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COMPASS

Cross-Border Marriage Kit

FRA ↔ USA

CROSS-BORDER MARIAGE KIT

FRA – USA

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Overview

CATEGORY	FRANCE	USA
AUTHORITIES IN CHARGE	Town Hall (<i>Mairie</i>) –civil registrar	County Clerk or State Vital Records Office
COSTS	Civil ceremony is free	Marriage license fees vary: USD 25–100
PROCESSING TIMES	Publication of banns: 10 days minimum. Full process: ~3–6 weeks	License often issued same day; waiting period 0–5 days; total ~1–4 weeks
LANGUAGE REQUIREMENTS	All documents must be in French. Certified translation required.	All documents must be in English. Certified translation required.
APOSTILLE / LEGALIZATION	Apostille required for U.S. documents	Apostille required for French documents
IMMIGRATION EFFECT	Marriage may allow residence permit in France	Marriage may allow spouse to apply for Green Card

KEY INSIGHTS

- **France: uniform national system** → The *Code civil* applies everywhere. Rules on banns, documents, and timelines are the same in every *mairie*, giving clarity but little flexibility.
- **USA: State-specific rules** → Each State sets its own requirements (fees, waiting periods, witnesses). Couples must check the rules where they plan to marry.
- **Civil marriage only** → In both countries, only the civil act has legal effect. Religious ceremonies are optional but have no legal consequence unless preceded by the civil marriage.

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Legal Requirements

FRANCE

- Civil marriage only (religious ceremony optional, no legal effect).
- Publication of banns: minimum 10 days at *mairie*.
- At least one spouse must reside in the commune.

Required documents:

- Birth certificate (≤ 3 months old if French, ≤ 6 months if issued abroad).
- Proof of residence.
- Passports/IDs.
- *Certificat de coutume* and *certificat de célibat* for U.S. citizen.
- Translations: mandatory by sworn translator (*traducteur assermenté*).
- Apostille: required for all U.S. documents.
- Witnesses: 2–4 adults with ID.
- Parental consent: mandatory if under 18.

USA

- Civil marriage required; religious ceremonies optional but not legally binding without license.
- No federal law; each State sets its own rules.

Required documents:

- Birth certificate (apostilled if foreign).
- Passport/valid ID.
- Divorce decree/death certificate (if previously married).
- Waiting period: 0–5 days depending on State.
- Translations: certified translation required.
- Witnesses: generally 1–2 (varies by State).
- Minimum age: 18 (16–17 with parental/judicial consent).
- Apostille: required for French documents.

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Marrying in France (with a U.S. citizen)

DOCUMENTS

- Birth certificate (French spouse: ≤3 months; U.S. spouse: apostilled + translated).
- Passport/ID.
- Proof of residence in France.
- *Certificat de coutume* + *certificat de célibat* (from U.S. Embassy/Consulate).
- Divorce/death certificate if applicable.
- Apostille and sworn translations.

STEPS & TIMELINE

1. Collect documents (1–2 months).
2. Obtain apostilles + sworn translations (2–3 weeks).
3. Submit full file to *mairie* (at least 30 days before desired date).
4. Publication of banns (10 days).
5. Civil ceremony at Town Hall with 2–4 witnesses.
6. Issuance of French marriage certificate + *livret de famille*.

Marrying in the USA (with a French citizen)

DOCUMENTS

- Passport/valid ID.
- Birth certificate (French spouse: apostilled + translated).
- Divorce decree/death certificate if applicable.
- Certified translations for non-English documents.
- Proof of age (sometimes required).

STEPS & TIMELINE

1. Choose State of marriage; verify requirements.
2. Apply for marriage license at County Clerk.
3. Submit documents + pay fee (USD 25–100).
4. Wait period (0–5 days depending on State).
5. Ceremony before judge, justice, or authorized officiant, with witnesses.
6. Issuance of marriage certificate.
7. Request apostille for certificate (via Secretary of State).

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Recognition in the other country

French marriage recognized in USA

REQUIREMENT	HOW TO PROVIDE	WHERE	TIMING	NOTES
MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE	Obtain official French marriage certificate	From <i>mairie</i> where marriage was celebrated	Issued after ceremony	Must be recent (certified copy) for use abroad
APOSTILLE	Requests apostille from French authorities	Court of Appeal (France)	1–2 weeks	Confirms authenticity of the certificate under Hague Convention
CERTIFIED TRANSLATION	Translate into English	Sworn/certified translator	Few days	Must be accepted by U.S. immigration or civil office
SUBMISSION FOR IMMIGRATION	File with immigration application	USCIS (U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services)	Part of Green Card application	Forms + apostilled & translated certificate required
CIVIL USE (OTHER PURPOSES)	Present certificate + apostille	DMV, Social Security, or County Clerk	Variable	For name changes, benefits, and administrative uses
MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE	Obtain official French marriage certificate	From <i>mairie</i> where marriage was celebrated	Issued after ceremony	Must be recent (certified copy) for use abroad

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USA marriage recognized in France

REQUIREMENT	HOW TO PROVIDE	WHERE	TIMING	NOTES
U.S. MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE	Request certified copy	County Clerk / Vital Records Office	After marriage ceremony	Original certificate required
APOSTILLE	Requests apostille on U.S. certificate	Secretary of State (of issuing State)	1–3 weeks	Each State has its own procedure and fee
TRANSLATION INTO FRENCH	Certified translation by sworn translator	Sworn/certified translator	Few days	Mandatory for transcription in France
TRANSCRIPTION	Submit apostilled + translated certificate	French Consulate / Nantes central registry	1–3 months	Without transcription, marriage is not valid in French civil records
LIVRET DE FAMILLE	Issued after successful transcription	French Consulate / Nantes	Upon transcription	Necessary for legal recognition in France (e.g., name, children, etc.)
U.S. MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE	Request certified copy	County Clerk / Vital Records Office	After marriage ceremony	Original certificate required

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Special cases & red flags

- **Previous marriages:** divorce judgments/death certificates must be apostilled + translated.
- **Name discrepancies:** ensure consistency across all documents.
- **Validity windows:** French birth certificates valid only 3–6 months.
- **Residency issues:** at least one spouse must show proof of residence in commune (France).
- **Immigration risk:** sham marriages are prosecuted (France & USA).
- **State-specific quirks:** U.S. States vary in consent age, witness rules, or ceremony options.

Checklists

FRANCE

1. Birth certificate (valid).
2. Passport/ID.
3. Proof of residence.
4. Certificat de coutume.
5. Certificat de célibat.
6. Apostilles + sworn translations.
7. Witness IDs.
8. Submit file at mairie.
9. Publication of banns.
10. Civil ceremony.
11. Obtain certificate + *livret de famille*.

USA

1. Choose State of marriage.
2. Birth certificate (apostilled + translated if foreign).
3. Passport/ID.
4. Divorce/death certificate (if applicable).
5. Certified translations.
6. Apply for marriage license.
7. Pay fees.
8. Wait for period (if any).
9. Ceremony with officiant + witnesses.
10. Obtain marriage certificate.
11. Request apostille (if needed for France).

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Templates

This section provides **official resources and sample documents** commonly required for Franco–American marriages.

Use the hyperlinks below to access the official template or instruction page.

1. Translator's Certification of Accuracy

Official USCIS requirement for certified translations (wording and rule: 8 CFR 103.2(b)(3)).

 [USCIS Policy Manual — Evidence: Translation Requirements](#)

2. Affidavit / Certificate of No Impediment (France)

Official French procedure for capacity to marry / single status.

 [Service Public — Certificat de capacité à mariage](#)


3. Witness Information Sheet (USA)

Official U.S. guidance explaining witness requirements (example: NYC Clerk).

 [NYC Clerk — Marriage Ceremonies & Witness Info](#)

4. Cover Letter / Marriage File Submission (France)

English-language consular instructions to register (transcribe) a U.S. marriage in the French civil registry.

 [Consulate of France in Los Angeles — Registration of a marriage with the French Civil Registry](#)

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Official Sources

TOPIC	AUTHORITY / URL	NOTES
GENERAL MARRIAGE IN FRANCE	Service Public — Se marier en France	Official overview of civil marriage rules in France.
CERTIFICATE OF CAPACITY TO MARRY (FRANCE)	Service Public — Certificat de capacité à mariage	Required for French citizens marrying abroad.
RECOGNITION OF U.S. MARRIAGE IN FRANCE	Consulate of France in Los Angeles — Registration of a marriage	Procedure to transcribe a U.S. marriage certificate into the French civil registry.
U.S. FEDERAL GUIDANCE ON MARRIAGE DOCUMENTS	U.S. Department of State — Marriage	Explains U.S. recognition of foreign marriages and required documents.
MARRIAGE IN THE USA (GENERAL)	USA.gov	Federal portal with state links.
NEW YORK MARRIAGE PROCEDURE	NYC Clerk — Marriage License & Ceremonies	Example of local procedure in a major U.S. city.
CALIFORNIA MARRIAGE LICENSE (EXAMPLE STATE)	CDPH — Marriage	Example of state-level guidance (California).
U.S. APOSTILLE (HAGUE CONVENTION)	U.S. Department of State — Apostille	Apostille process for U.S. marriage certificates.
FRANCE APOSTILLE AUTHORITY	Service Public — Légalisation ou apostille	French Ministry of Justice explanation; Apostille is issued by Courts of Appeal.
CERTIFIED TRANSLATION REQUIREMENTS (USA)	USCIS Policy Manual — Translation Requirements	Mandatory translator's certification wording.
FRENCH CENTRAL CIVIL REGISTRY (NANTES)	MEAE — État civil et nationalité (SCEC Nantes)	Official directory of sworn translators in France.
USCIS TRANSLATION REQUIREMENT (WORDING)	USCIS Policy Manual — Evidence: Translation	Central office that records marriages of French citizens abroad.

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Glossary & Notes

TERM	DEFINITION / NOTES
APOSTILLE	An international certification under the Hague Convention (1961) that authenticates public documents (e.g., birth, marriage certificates) for use abroad. Required in both France and the U.S.
BANNS OF MARRIAGE	Public notice of intended marriage in France. Must be displayed at the town hall (mairie) of residence for a minimum of 10 days before the ceremony.
CERTIFICATE OF CAPACITY TO MARRY (CERTIFICAT DE CAPACITÉ À MARIAGE)	Issued by French consulates to French nationals marrying abroad. Confirms legal capacity under French law.
CIVIL MARRIAGE	The only legally recognized form of marriage in both France and the U.S. Religious ceremonies are optional but have no civil effect.
CONSULAR TRANSCRIPTION	The process of registering a foreign marriage in France. U.S. marriages must be transcribed through a French consulate or the SCEC (Nantes) before being valid in France.
GREEN CARD (PERMANENT RESIDENT CARD)	U.S. immigration document granting lawful permanent residence. A French spouse of a U.S. citizen may apply after marriage recognition.
LIVRET DE FAMILLE	Family record booklet issued by French authorities upon marriage transcription. Records details of marriage, children, and family events.
NO €MPEDIMENT CERTIFICATE / SINGLE STATUS AFFIDAVIT	Document confirming that a person is legally free to marry. In France: “Certificat de célibat” or “Certificat de non-opposition.” In the U.S.: usually an affidavit sworn before a notary or consular officer.

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TERM	DEFINITION / NOTES
SWORN TRANSLATOR (TRADUCTEUR ASSERMENTÉ)	Official translator registered with a French Court of Appeal, authorized to produce certified translations (traductions assermentées).
USCIS (U.S. CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES)	The U.S. authority in charge of immigration benefits, including Green Card petitions based on marriage.
VISA K-1 (FIANCÉ€ VISA)	U.S. visa for a foreign fiancé€ of a U.S. citizen, allowing entry for marriage within 90 days. Not applicable once already married abroad.
STATE VITAL RECORDS OFFICE (USA)	Each U.S. state maintains its own registry of births, marriages, and deaths. Marriage certificates must be obtained from the state where the marriage occurred.
SERVICE CENTRAL D'ÉTAT CIVIL (SCEC – NANTES)	The French authority centralizing civil status records for French nationals abroad. Handles transcription of U.S. marriages into the French system.
US DEPARTMENT OF STATE AUTHENTICATION OFFICE	Issues apostilles for U.S. federal documents. For state-issued documents, apostilles are provided by the Secretary of State of that state.
DUAL NATIONALITY	Situation where a person holds both French and U.S. nationality. Marriages are valid under both systems but may trigger dual obligations (e.g., taxes, military registration).

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Annexes

ANNEX	TITLE	FILE
1	Sample French Marriage Certificate (Acte de mariage)	Service-Public — Marriage certificate: request for full copy or extract.
2	Sample U.S. State Marriage Certificate	Genesee County (NY) — Marriage certificate sample (PDF).
3	Certificate of Capacity to Marry (France)	Service-Public — Certificat de capacité à mariage.
4	Affidavit of Single Status (USA) — guidance	U.S. Dept. of State — Marriage Abroad (Affidavit of eligibility to marry).
5	Translator's Certification of Accuracy (wording)	USCIS Policy Manual — Evidence: Translation Requirements.
6	French Apostille — official model	HCCH — Model Apostille Certificate (PDF).
7	U.S. Apostille — sample certificate	Texas Secretary of State — Apostille Sample (PDF).
8	Consular Marriage Registration (France)	Consulate of France in Los Angeles — Registration of a marriage.
9	U.S. Witness info (example)	NYC City Clerk — Marriage Ceremony (witness requirements).
10	Cover letter context / required docs (France)	Consulate of France in Los Angeles — Marriage.
11	Livret de famille (France)	Service-Public — Livret de famille.

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Legal Disclaimer & Thank You

This Cross-Border Marriage Kit has been carefully researched and compiled to provide practical guidance for international couples.

However, it does **not constitute legal advice**.

- Laws and procedures may change at any time.
- Requirements may vary depending on the specific **U.S. state** or **French municipality** involved.
- Always verify your situation directly with the **competent civil authorities**, embassies, or consulates before submitting documents.
- LexAtlas cannot be held liable for any administrative delays, changes in law, or outcomes arising from the use of this guide.

For complex or exceptional cases (previous marriages, immigration complications, name changes, adoption, or nationality issues), we strongly recommend consulting a qualified attorney or notary.

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