U.S. State Department Expands Social Media Vetting to H-1B Applicants and their H-4 Dependents

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On December 3, 2025, the State Department announced an expansion of screening and vetting for H-1B and dependent H-4 visa applications. This new vetting policy went into effect on December 15, 2025. Under the updated guidelines, H-1B and H-4 applicants must set all social media accounts to public for the duration of the visa application process. This requirement is an expansion of a similar policy introduced in June 2025 for students and visitors applying for F, M, and J visa categories.

1. What to Expect

The December 3rd announcement does not specify the exact scope of social media review for H-1B and H-4 applicants. However, it is widely expected to align with the vetting standards currently applied to F, M, and J visa categories. Under those guidelines, consular officers are instructed to look for:

- Indications of hostility toward U.S. citizens, culture, government, institutions, or founding principles.
- Evidence that an applicant advocated for, aided, or supported designated foreign terrorist organizations or other threats to U.S. national security, including involvement in unlawful antisemitic harassment or violence.
- Signs that an applicant may attempt to steal technical information, exploit U.S. research and development, or spread false information for political or other purposes.
- Whether the applicant demonstrates a history of political activism and the likelihood of continuing such activity in the United States.
- Any indication that the applicant is complicit in censorship or attempts to censor U.S. citizens.

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2. Impact of Visa Processing

Applicants and employers should prepare for significant delays in visa processing as consulates adjust to these new requirements. There are reports that many appointments scheduled on or after December 15 have been canceled and rescheduled, sometimes months later, as consular officers allocate time for online presence reviews. This shift is expected to reduce overall consular capacity, leading to longer wait times for H-1B, H-4, and other nonimmigrant visa categories. Foreign nationals planning international travel without valid visas should consider postponing their trips, as obtaining a new visa could take considerably longer. Those who must travel should anticipate substantial delays and plan accordingly to minimize disruption.

3. Compliance Tips

Applicants should take proactive steps to ensure their social media presence aligns with the new requirements. Applicants should ensure that all their social media accounts are set to public for the duration of the visa process. They should review and be aware of posts, comments, and shared content that could be misinterpreted as hostile or politically sensitive. Applicants should, however, avoid deleting accounts abruptly, as this may raise questions during vetting. Reports indicate that the State Department may use artificial intelligence to review social media activity, and closing accounts close to a visa interview could trigger red flags.

Failure to comply with the new social media requirements can result in extended administrative processing or outright visa denial. Unavailable profiles may trigger additional scrutiny, delaying approvals for months. Applicants should understand that consular officers have broad discretion in interpreting online content. If applicants believe their social media accounts may pose a concern at the consulate, they should contact immigration counsel for guidance.

4. Conclusion

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The State Department's expansion of social media vetting to H-1B and H-4 applicants marks a significant shift in U.S. immigration policy, reflecting an increased focus on digital footprints as part of national security screening. While the intent is to safeguard U.S. interests, the practical impact will be longer processing times, heightened scrutiny, and added complexity for both applicants and employers. Those affected should act quickly to review their online presence, comply with the new requirements, and plan for potential delays. As this policy evolves, staying informed and proactive will be essential to navigating the visa process successfully.

Frost Brown Todd's immigration team is available to assist employers and individuals in creating a course of action to address the above social media vetting. Please contact Abby Castle, Alicia Visse-Kroger, or another member of our team for assistance.

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