United States

State Department Implements New Visa Application Questions for Some

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Summary

Consular officers will have broad authority to flag visa applicants for additional scrutiny. Applicants may be asked to provide in-depth information on their social media use, travel history, employment history and family, which could lead to additional background checks and visa issuance delays.

The State Department has unveiled new visa application questions for foreign nationals who are deemed by a US consulate to pose heightened security concerns.

Visa applicants may be asked to provide the following additional details:

- Five years of public social media account information, email addresses and phone numbers
- All prior passport numbers
- 15 years of residence, employment and travel history (including source of travel funds)
- The names of all children, siblings and current and former spouses

Though the State Department says that responding to the new questions is voluntary, applicants who do not respond may have their visa applications delayed or denied.

The new visa questions are one facet of the State Department's implementation of President Trump's "extreme vetting" directive to the immigration agencies. The Office of Management and Budget has approved the additional application questions for six months, through the end of November, although the State Department can take steps to use these questions beyond that time.

Who Is Subject to the New Questions

The new questions are not required of all visa applicants. Only foreign nationals flagged by a US consular officer for additional security screening will be asked to complete them.

US consulates have wide latitude to subject individual applicants to additional screening. Consulates are also authorized to identify applicant groups in their jurisdiction who warrant additional vetting.

Though the State Department has not specified how it will select applicants for additional screening, factors could include an applicant's country of citizenship; residence or birth; travel history; military service; affiliations; involvement in high-technology fields; and appearance in the national security or law enforcement databases.

What This Means for Foreign Nationals

Though not every visa applicant will be subject to the new questions, foreign nationals may wish to prepare for the possibility that they will be asked to respond. Gathering

social media, travel, work and residence history, details of prior passports and the like before a visa appointment can help minimize delays in the event a traveler is asked to provide additional information.

Applicants should answer the new application questions to the best of their ability. If unsure of an answer or unable to recall precise details, applicants should include an explanation.

Those who are subject to the new questions should expect additional background checks and visa issuance delays.

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