



This month, our newsletter focuses on operational changes at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and an increase in premium processing fees for a change or extension of status for nonimmigrants. As always, thank you for your support of the BridgeUSA program.

U.S. Department of Homeland Security Operations

On Saturday, February 14, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) shutdown, meaning the agency's services are temporarily paused or slowed until a federal budget for Fiscal Year 2026 is approved by Congress.

However, the BridgeUSA program will continue to operate as the federal budgets for the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Social Security Administration, and all other federal agencies have been approved.

DHS' budget includes funding for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Customs and Border Protection (CBP), and the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). More details are provided to help you better understand how the shutdown of the Department of Homeland Security will affect certain services and operations related to the BridgeUSA program:

- USCIS oversees compliance with U.S. immigration laws, which includes monitoring J-1 visa holders through SEVIS and authorizing a change or extension of status.
- CBP monitors the U.S. border, including entry and exit through the airport. CBP's role is to ensure all individuals who enter the country comply with U.S. immigration laws and do not pose a threat to national security, public health, or public safety.
- ICE enforces immigration violations by visa holders, which includes working without authorization, overstaying a visa, criminal violations, and not following the DS-7002 plan (Training/Internship Placement Plan).

Most DHS staff are classified as essential personnel and continue to work. CIEE does not anticipate major disruptions of services provided by USCIS, CBP, and ICE. The Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) is operational. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA), which verifies identification (visas, passports, etc.) at security checkpoints, is operating with essential personnel. However, participants and travelers may experience delayed flights, longer wait times at airports, or service delays.

Fee Increases for Extension or Change in Status

Starting on March 1, USCIS will [increase premium processing fees](#). These fee increases will affect applications using [Form I-539](#) to extend or change a nonimmigrant status. The application processing fee will increase from \$1,965 to \$2,075.

Advocacy Letters to Members of Congress

Your outreach made a difference! Earlier this month, CIEE urged host organizations to reach out to their respective Congressional leaders regarding the need to keep embassies staffed and visa appointments available for J-1 visa applicants. Considering the passage of the U.S. Department of State's budget in late January, we are confident that your outreach helped to keep the BridgeUSA program and other international exchange programs at top of mind.

If you did not have an opportunity to send a letter to your Congressional members, reach out to your assigned CIEE team member to learn how to participate in this advocacy campaign.

CIEE's BridgeUSA Celebration Tour 2026

To kick off 2026, CIEE's [BridgeUSA Celebration Tours](#) will travel to the picturesque ski destination of Park City, Utah in March. While the Celebration Tour is underway, CIEE will host the Young Civic Leadership Summit (YCLS) in Salt Lake City. Together both events celebrate the transformative power of BridgeUSA while honoring local leaders and champions – community and business leaders, dedicated sponsors, and hardworking participants.

This marks the second time the BridgeUSA Celebration Tour and YCLS have come together. Relive last summer's joint event in [Myrtle Beach with our Celebration Tour Recap](#) video.

Other Points of Interest

- ECA's [BridgeUSA Facts and Figures](#) updated for 2024 and 2025 program participation.
 - On February 22, DHS released a [statement](#) with a full list of emergency measures. These measures apply to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, courtesy escorts provided by TSA, and CBP's Global Entry service.
 - Celebrate America's 250th Anniversary this year with CIEE and our new partner, the [America250 initiative](#). More details are coming soon!
 - Stay connected by following [CIEE on LinkedIn](#) for the latest updates on the 2026 Celebration Tour destinations and other notable CIEE news.
 - Interested in BridgeUSA best practices and connecting with the worldwide BridgeUSA community? Get involved with [CAPDL!](#)
 - Check out "[The Truth with Rick Ruth](#)", a new informational CAPDL podcast. February's episode provides an overview of – and explores myths around – BridgeUSA regulation.
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CIEE thanks you for your ongoing support and advocacy. For any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out to your CIEE point of contact.

Questions? Contact [Asenith Dixon Bell](#).

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