



THE DECISION ENGINEER

Citizenship by Descent Document & Task Tracker

Every document, every step, in the order it actually needs to happen.

Version 1.0 · August 2026 · Free updates for all purchasers

Educational resource only: not legal or immigration advice.

Engineer your biggest life decisions.

Document & Task Tracker

Two linked systems: the **documents** your application needs, and the **tasks** that get you there, sequenced across eight phases. Work in phase order: most documents can't be apostilled before they're issued, translated before they're apostilled, or submitted before they're translated. Tick each box as you go, and use the notes column for the specifics that trip most applicants up.

Wherever this tracker says **parent** or **grandparent**, use whichever side of your family your lineage claim runs through. Skip anything marked *if applicable* that doesn't match your situation.

A note on the Required, Recommended, and Optional labels

These labels are my best read from my own application, not the official word. A lot of this is situational.

Depending on your lineage, the records that exist for your family, and what the platform actually asks you for, things marked Required may not apply to you at all, and some translations or apostilles listed may never come up.

Treat it as a list of everything that could come up rather than a list of things you must produce. Its main use is keeping track of what you have already done.

Apostilles and translations: not always required to upload: always required in country.

The online portal may accept your documents without apostilles or certified French translations attached. Do not read that as permission to skip them.

When you travel to Benin to petition for permanent nationality in person, officials will expect apostilled originals and certified French translations. Documents that cleared the upload can still be rejected at the counter.

Get them done on the timeline in this tracker. Apostilles and translations are the two steps with the longest lead times and the least tolerance for being rushed.

This process is still evolving.

Law No. 2024-31 is new, and the application process is being actively refined: requirements, portal behavior, and processing times have all shifted since launch.

This tracker carries a version number. When the process changes, an updated version is issued and sent to everyone who has purchased any earlier version, at no additional cost. Check the version on the cover against the latest available before you submit.

Always confirm current requirements at myafroorigins.bj: this tracker organizes the process, it does not replace the official source.

PART ONE

Document Checklist

Required documents are non-negotiable. **Recommended** ones strengthen your case. **Optional** ones are situational. Processing shows what each document still needs before it's submission-ready.

Identity				4 documents
	Document	Required	Processing	Notes
☐	Birth certificate (long form, certified copy)	REQUIRED	APOSTILLE · TRANSLATE	
☐	U.S. passport	REQUIRED		
☐	Marriage certificate	REQUIRED	APOSTILLE · TRANSLATE	Only if your lineage claim relies on a marriage record
☐	Driver's license	REQUIRED		

Lineage				2 documents
	Document	Required	Processing	Notes
☐	Parent's birth certificate	REQUIRED	APOSTILLE · TRANSLATE	Certified copy from the issuing state's vital records office
☐	Grandparent's death and/or birth certificate	REQUIRED	APOSTILLE · TRANSLATE	Certified copy: order from vital records, or check Ancestry/FamilySearch if unavailable

Ancestry				1 document
	Document	Required	Processing	Notes
☐	AncestryDNA full ethnicity report (PDF export)	REQUIRED		Confirm your testing lab is on Benin's approved list at myafroorigins.bj

Legal				2 documents
	Document	Required	Processing	Notes
☐	FBI background check (Identity History Summary)	REQUIRED	APOSTILLE · TRANSLATE	Order within 90 days of submission: takes 2–3 weeks
☐	State criminal background check	RECOMMENDED	APOSTILLE · TRANSLATE	Must be dated within 3 months of submission

Occupation				2 documents
	Document	Required	Processing	Notes
☐	Employment verification letter	REQUIRED	TRANSLATE	Request the general 'for international purposes' version from HR
☐	Recent pay stubs (3 months)	RECOMMENDED	TRANSLATE	Backup for employment letter: platform accepts either

Residence				1 document
	Document	Required	Processing	Notes
☐	Recent utility bill (proof of residence)	REQUIRED	TRANSLATE	Within 3 months, full name and current address

Supporting				1 document
	Document	Required	Processing	Notes
☐	Public historical records	OPTIONAL	TRANSLATE	Census, Freedmen's Bureau, birth, death, marriage, or slave schedule records: any that support your lineage

Narrative				3 documents
	Document	Required	Processing	Notes
☐	Family tree chart	REQUIRED		One-page visual: names, dates, connecting lines
☐	Written family history / narrative	RECOMMENDED	APOSTILLE · NOTARIZE · TRANSLATE	Combines lineage story, non-African citizenship declaration, and any name discrepancy explanation
☐	Name discrepancy affidavit	RECOMMENDED	APOSTILLE · NOTARIZE · TRANSLATE	Only if a name differs across historical records

Application				3 documents
	Document	Required	Processing	Notes
☐	Completed application form	REQUIRED	TRANSLATE	
☐	Passport photos	REQUIRED		Check myafroorigins.bj for current size/format specs
☐	Fee payment receipt	REQUIRED		\$100 application fee: save confirmation as PDF

Submission				3 documents
	Document	Required	Processing	Notes
☐	All documents scanned (300 DPI minimum)	REQUIRED		Scan both original and apostilled versions
☐	Standardized file naming applied	REQUIRED		[Category]_[DocName]_[Language].pdf
☐	Master application bundle	RECOMMENDED		One combined PDF, in submission order

Travel				4 documents
	Document	Required	Processing	Notes
☐	Originals organized in travel folder	REQUIRED		
☐	Apostilled copies: backup set	REQUIRED		Kept separate from originals
☐	Printed application packet (2 sets)	REQUIRED		One to submit, one to keep: English and French versions
☐	Extra passport photos	REQUIRED		For in-country passport application

PART TWO

Task Checklist: 8 Phases

Work through these in order. Phases 4 and 5 (Apostille, Translate) are where most timelines slip: start those the moment a document is in hand.

PHASE 1: ORDER & REQUEST				13 tasks
	Task	Priority	Notes	
☐	Order long-form birth certificate (certified copy, raised seal)	REQUIRED	Order from your state's vital records office	
☐	Order marriage certificate (certified copy)	REQUIRED	Only if applicable: confirm raised seal is present	
☐	Order parent's birth certificate (certified copy)	REQUIRED	From your parent's state of birth vital records office	
☐	Order grandparent's death and/or birth certificate	REQUIRED	Check vital records first, then Ancestry/FamilySearch if unavailable	
☐	Order FBI Identity History Summary	REQUIRED	fbi.gov/ident: \$18: order within 90 days of submission, allow 2–3 weeks	
☐	Order state criminal background check	RECOMMENDED	Must be dated within 3 months of submission	
☐	Request employment verification letter from HR	REQUIRED	Ask for the 'for international purposes' version. Don't mention Benin.	
☐	Gather 3 most recent pay stubs	RECOMMENDED	Backup for the employment letter	
☐	Get a recent utility bill as proof of residence	REQUIRED	Within 3 months, full name and current address	
☐	Download AncestryDNA full ethnicity report as PDF	REQUIRED	Ancestry > DNA > View Results > Download full report	
☐	Confirm your DNA lab is on Benin's approved list	REQUIRED	Check myafroorigins.bj: contact the platform about alternatives if not listed	
☐	Download available public historical records	RECOMMENDED	Census, Freedmen's Bureau, birth, death, marriage, slave schedules: search FamilySearch/Ancestry by decade	
☐	Search for pre-1865 ancestors in historical records	RECOMMENDED	Where they exist, these are the strongest possible evidence	

PHASE 2: BUILD & DRAFT

7 tasks

	Task	Priority	Notes
☐	Finalize family affidavit: complete all fields	REQUIRED	Lineage narrative, non-African citizenship declaration, name discrepancy. Add DOB, birth city, execution date.
☐	Build family tree visual chart	REQUIRED	One clean page: names, dates, connecting lines. Attach as Exhibit A.
☐	Export and save AncestryDNA report as final PDF	REQUIRED	Confirm it's the complete report, not a summary
☐	Organize public historical records into labeled PDFs	RECOMMENDED	Group by record type and ancestor name
☐	Draft a cover letter for the application package	RECOMMENDED	Brief: who you are and what you're submitting
☐	Review all documents for exact name matches	REQUIRED	Flag spelling differences: explain any in your affidavit
☐	Create a document index (master submission list)	REQUIRED	Numbered list: attach as the first page

PHASE 3: NOTARIZE

1 task

	Task	Priority	Notes
☐	Notarize the family affidavit	REQUIRED	Print it: do NOT sign before the notary. Bring photo ID.

PHASE 4: APOSTILLE

7 tasks

	Task	Priority	Notes
☐	Apostille birth certificate	REQUIRED	Through your state's Secretary of State
☐	Apostille marriage certificate	REQUIRED	Only if applicable
☐	Apostille parent's birth certificate	REQUIRED	Through the issuing state's Secretary of State
☐	Apostille grandparent's death/birth certificate	REQUIRED	Through the issuing state's Secretary of State
☐	Apostille family affidavit	RECOMMENDED	Notarize first (Phase 3), then apostille
☐	Apostille state background check	RECOMMENDED	Do this close to submission: must be dated within 3 months
☐	Apostille FBI background check	RECOMMENDED	Only through the U.S. Dept of State Office of Authentications in DC: \$20, allow extra time

Required in country, even if the upload accepts you without them.

The portal may let you submit without apostilles or certified translations. Officials in Benin will still expect both when you petition in person. Don't skip this phase.

PHASE 5: TRANSLATE

14 tasks

	Task	Priority	Notes
☐	Submit English documents for certified French translation	REQUIRED	<i>tradux.gouv.bj: submit as one batch. Budget \$50–150/doc.</i>
☐	Priority translate: affidavit and narrative	REQUIRED	<i>Your most important document: translate first</i>
☐	Translate birth certificate	REQUIRED	
☐	Translate marriage certificate	REQUIRED	<i>Only if applicable</i>
☐	Translate parent's birth certificate	REQUIRED	
☐	Translate grandparent's death/birth certificate	REQUIRED	
☐	Translate FBI background check	REQUIRED	
☐	Translate state background check	REQUIRED	
☐	Translate employment verification letter	REQUIRED	
☐	Translate pay stubs	RECOMMENDED	
☐	Translate utility bill	REQUIRED	
☐	Translate public historical records	RECOMMENDED	<i>Translate together as one batch</i>
☐	Translate family tree chart	REQUIRED	<i>Names, dates, and labels</i>
☐	Review all French translations against English originals	REQUIRED	<i>Flag errors and request corrections before submitting</i>

Required in country, even if the upload accepts you without them.

The portal may let you submit without apostilles or certified translations. Officials in Benin will still expect both when you petition in person. Don't skip this phase.

PHASE 6: ORGANIZE & SCAN

5 tasks

	Task	Priority	Notes
☐	Scan all documents at 300 DPI minimum	REQUIRED	Both original and apostilled versions: label each clearly
☐	Apply standardized file naming to all files	REQUIRED	[Category]_[DocName]_[Language].pdf
☐	Create a master application bundle (combined PDF)	RECOMMENDED	Keep individual files too, for upload
☐	Build the final master document index	REQUIRED	Numbered list: first page of the bundle
☐	Back up all files to cloud storage	REQUIRED	Before submitting, in case anything needs re-uploading

PHASE 7: SUBMIT APPLICATION

6 tasks

	Task	Priority	Notes
☐	Create an account on myafroorigins.bj	REQUIRED	
☐	Complete the online application form	REQUIRED	Fill out every field before uploading documents
☐	Upload all required documents	REQUIRED	English originals and French translations: double-check completeness
☐	Pay the \$100 application fee	REQUIRED	Save the payment confirmation as a PDF
☐	Save confirmation email and reference number	REQUIRED	Needed to check status: reviewed within 3 months
☐	Monitor application status	REQUIRED	Respond promptly to any request for more documentation

PHASE 8: TRAVEL PREP

10 tasks

	Task	Priority	Notes
☐	Reorder FBI background check	REQUIRED	Within 90 days of your Benin trip: the Phase 1 copy expires
☐	Reorder state background check	RECOMMENDED	Same timing: close to your travel date
☐	Take updated passport photos	REQUIRED	Check myafroorigins.bj for current specs
☐	Organize originals into a travel document folder	REQUIRED	All certificates, DNA report, affidavit, background checks, approval certificate
☐	Create an apostille backup set (physical copies)	REQUIRED	Kept separate from your originals
☐	Print the full document packet: 2 sets	REQUIRED	One to submit, one to keep: English and French
☐	Book flights to Benin (Cotonou: COO)	REQUIRED	Must visit within 3 years of your nationality certificate date
☐	Book hotel in Benin and save the invoice	REQUIRED	Standardized hotel invoice or notarized rental agreement required
☐	Submit petition for permanent nationality, in person	REQUIRED	Filed with the Minister of Justice: bring all originals
☐	Apply for a Beninese passport in-country	REQUIRED	After permanent nationality is confirmed: valid 3 years

Built while going through this process, not researched from the outside.

The same structured approach applies to any decision you cannot take back. The 10-Minute Decision Audit is free: thedecisionengineer.co

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