

# THE FY 2026 H-1B VISA LOTTERY: A QUICK GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS

Insights  
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The H-1B visa program allows U.S. employers to hire highly skilled foreign professionals. But with a limited number of visas and high demand, early preparation is key. Here is a quick overview of the 2026 H-1B visa lottery process, key learnings from past seasons, and practical steps employers can take to navigate the process smoothly.

## 1. What is the H-1B Visa Cap Lottery?

- Each year, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) allocates a limited number of H-1B visas through a cap lottery process. Over the past 15 years, the lottery has been necessary due to high demand by U.S. employers.
- There are 65,000 slots available for “regular” H-1B registrations, with an additional 20,000 slots allocated to individuals with a U.S. master’s degree or higher.
- To apply for a particular year, employers must submit an electronic registration for each candidate they sponsor. If the number of registrations exceeds the quota, USCIS will conduct a random lottery process to determine which registrations will advance to the next stage.
- For selected candidates, employers will be required to submit detailed individual nonimmigrant applications.
- The lottery system is intended to ensure a fair allocation of visas when demand exceeds supply.

## 2. When Will the H-1B Cap Lottery Take Place?

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- March 2025. This period will also include registration of candidates who fall under the advanced degree quota.
- Employers whose candidates are selected may submit H-1B cap-subject petitions between April 1 and June 30.
- After this period ends, USCIS will determine whether the cap has been met and whether additional lotteries or actions are necessary.

### 3. Results of the Previous H-1B Visa Cap Season (FY 2025)

- For the FY 2025 H-1B visa cap season, two lotteries were held, in March 2024 and July 2024.
- The total number of **registrations** decreased significantly compared to FY 2024, with a decrease in the number of applicants who registered multiple times.
- The total number of **applicants** was approximately 442,000, roughly the same as FY 2024 (446,000).
- The number of employers was similar, with 52,700 in FY 2025 and 52,000 in FY 2024 (actual numbers).
- The number of registrations that were determined to be valid fell sharply, from 758,994 in FY 2024 to 470,342 in FY 2025, a decrease of 38.6%.
- The average number of registrations per person decreased from 1.70 in FY 2024 to 1.06 in FY 2025.

### What to Do Now

- **Work with legal counsel:** Work with your immigration legal counsel to streamline the registration process, stay up to date on updates and changes, and ensure compliance with USCIS requirements.
- **Educate stakeholders:** Ensure your internal teams, such as HR and management, understand the lottery process, timelines, and areas of responsibilities to prevent delays and improve coordination.
- **Prepare alternatives:** Not being selected in the H-1B lottery can be a setback, but it doesn't mean there are no other options. Employers can consider a variety of [short-term, long-term, and lesser-known alternatives](#) to ensure they can continue to employ foreign national employees.

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## Conclusion

Fisher Phillips will continue to monitor this situation and will provide additional updates as new information becomes available from USCIS. In the meantime, we encourage you to sign up for [the Fisher Phillips Insight System](#) to receive the latest updates. If you have any further questions, please contact your Fisher Phillips attorney, the authors of this insight, or any attorney in [our Immigration Practice Group](#).