



When the visa does not arrive

US work visas and late show cancellations

What event professionals should plan for when performers and crew need US work visas

OTAS Insight TB-002 | All levels: Operational • Tactical • Strategic

Correct as of 20 October 2026 | United States (US federal rules) | Not legal advice | otas.live/insights/



The short version: how a US show can be lost to visas

What happened

Two LA shows cancelled

- Concerts set for 22 and 23 October 2026 were cancelled on 20 October
- The US visas needed could not be obtained
- The organisers had worked on them for more than six months
- No reason given. EPGN does not speculate

How it works

Petition, then visa

- USCIS must approve a petition first
- Then each person applies at a US embassy or consulate
- An approved petition does not guarantee a visa
- Crew need their own petitions

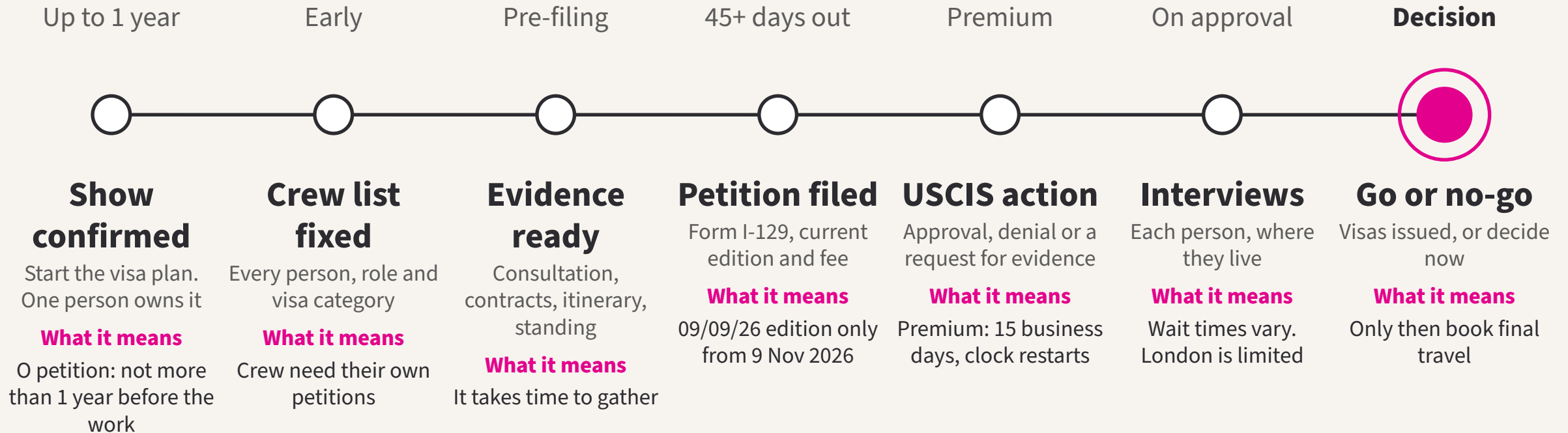
What to do

Plan back from the date

- List every performer and crew member
- Agree a go or no-go date in the contract
- Agree who pays if visas fail

Describes US federal rules as published on 20 October 2026. General information, not legal or immigration advice.

Back-plan from the show date: 7 points where time runs out



Planning prompts, not an official timeline. The 1 year and 45 day points are USCIS figures for O petitions. Adapt the plan with your immigration adviser.

The main visa categories for live events

01 • Performers

O-1

Extraordinary ability in the arts, or extraordinary achievement in film or TV

File at least 45 days before the work

02 • Support

O-2

Assists an O-1 performer as an integral part of the performance

Each O-2 needs their own Form I-129

03 • Groups

P-1B

A member of an entertainment group recognised internationally as outstanding

Group 1 year old, 75 percent rule

04 • Support

P-1S, P-2S, P-3S

Essential support crew for P performers, on a separate petition

Lighting and sound technicians count

05 • Culture

P-3

Artists or entertainers in a culturally unique programme

To perform, teach or coach

06 • Not for work

ESTA

The Visa Waiver Program does not permit employment

FCDO: risk of detention and deportation

Get immigration advice on the right category for every person. Sources: USCIS and the Department of State, 20 October 2026.

Crew need their own petitions

- **Not on stage, not covered** USCIS says people who assist but are not on stage, “such as lighting or sound technicians”, need a separate petition.
- **Who counts** USCIS examples of P-1 support personnel: front office personnel, camera operators, lighting technicians and stage personnel.
- **O-2 support** The O-1 performer and each O-2 must each have their own Form I-129.
- **Evidence takes time** A consultation, contracts, an itinerary and evidence of critical skills and experience with the performer.
- **Same priority** A late crew petition can stop a show as surely as a late performer petition.
- **Start early** Fix the crew list as early as you can, and keep it current.

Where it shows up at events

Lighting and sound touring technicians who run the show

Stage and camera stage crew and camera operators

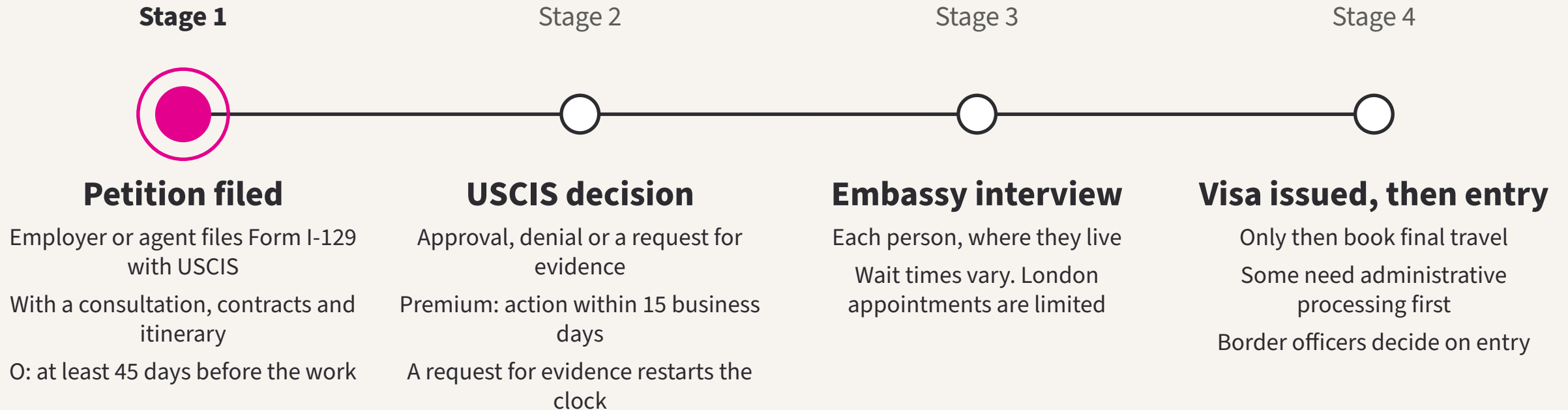
Production office front office personnel

Tour and production managers check the category for every person

The point

A performer’s approval does not cover the touring crew.

Four stages, and each one can run late



The point: a petition approval does not guarantee a visa, and a visa does not guarantee entry (Department of State).

45 days: the minimum, not the target

45

days before the work: the latest point at which USCIS says to file O petitions to avoid delays. And not more than 1 year before.

Premium processing. USCIS action within 15 business days, for a fee. A request for evidence stops the clock and starts a new one.

Form I-129 edition. From 9 November 2026, only the 09/09/26 edition is accepted.

Fees. A \$205 non-refundable visa application fee. A visa integrity fee of at least \$250 is set in US law. Collection not confirmed.

Late decisions cost more. In Los Angeles the cancellation came less than three days before the first show.

After USCIS approves, each person still needs an embassy interview, and wait times vary.

Operational: what performers and crew can do

- **Never work on an ESTA** Employment is not permitted under the Visa Waiver Program.
- **Check your passport** Valid for at least six months beyond your stay, unless exempt.
- **Send documents fast** Return personal documents and visa forms as soon as you are asked.
- **Book your interview early** As soon as the petition is approved, where you live.
- **Keep travel flexible** No non-refundable personal travel until your visa is issued.
- **At the border** Carry the approval notice and contract details. Answer questions truthfully.

Whose job it is

The employer or agent files the petition. You apply for your own visa.

What to expect from your team

- A clear list of documents
- A date for each step
- A named visa contact
- Early word if a date is at risk
- Unsure what your visa allows? Ask before you travel, not at the border.

Visa delayed? Tell the production team straight away.

Tactical: what production and tour managers put in place

01

List every person

Performers and crew, with their role and visa category

Keep: crew list with categories

02

Get the category right

Immigration advice for each person. Support crew need their own petitions

Keep: adviser's note

03

Back-plan from the first show

Evidence, filing, USCIS, interview, processing and a buffer

Keep: dated plan

04

File early

0 petitions at least 45 days out, as a minimum. Budget for premium processing

Keep: filing receipts

05

Track every week

Evidence, filing, approval, interview and visa issued, for each person

Keep: status tracker

06

Stay flexible

Flexible tickets and rooms until visas are issued. Draft the cancellation notice

Keep: booking terms, draft notice

Three levels: Operational for performers and crew, Tactical for production and tour managers, Strategic for promoters, organisers and directors.

Strategic: what promoters, organisers and directors decide

Decision	What it looks like	Evidence to keep
Who files and pays	Who files each petition, who supplies which evidence by when, and who pays the fees	Signed contract
Go or no-go date	The date by which visas must be issued, and who makes the call	Contract clause
Costs if visas fail	Travel, crew fees, venue costs and ticket refunds: who bears each one	Contract or written agreement
Crew at the same priority	Crew petitions included and managed like the performers' petitions	Crew list and visa plan
Insurance	Whether the policy covers a failure to obtain visas, confirmed in writing	Insurer's written answer
Fund the process	Time and specialist advice budgeted from the day the show is confirmed	Budget line
Communications	Who speaks for the event, and how fast ticket holders and crew are told	Draft notices, contact list
Review	After each tour: what slowed the visas, and what changes next time	Debrief notes

Points to discuss with your lawyer, not legal drafting or a complete list.

What we don't know yet: 6 open points

01 • Not stated

Why these visas failed

The organisers have not said. We draw no conclusion

Now: plan for the process, not the case

02 • Changes often

Processing times

USCIS and embassy timings vary through the year

Now: check current figures before planning

03 • Not confirmed

Visa integrity fee

In US law at \$250 or more. Collection on 20 October not confirmed

Now: check Department of State fee pages

04 • Depends on wording

Insurance

Cover for a failure to obtain visas depends on the policy

Now: ask your insurer in writing

05 • No figures

How common it is

We found no official figures on visa-related cancellations

Now: treat it as a planning risk

06 • Changing

Forms and fees

New Form I-129 edition from 9 November 2026. New fee schedule 16 October

Now: check before every filing

Open on 20 October 2026. Check the official sources before acting.



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Key sources: USCIS; USCIS Policy Manual; US Department of State; 8 U.S.C. 1806; FCDO; organisers' official notices

Spotted an error? Tell us and we will correct it. General information, not legal or immigration advice. Correct as of 20 October 2026.

Work with OTAS

Sending performers or crew to work at an event in the United States?

[Request a call with OTAS to discuss how we can help](#)

Briefing card • about 1 minute

“Before we travel to the US: nobody works on an ESTA. Everyone needs the right visa in their passport before they fly.

Bring your passport, a copy of our approval notice and your contract details. At the border, answer questions truthfully and say what you are there to do.

Visa contact: _____ **Flight:** _____

Interview date: _____ **Notice copy at:** _____

Do not book any personal travel you cannot change until your visa is issued. If anything changes with your visa, tell the visa contact straight away. Any questions?”

Read before crew travel. Fill in the blanks first.

Before your US date: the checklist, by level

Operational no ESTA work; passport checked; documents sent; interview booked early; travel flexible until the visa is issued.

Tactical list every person and category; back-plan from the first show; file early; budget for premium processing; track weekly.

Strategic contract who files and pays, a go or no-go date and who bears the costs; check insurance in writing; plan communications.