



Improving the Visa Process for Foreign Guest Artists and Cultural Exchanges Through the U.S. Department of State

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Improving the Visa Process for Foreign Guest Artists at U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)

Najeon Lee, League of American Orchestras

IMPROVING THE VISA PROCESS FOR FOREIGN GUEST ARTISTS

Background

- Arts organizations and artist management companies must obtain the appropriate visas when engaging foreign artists (O & P).
- Visas used to be processed within an average of 30-45 days.

IMPROVING THE VISA PROCESS FOR FOREIGN GUEST ARTISTS

Premium Processing Service

- In June 1, 2001 USCIS began offering Premium Processing Service, (PPS) for an extra \$1,000 fee.
 - Most non-profits can't afford this fee.
 - Regular processing is now highly unpredictable- can take up to 6 months!
 - Nonprofit organizations can now file 12 months in advance but are not always able to do so.
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IMPROVING THE VISA PROCESS FOR FOREIGN GUEST ARTISTS

Congress and USCIS

- Arts community has met with USCIS who understand there is a problem but have been unwilling to address it.
- Congress understands the time sensitive nature of the performing arts which is why it mandated artist visas to be processed in 14 days.

IMPROVING THE VISA PROCESS FOR FOREIGN GUEST ARTISTS

What we're asking...

- “Urge Congress to enact legislation that will reduce the total processing time for O & P petitions filed by, or on behalf of, nonprofit arts-related organizations to a maximum of 45 days.”

IMPROVING THE VISA PROCESS FOR FOREIGN GUEST ARTISTS

Recent and Current Progress

- Last year, H.R. 1312, the ARTS (“Arts Require Timely Service”) Act was passed by the full House.
- A companion measure, Senate bill S. 2178, was introduced.
- The original sponsors of both the House and Senate bills plan to reintroduce the bill in each chamber.

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Cultural Exchanges Through the U.S. Department of State

STRENGTHENING TIES BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND THE WORLD

Tom Birch, National Assembly of State Arts Agencies

CULTURAL EXCHANGES THROUGH THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Policymakers Agree Cultural Exchange = Benefits

- **Provides access to global perspectives and promotes participation in a global society**
 - **Creates environment for more effective diplomacy**
 - **Builds relationships among people of different countries, cultures, and faiths**
 - **International cultural exchange carries an economic benefit.**
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CULTURAL EXCHANGES THROUGH THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Administration Officials Agree

- **President Obama's campaign platform: Cultural exchange can break down barriers**
- **Secretary Clinton's confirmation hearing: "Smart power" includes cultural exchange as a valuable tool**
- **Vice President Biden as Senate Committee chairman: Cultural exchanges can erase borders of hostility and build deeper understanding**

CULTURAL EXCHANGES THROUGH THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Tell Your Representative

**Increase State Department Funding for
Cultural Programs Division**

\$10 million

FOR

**Professional Exchanges and Cultural Grant Program
and
Performing Arts Initiative**

What are these programs?

Professional Exchanges and Cultural Grant Program

- provides grants to U.S. nonprofit organizations for exchange programs in the arts, arts management, and arts education
- Detailed application, available in January on State website

Performing Arts Initiative

- provides financial support to U.S. Embassies for presentations of American performing art and artists
- Twice annual competition for funding among embassies

CULTURAL EXCHANGES THROUGH THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Tell Your Representative

- 1) Make information on projects funded through these programs available to the public;**
- 2) Encourage broad participation in programs with an emphasis on simplifying the application process; and**
- 3) Recruit applicants widely**

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