ISSUE

The United States is facing a shortage of engineers, and foreign engineering professionals can help meet this need. ACEC favors an increase in the number of H-1B and EB immigrant visas as a means of addressing the shortage of engineering professionals in the United States, with the possibility of the cap increasing based on employment market conditions.

OVERVIEW

H-1B and employment-based (EB) immigrant visa programs allow certain foreign citizens to work in the United States. These programs are essential to ensuring the engineering industry can recruit highly-skilled foreign engineering professionals to help address the critical shortage of engineers in the United States. According to the National Science Foundation, in 2015 half of engineering master’s degrees awarded by U.S. universities were earned by foreign nationals on temporary visas, including 70 percent of master’s degrees in electrical engineering.

To qualify for an H-1B visa, the potential employee must hold at least a bachelor’s degree or its equivalent in experience, training, and education in the relevant field. Employers in a range of fields – including engineering, medicine, science, education, and information technology – can apply to sponsor an H-1B visa for an employee.

A statutory cap limits the number of H-1B petitions that may be approved in each fiscal year. The general cap is 65,000 H-1B visas, although an additional 20,000 H-1B visas are available to foreign workers who hold a master’s degree or higher from an accredited U.S. university.

Demand for H-1B visas far outweighs the supply. For example, the H-1B cap for FY 2018 was reached after the application window had been open for just seven days. Limited numbers of H-1B visas have a significant impact on the qualified labor pool for U.S. engineering firms.