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Expanded Visa Vetting and Social Media Screening Requirements: What Members Should Know

Over the past year, the **Department of State** and the **Department of Homeland Security** have expanded screening, vetting, and social media data requirements for nonimmigrant visa applicants. In addition to the students and exchange visitors already subject to an online presence review, on Dec. 15, enhanced social media requirements went into effect for H-1B work visa applicants and dependent H-4 visa applicants. Enhanced online presence review now applies to the following skilled worker, student and exchange visitor visas:

- **F-1**—Academic students (universities, colleges, high schools, immersion programs)
- **M-1**—Vocational or nonacademic students
- **J-1**—Exchange visitors (students, scholars, researchers, interns, au pairs)
- **H1-B**—Skilled workers (scholars, researchers, healthcare, technology)
- **H-4**—Dependents

H-1B Work Visa vs. F-1 Student Visa: Social Media Requirements

At-a-Glance Comparison

Category	H-1B Work (and H-4 Dependents) Visa	F-1 Student Visa
Who is covered	Specialty workers and their spouses/children	Academic students
Effective date of expanded screening	Dec. 15, 2025	Implemented earlier in 2025 (already in effect)
Social media disclosure required on application?	Yes—must list platforms and usernames used in last five years (DS-160 Online Nonimmigrant Visa Application form)	Yes—same requirement (DS-160)
Passwords required?	No	No
Online presence review by consular officers?	Yes (new as of Dec. 15)	Yes (ongoing)
Profiles must be set to public?	Yes (new as of Dec. 15)—setting limited access or visibility of online presence could be construed as an effort to evade or hide certain activity.	Yes (ongoing)

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Category	H-1B Work (and H-4 Dependents) Visa	F-1 Student Visa
What officers may review	Public posts, photos, comments, affiliations, tags, shared content	Same
Failure to make accounts public	Can result in delays, administrative processing or refusal	Same
Primary purpose of review	National security, identity verification, consistency with job petition	National security, identity verification, consistency with academic intent

The key difference:

- ➡ F, M and J visa applicants were already subject to these requirements; until Dec. 15, H-1B and H-4 applicants were not.

The changes apply to:

- **H-1B principal applicants** (specialty occupation workers)
- **H-4 dependents** (spouses and children)

These applicants include:

- First-time H-1B visa applicants
- H-1B renewals
- H-1B visa stamping abroad
- H-4 dependent visa applications

What Is Now Required

Mandatory social media disclosure (DS-160 Online Nonimmigrant Visa Application form); all H-1B and H-4 applicants must:

- List **all social media accounts** (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, X, TikTok, YouTube and others) used in the past five years.
- Provide **every username/handle** used on those platforms.
- Disclose **email addresses and phone numbers** used in the past five years.

Passwords are **NOT required** to be provided.

Online presence review: U.S. consular officers now conduct a formal online presence review for H-1B and H-4 applicants.

Social media profiles must be made public. Private or restricted accounts can trigger:

- Administrative processing (221[g]) temporary visa delays
- Interview delays
- Requests for follow-up information
- Visa denial

What Consular Officers Are Looking For

Consistency with the H-1B application. Officers compare online content with the information provided in the visa application, such as:

- Employer name
- Job title and duties
- Work location
- Timeline of employment

Potential red flags include:

- Claiming work for a different employer
- Indicating remote work not listed in the petition
- Stating a different job role than the approved position

Immigration compliance. Officers may look for:

- Evidence of unauthorized work
- Statements suggesting intent to violate visa terms
- Prior overstays or misrepresentation

National security and public safety. Officers will assess:

- Public affiliations
- Statements or endorsements tied to security concerns
- Evidence of “hostile attitudes” toward U.S. citizens, culture, government, institutions or founding principles
- Evidence of political activism disfavored by the administration
- Content suggesting fraud or misrepresentation

Keep in mind: The expanded screening and vetting primarily applies when you are applying for initial visa applications, renewals and re-entry after international travel.

How H-4 Dependents Are Affected

H-4 spouses and children are screened separately. Each H-4 applicant must:

- Disclose their own social media history.
- Set their own accounts to public.

A dependent's social media content can affect their individual visa outcome.

What Has Not Changed

- For academic students (F-1), vocational or nonacademic students (M-1) and exchange visitors (J-1), the requirement to list **social media platforms and usernames from the past five years** has existed since 2019.
- Officers **do not ask for passwords**.
- Private messages are **not directly accessed** (review is of publicly available content).

Practical Checklist for H-1B Applicants

Before your visa interview:

- Review all your public social media profiles.
- Ensure their consistency with your H-1B petition.
- Remove or clarify outdated employer or job references.
- Set all accounts to **public**.
- Do not delete content or profiles after listing them, as this can be seen as dishonest.
- Confirm entries on the DS-160 Online Nonimmigrant Visa Application form are complete and accurate.

Know your rights: Social media review is limited to what is publicly available.

Key Takeaways

- Dec. 15 marks a major shift for H-1B and H-4 visa processing.
- H-1B applicants are now subject to the same level of social media scrutiny previously applied to student and exchange visas.
- Public social media review is now standard for employment-based visa processing.
- Expect slower processing times due to the heightened screening process.

Sources

[Fragomen](#), “Visa Applicants Now Required to Disclose Social Media Use, Prior Contact Information,” June 3, 2019.

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[VisaVerge](#), “2025 U.S. Student Visas Require Public Social Media Amid Heightened Screening,” last updated July 9, 2025.