institution requires the document in English or in translation**
- **Allow adequate time: state processing is typically several business days; federal processing varies**

Common Reasons for Apostille Rejection

Understanding these prevents costly delays. We review all documents before submission to catch these issues in advance.

- Submitting a state document to the federal authority or vice versa
- Improper or missing notarization on documents that require it
- Expired, outdated, or recently reissued certificates that do not match current standards
- Writing, highlighting, staple holes, or damage on the document
- Incorrect document format for the destination country
- Missing required supporting forms (such as Form DS-4194 for federal submissions)
- Incorrect or missing payment
- Photocopies submitted without proper Copy Certification by Document Custodian

Document Types We Process

Personal Documents	Corporate Documents	Federal Documents
Birth, marriage, death certificates Diplomas and transcripts Powers of attorney Passport and ID documents Criminal history reports Adoption documents Employment and benefit letters Divorce certificates Social Security documents	Certificate of incorporation Certificate of good standing Articles of association Certificate of incumbency Certificate of origin Board resolutions Operating agreements ISO and quality certificates Tax residency Form 6166	FBI background checks Naturalization certificates Consular birth reports IRS tax documents FDA certificates DD214 discharge reports SSA benefit verification USDA and EPA documents

If your document type is not listed, contact us for a complimentary review. We confirm whether your document qualifies before you prepare anything.

Processing Timelines

Service	Standard Timeline	Notes
Document review and preparation	1 to 2 business days	We review before submission to prevent rejection
Illinois Secretary of State apostille	Varies by current volume	Expedited options may be available
Other state apostilles (via partner network)	Varies by state	We confirm timeline per state before proceeding
Federal apostille (Washington, D.C.)	Varies; can be 1 to 27 business days	Expedited federal service available
Authentication for non-Hague countries	Varies by embassy and country	We confirm timeline before proceeding

Always start early. Begin the apostille process well in advance of any deadline to accommodate potential delays. Contact us to confirm the estimated timeline for your specific document and destination before you proceed.

Book Your Appointment

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Illinois Notary Commission #1030093 | Valid through April 20, 2030 | E&O; Coverage \$100,000 | NNA Certified Signing Agent | NNA Background Screened

SCNO and Associates is not a law firm and does not provide legal advice. Apostille and authentication facilitation services assist clients with document preparation and submission coordination only. Processing times and acceptance requirements vary by country, state, and document type.