



**alliance**  
for international exchange

# Finding Stable Ground But Facing Strong Headwinds

*The State of U.S. Exchange Programs in Early 2026*

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Alliance for International Exchange

# Who We Are

The Alliance for International Exchange



- **Our Purpose**

An association of 110+ U.S.-based educational and cultural exchange organizations focused on promoting the growth and impact of international education and exchange programs.

- **Our Mission**

To serve as the sole public policy voice for the international exchange community, offering advocacy, information sharing, and professional development opportunities for members.



# Programs We Serve

## U.S. Department of State Programs

- BridgeUSA Programs
- Educational and Cultural Exchange (ECE) Funded Programs

## International Higher Education

- International Students
- Study Abroad

## Youth and Student Mobility

# Defining Challenges of 2026 So Far

- **Visa Appointment Availability**

Concerns regarding the availability of J-1 visa appointments.

- **Movement of Funds, Grant Issuance**

Challenges related to the timely awarding of grants and issuance of funds for State Department exchange programs.

# Dangerously Existential Challenges of 2025

## 93% Proposed Funding Cut

*Congress funds ECA at \$667 million for remainder of FY26, "only" a 10% cut*

## DOS Reorganization Uncertainty

*ECA remains intact amidst major State Department reorganization*

## 22 ECA Programs, \$100M, Held

*Funding has been released, most programs have been approved for continuation - BUT funds continue to move slowly.*

## Visa Interview Pause

*Pause lifted after 3+ weeks - BUT impact of that pause and online presence vetting still being felt*



# Advocacy Unlocked

If 2025 showed us anything, it's  
that *our advocacy works*.

Congressional meetings

200+

Letters to Congress

60,000

Advocacy Day participants

160

Members of Congress engaged during Summer of Action

65

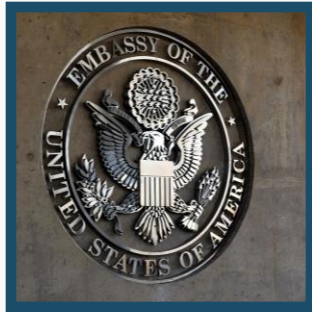
Newsletters, posts, & speaking engagements

139

Impact Report

1

# Damagingly Specific Challenges of 2026



## Decreased visa appointments

Multiple countries have indicated they won't have capacity to meet demand for J-1 visa interviews.

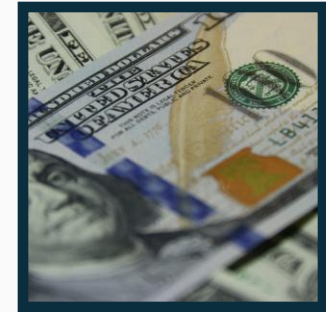
Turkey, Kazakhstan, Colombia, Thailand, Mongolia, Poland, Slovakia, and Serbia, are among countries with very limited visa appointment availability.



## Online presence vetting

6x longer to adjudicate any given J-1 visa with social media vetting requirements.

Previously ~5 min,  
now up to ~ 30 minutes.



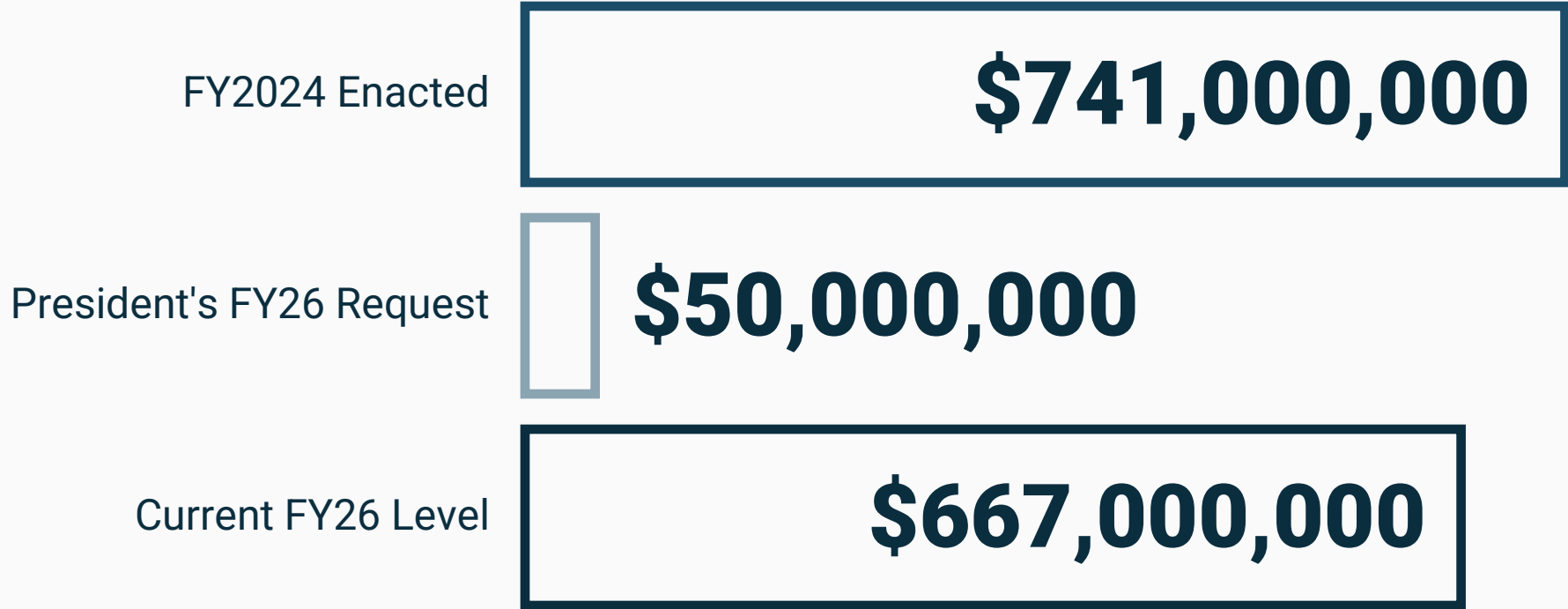
## Funds are moving slowly

22 programs that were held in FY25, but released and approved for continuation, still haven't received those funds.

OMB continues to obstruct FY26 programs/funds from moving forward expeditiously.

# DOS Exchange Program Funding

Enacted vs. Requested Levels



# A Decline in J-1 Visa Issuance in 2025

BridgeUSA participant numbers dipped to 275,000 in 2025, an 8.8% decrease from 2024.

Category	2025 Issuance	2024 Issuance	Change (%)
Research Scholar	17,622	24,067	-26.8%
Teacher	5,276	6,780	-22.1%
Au Pair	16,840	19,408	-13.2%
Trainee	8,605	9,821	-12.3%
Intern	16,877	18,719	-9.8%
Secondary Student	17,863	19,077	-6.3%
Summer Work Travel	104,609	107,228	-2.5%
Camp Counselor	32,470	32,079	+1.2%
<b>Total Participants</b>	<b>275,000</b>	<b>301,595</b>	<b>-8.8%</b>

# Summer 2025 Visa Issuance Data

Sharp decline due to pause in new visa interviews

	F, M, J Visas			J-1 Visas		
	2024 Issuance	2025 Issuance	Change (%)	2024 Issuance	2025 Issuance	Change (%)
June	121,968	60,941	-50%	32,763	19,166	-41%
July	112,429	73,614	-34%	28,566	23,237	-19%
August	55,355	51,605	-7%	15,539	16,588	+1%
<b>Overall Summer</b>	<b>289,752</b>	<b>186,160</b>	<b>-36%</b>	<b>76,868</b>	<b>58,991</b>	<b>-23%</b>

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Stay Active.**



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