

## **Comments on Supplemental Questions for Visa Applications**

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The American Library Association (ALA), the nation’s oldest and largest library organization, represents more than 57,000 members in every state in America including over 1,700 members from 92 countries around the world.<sup>i</sup> ALA and its members have long been, and remain, dedicated to meeting the critical needs for access to library and information resources, services, and technologies for all people.<sup>ii</sup>

This commitment is fundamental to librarianship and has been central to ALA’s values, plans and policies since its establishment 140 years ago. ALA’s policymaking member-elected Council formally resolved in 2006 that:

ALA affirms and supports the rights of librarians and library workers from outside the U.S. to travel to the U.S., and not be prohibited or impeded by U.S. government policies, to attend and participate in conferences, to purchase books and other library materials, to meet and develop working relationships with librarians and library staff, to develop gift and exchange programs, to pursue and establish ties with library and other professional associations and libraries, and to conduct educational and professional library-related activities.<sup>iii</sup>

ALA is, therefore, deeply concerned that the innocuously titled “Supplemental Questions for Visa Applicants” upon which comment has been solicited would in practice constitute “extreme vetting” and, especially if indiscriminately applied to the entire population of targeted nations, cannot be reconciled with our principles and policies. Moreover, such intrusive and widely applied questioning will have a substantial chilling effect on travel with large and negative economic consequences for all American businesses and organizations. That impact must be fully understood and given due weight before any such wholesale screening procedures are adopted or implemented.

These concerns are not hypothetical. Indeed, ALA already has felt such effects. International registrations for our 2017 Annual Conference to be held in Chicago in late June are below what they were in 2013 when the conference was last held there.

Nor are these concerns economically trivial, as our own experience documents. ALA sponsors two major conferences each year, the location of which rotate throughout the nation’s largest cities to accommodate the volume of visitors. Approximately 20,000 people attend our Annual Conference, on average, while our Mid-Winter Meeting generally draws more than 10,000. In addition, many of ALA’s twelve Divisions hold their own smaller, but nonetheless well-attended, meetings throughout the nation. In a typical year, 1,000 international librarians attend our conferences and events in the United States.

In addition, ALA conference and events feature extensive exhibits by hundreds of vendor companies, including a significant number from foreign nations whose representatives travel from abroad to conduct business at these convenings. Total annual ALA revenue from international registrations and international exhibitors averages \$700,000.

Because of their tremendously positive economic impact on host cities, conference venues and localities compete strenuously to attract ALA's events, which are calendared years in advance. All of these meetings have large and positive economic effects on the revenues of restaurants, coffee shops and carryouts, hotels, transportation companies, other businesses, municipal transit systems, and state and local tax revenues.

Accordingly, in addition to assessing the increased burden on the person seeking a visa to visit the U.S., the federal government must realize and strike a balance that accommodates the very real economic impact of such visa requirements on thousands of American nonprofit organizations and the businesses of all sizes that support them.

ALA and its many members live and work in every state in the nation. Many work in public venues and serve the hundreds of millions of people who visit one of America's more than 120,000 libraries 1.4 *billion* times each year. They feel no less at risk, and have no less of an interest in true security, than other Americans or the government.

Accordingly, ALA supports appropriately targeted and tailored visa screening procedures, but believes the extent and overbroad application of the proposed changes to be excessive, and that they will widely discourage business and educational travel to the United States of all kinds. We respectfully urge that they not be implemented as proposed and that any subsequent reformulation of the proposed procedures again be subject to notice, publication and comment.

Respectfully submitted,

Adam M. Eisgrau, Managing Director  
Office of Government Relations  
American Library Association

*May 18, 2017*

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<sup>i</sup> Our members' home countries include Iran, Iraq, Algeria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.

<sup>ii</sup> See "[American Library Association Strategic Directions](#)," 2017 Update

<sup>iii</sup> See "[Resolution on Rights of Librarians and Library Workers to Travel](#)," 2005-2006 ALA CD#18.2