# H-1B CAP LOTTERY: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW FOR THE FY 2026 SEASON

For thousands of skilled foreign professionals, the H-1B classification provides a pathway to work in the United States. However, with a strict annual limit, or cap, of 65,000 H-1B visas—plus an additional 20,000 reserved for those with advanced U.S. degrees—the demand for H-1B status far exceeds the available supply. As a result, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services ("USCIS") uses a lottery system to determine which applicants may file an H-1B petition.

The H-1B cap initial registration period for fiscal year 2026 opened on March 7, 2025, and closes on March 24, 2025. Because the registration window is open for only a short time, it is crucial that employers and prospective cap-subject H-1B beneficiaries understand the USCIS electronic registration process.

## THE H-1B LOTTERY REGISTRATION

USCIS has implemented an electronic registration system to streamline the H-1B lottery process, designed to randomly select registrations based on unique beneficiaries rather than by registration. USCIS will continue this process for FY 2026, with enhancements for organizational and representative accounts.

During the registration window, prospective employers must submit electronic registrations for each foreign worker they intend to sponsor. To register, the petitioning employer, or their representative, must create a USCIS online account to provide information about the prospective H-1B beneficiary, including their passport number or travel document number, and pay a $215 registration fee for each beneficiary.

Once the registration window closes, USCIS will randomly select registrations to determine which applicants may file H-1B petitions. According to USCIS, employers and representatives with selected registrations will be notified by March 31, 2025.

## WHAT HAPPENS AFTER REGISTRATION?

If an applicant is selected in the H-1B lottery, the petitioning employer will have 90 days to submit an H-1B petition. Selection through the lottery process does not guarantee approval of the H-1B petition—it only grants the employer the opportunity to file an H-1B petition, which must still meet all USCIS eligibility requirements.

Once the H-1B petitions for the first round of lottery selections are processed, USCIS may conduct additional rounds to fill all available H-1B visas.

## PRACTICAL TAKEAWAYS

With the H-1B registration period running from March 7 to March 24, 2025, employers should prepare early to ensure timely submission. Due to high demand, registration does not guarantee selection to submit an H-1B petition, nor does selection in the lottery guarantee petition approval. Staying informed about process changes and ensuring compliance with USCIS requirements will help employers navigate the H-1B lottery successfully.

If you are an employer seeking to register for the FY 2026 H-1B lottery, Hall Render's Immigration Team can assist with the registration and filing process. Our team provides guidance on the H-1B lottery and registration requirements, legal support to ensure compliance with USCIS regulations and assistance with petition preparation and filing. If you have any questions or need assistance, please contact:

- Michael L. Kim at (317) 977-1418 or mkim@hallrender.com; or
- Charlotte M. Fillenwarth at (317) 977-1476 or cfillenwarth@hallrender.com;
- Lindsay C. Ramsey at (317) 429-3637 or lramsey@hallrender.com;
- Moncerrat Alvarez Mora at (317) 977-1477 or mmora@hallrender.com; or
- Your primary Hall Render contact.

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