

Recommendations for Ameliorating Impact of Visa Delays

- ***The Goal for Visa Processing Should be 48 hours, With a Maximum Limit of 30 Days.***

The clear link between lengthy visa processing times and the adverse impact on the U.S. economy demands that processing times be greatly improved. The United States should set the world standard in the secure and efficient processing of visa applications. The goal should be to have an interview scheduled and a decision on all applications within 30 days, with the majority of applications decided within 48 hours. Timely decisions will enhance U.S. security and the economy. A mechanism to expedite and provide more feedback to U.S. companies on applications pending more than 30 days is necessary.
- ***Consular Posts Should Provide Greater Transparency to U.S. Companies.***

Processing times and procedures vary greatly among U.S. consular posts around the world and can change unexpectedly. Business demands that American companies, their employees and customers be able to plan and implement business strategies in a predictable and timely manner. To achieve an environment that assists U.S. companies in the accurate planning and implementation of business strategies, U.S. consular operations and procedures must be more transparent and consistent. Consular posts should publish up-to-date processing times and application procedures on their websites. This should include clear, concise and complete instructions on necessary documents and scheduling an interview. To the extent possible, times and procedures should be standardized around the world so that multinational companies can readily advise their employees, customers and international business partners on what to anticipate. Information should also be provided, to the extent possible, about the reasons for visa denials, particularly in the case of an applicant who has previously visited the United States or worked for the company in the United States or abroad. The current lack of communication makes visa denials appear arbitrary and unreasonable.
- ***A “Gold Card” Program Would Facilitate Visa Applications, Prevent Bureaucratic Redundancies, and Avert Other Problems Before They Occur.***

Many U.S. companies with well-established global operations generate a steady and predictable flow of business visa applications by corporate employees, customers, and others whose U.S. travel is directly connected to corporate activities. The government should develop a “gold card” program that provides for more direct communication between corporate and government officials on the purpose and timing of particular applications so that potential problems, such as questions about technology transfer, could be addressed in advance with these applicants. Such a program for cooperating companies would permit timing of interviews and advance-delivery of documentation to facilitate the flow of cases through the consulate. That, in turn, will provide more predictability and facilitate business planning. Similar cooperative arrangements have worked well in the customs arena. Likewise, the government should eliminate redundancies in its reviews and treat the issuance of a deemed export license by the Department of Commerce as sufficient grounds to approve a visa application during the period for which the deemed export license remains in effect.
- ***Continued Integration of Government Databases is Essential.***

The Departments of State and Homeland Security have been working with the FBI, Department of Defense and other agencies to integrate databases relevant to security checks and visa issuance. Such integration must be expanded and accelerated. Of particular concern to the business community is the apparent lack of integration of the Department of Commerce export control function into decisions on visa issuance. U.S. companies in sensitive industries must sometimes obtain a “deemed export” license prior to employing a foreign national. Deemed export compliance requires a great commitment of time and resources. Companies are troubled that individuals holding deemed export licenses often must undergo duplicative security checks at the Consulate. Better integration of these databases would reduce delays and enhance security.

- ***Multiple-entry, Longer Duration Visas Would Lessen Consular Workloads.***
The U.S. Government should initiate negotiations with our trading partners that currently do not provide multiple entry visas under the visa reciprocity system. By advancing multiple entry, as well as extended term visas for citizens of countries that do not currently have these options, U.S. consular posts and U.S. companies will benefit from a lesser volume of applications, which will enhance the efficiency of the entire visa system.
- ***Consular Posts Should Allow Interviews to be Scheduled Over the Internet.***
Consular posts maintain various procedures for scheduling interviews. Some require a call to a toll-number available only in country, others have web scheduling. Many do not allow appointments for employees currently in the United States who must obtain a new visa during a short business trip abroad. Because U.S. companies often have in-house personnel who assist employees and clients in navigating through the visa process, they should be able to assist in scheduling the interviews from the United States via the internet. Interviews should be allowed to be scheduled well in advance of travel to allow time for unexpected delays. This small step toward enhancing customer service would make the process less frustrating and more efficient for U.S. companies without any adverse impact on security.
- ***Congress Should Exercise Its Oversight Authority to Ensure Improvements in Consular Services.***
Congress and the Administration are equally responsible for ensuring that our borders are both secure and efficient. Congress should establish standards for efficient visa processing and a timetable and metrics for executive branch agencies to adhere to in moving toward an efficient and secure system, such as those detailed in H.R. 4373, introduced by Representative Capuano (D-MA) on May 17, 2004. In addition, Congress must ensure that the Administration has sufficient resources to meet these processing standards, to adequately staff consular posts, to train consular officers sufficiently, and to put state-of-the-art telecommunications and database systems into operation without delay.