

POSITION STATEMENT

Visa Processing

*Adopted by the IEEE-USA
Board of Directors, 25 June 2010*

IEEE-USA believes that the U.S. visa processing system serves the important functions of maintaining our nation's security while enabling the entry of the brightest and most qualified international students, scholars, scientists, and engineers, who help support America's scientific and economic competitiveness. To the extent practical without compromising security, we urge Congress and the Administration to take appropriate actions to streamline and improve the U.S. visa processing system to eliminate unnecessary delays and allow for priority processing of visitors entering the United States for mutually beneficial educational, scientific and technical collaborations. To this end, IEEE-USA joined nearly 30 other major scientific, technical and university organizations in a June 2009 statement making the following recommendations that the Federal government should:

- **Address the current backlog of visa applications as expeditiously as possible** by providing sufficient resources to the Department of State and its partner agencies to allow timely processing of visa applications. This action must be taken to prevent the world from again believing that the United States does not welcome international students, scholars, and scientists.
- **Streamline the visa process for credentialed short-term visitors in science and technology fields.** A non-immigrant visa applicant who is a legitimate graduate student, researcher, or professional in any field of science and technology, and whose application is supported by a qualified university, scientific body, or corporation should receive a determination on his or her visa application within 30 days. Longer delays are very disruptive to scientific study, research and collaborations.
- **Reduce repetitive processing of visa applications for those well-known researchers and scholars who regularly visit the United States.** The Department of State and its partner agencies should reduce repetitive reviews of international researchers and scholars who regularly travel to the United States

to attend academic conferences and conduct research. Longer duration clearances and visas are needed.

- **Establish protocols to make treatment of applicants more consistent.** Consular staff at posts abroad should receive regular training on protocols for initiating a Visas Mantis review so that this screening tool can be used appropriately and consistently. Additional training and guidance for consular staff can enhance security while simultaneously reducing the number of applications submitted for Visas Mantis reviews, thereby alleviating potential delays.
- **Provide more transparency in the visa system.** We recommend that the Department of State provide more transparency for visa applicants who experience delays, and establish a special review process to address applications pending for more than 30 days.
- **Review and streamline the Technology Alert List (TAL) to include only subject areas that clearly have explicit implications for national security.** The list identifies sensitive areas of science and technology in which exports of technology or information might be controlled. However, over the years, the TAL has been broadened, and it now restrains and inhibits legitimate areas of scientific research.
- **Continue and expand ongoing efforts to renegotiate visa reciprocity agreements between the United States and key sending countries, such as China, to extend the duration of visas each country grants students and scholars of the other and to permit multiple entries on a single visa.** We encourage the Department of State to continue its efforts in this area. Improved reciprocity and allowing multiple entries would reduce the number of visa renewals that must be processed.
- **Convene a high level interagency panel to review the full range of visa-related policies and procedures put into place after 9/11.** Many policies and procedures designed to enhance national security were put into place after 9/11. An evaluation of their cost-effectiveness is needed, and ineffective and unnecessary procedures should be revised or eliminated. Such a review would resolve these and other outstanding issues.

The full text of the 10 June 2009 statement is accessible on-line at <http://www.ieeeusa.org/policy/policy/2009/061009.pdf>

This statement was developed by the IEEE-USA's Career and Workforce Policy Committee and represents the considered judgment of a group of U.S. IEEE members with expertise in the subject field. IEEE-USA advances the public good and promotes the careers and public policy interests of the more than 210,000 engineers, scientists and allied professionals who are U.S. members of the IEEE. The positions taken by IEEE-USA do not necessarily reflect the views of the IEEE or its other organizational units.

BACKGROUND

As the world's largest technical and professional society, IEEE is headquartered in the United States and has nearly 400,000 members in 175 countries around the world. IEEE publishes 30 percent of the world's literature in electrical engineering, computers and control technology, hosts more than 300 major technical conferences annually, and supports more than 900 active technical standards. The IEEE is a leading authority on technical subjects ranging from computer engineering, biomedical technology and telecommunications, to electric power, aerospace and consumer electronics. In addition to publishing scholarly articles in IEEE publications and attending IEEE-sponsored technical conferences, many of our international members serve as volunteers, supporting the operation of the association in a variety of leadership roles. After the increase in security measures following 9/11, IEEE began receiving regular notices from our non-U.S. members of problems they are experiencing related to entry and exit from the United States, including:

- Delays in visa processing that make it impossible for non-U.S. members to participate in U.S.-based conferences or to participate in IEEE committee or program meetings.
- Denial of entry visas on various grounds, often without explanation or opportunity to appeal
- Decisions by foreign students studying in the United States not to participate in international technical conferences because of concerns about potential delays in reentry

Despite positive steps taken in the last several years to streamline and improve the visa processing system, we continue to receive reports from our members who are still experiencing these and similar difficulties on a regular basis.

These situations have adversely affected the IEEE's ability to do business as a volunteer organization. They have created an incentive to move IEEE technical conferences and standards development activities out of the United States to facilitate international participation, with a resulting loss of financial benefits to the U.S. economy. Such situations are also contributing to an unfortunate perception that the United States is a less attractive destination for scientific and engineering education and research collaborations, which has negative implications for the United States. They have also diminished the spirit of scientific and technical collaboration that sustains collective efforts to tackle urgent global challenges such as capacity building, sustainable development and economic security.

For these reasons, IEEE-USA reiterates our commitment to work with the federal government to address remaining issues and improve the visa system further. A system that maintains our nation's security while encouraging the entry of the brightest and most qualified international students, scholars, scientists, and engineers will bolster American scientific and economic competitiveness, as well as help restore America's image abroad. We believe that implementing the above recommendations outlined above will help make this goal a reality.