



The following is information and recommendations exchange organizations and sponsors may wish to provide visa applicants and participants to ensure their exchange program experiences are as safe and smooth as possible. None of this information should be construed as legal advice and is meant only as suggestions and recommendations.

*Last updated: June 2, 2025*

## PRIOR TO DEPARTURE FOR THE U.S.: REVIEWING SOCIAL MEDIA

The U.S. government began using social media for immigration vetting in a limited capacity starting in 2014. In May 2017, the U.S. Department of State issued an emergency notice to increase the screening of visa applicants and, in 2019, began collecting social media handles from “nearly all foreigners” applying for visas to travel to the U.S.

On March 25, 2025, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio [instructed](#) U.S. embassies and consulates to begin referring certain student and exchange visitor visa applicants for a mandatory social media review.

This guidance states that F, J, and M visa applicants that fit one or more of the following criteria will be subject to this enhanced vetting:

- “who is eligible and that the (consular) officer has reason to believe has *openly advocated for a designated foreign terrorist organization*;
- “who was *previously in the U.S. on an F-1, J-1, or M-1 visa between October 7, 2023 and August 31, 2024*; or
- “whose *previous SEVIS record was terminated between October 7, 2023 and now.*”

**As of Tuesday, May 27, the Department of State is “evaluating operations and processes in preparation for expanded social media vetting of all student and exchange visitor applicants.”**

## UPON ARRIVAL IN THE U.S.: PREPARING FOR SCREENING

Exchange visitors and international students should be prepared for the possibility of additional screening or questioning by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) at the airport. Here are tips for how to be prepared:

**Ensure a personal item carry-on (not a carry-on suitcase, but a smaller bag a traveler can keep on their person) contains:**

- ☐ Originals and copies of all documentation, including (as applicable):
  - ☐ Passport and visa
  - ☐ DS-2019 or I-20 form
  - ☐ Letter from program implementer, sponsor organization, or university
  - ☐ Contract from host employer or letter of admission from university or academic program
- ☐ Name and contact information for a Point of Contact from program (i.e. host employer, host family, host camp, university representative, etc.)
- ☐ Name and contact information for a Point of Contact from program implementer or sponsor organization
- ☐ Any provisions to remain comfortable if a long wait is required, including water, snacks, and required medication.

*Travelers might consider sending digital copies of these documents to a trusted person in advance.*

**Travelers should alert a contact in the U.S. if they are selected for additional screening.**

**Cell phones may be inspected upon arrival in the U.S.**

## WHILE IN THE UNITED STATES

### Exchange visitors and international students in the U.S. are advised to always carry:

- ☐ One form of official government ID (original copy)
- ☐ Digital copies of passport, visa, DS-2019 or I-20, I-94 arrival record, SEVIS number, and a letter from program/sponsor/employer/university
- ☐ U.S. state driver's license (if applicable)
- ☐ Medical insurance card/information (if applicable)
- ☐ Emergency contact and information

### Exchange visitors and international students should know the rights and resources afforded to visitors to the United States:

- **The right to remain silent.** Nobody is required to speak to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) or other government officers.
  - Consider obtaining and carrying a “know-your-rights card” that can be handed to an officer. The card explains the right to remain silent and to speak with an attorney.
- **Nobody is required to open the door if they don't know who is knocking.**
  - To enter your place of residence, ICE officers must have a warrant signed by a judge. Unless the officers can show a warrant, they do not have to be let in. They can show the warrant through a window or slide it under the door, and it must have the correct name and address on it to be valid.
- **Create a safety plan.**
  - Memorize the phone number of a point of contact from the program sponsor, employer, host family, host university, etc.
  - Make sure loved ones and program staff can use ICE's online detainee locator (<https://locator.ice.gov/odls/homePage.do>) or they can call the local ICE office in the event of detainment.
- **Consider documenting any interaction with ICE officers using audio or video recording.**

**Exchange visitors and international students should not:**

- **Break program rules and regulations or violate state or federal law**, which could have immediate implications on visa status.

**Exchange visitors and international students should exercise caution in these instances:**

- **Traveling outside of the United States while on program.** Re-entry to the U.S. is always subject to screening and at the discretion of Customs and Border Protection.
- **Remaining in the United States past the date outlined on DS-2019 forms.**
- **Participating in political activity while in the United States.**
- **Posting political or inflammatory opinions on social media.**