

# Crossing into the U.S. for Work: What Canadian Employees and Employers Need to Know (May 2025)



## What to Expect at the U.S. Border in 2025

Travelling to the U.S. for business is not as simple as it once was. Due to increased scrutiny, stricter enforcement, and evolving immigration policies, Canadian employees crossing the border—even for short-term business meetings or conferences—may face detailed questioning, secondary inspection, and even requests to search electronic devices.

In 2025, **U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP)** has emphasized greater enforcement of visa compliance and security protocols. This means employees must be fully prepared to explain the **purpose of their visit**, present the correct **documentation**, and understand their rights and obligations.

## Typical Questions Employees May Be Asked

CBP officers may ask:

- What is the purpose of your visit?
- Who do you work for in Canada?
- Who are you meeting with in the U.S.?
- Are you receiving payment from a U.S. source?
- How long will you be in the U.S.?
- Do you have return travel booked?
- Do you have documentation from your employer?

These questions are meant to establish whether the traveller is entering under an appropriate status (e.g., business visitor vs. work visa holder).

## Common Scenarios and Their Requirements

<b>Scenario</b>	<b>Visa or Documents Typically Required</b>
Attending a business meeting	B-1 Visitor Status (no pay from U.S. entity)
Speaking at a conference (unpaid)	B-1 Visitor Status
Speaking at a conference (paid or with honorarium)	TN or O-1 Visa required
Installing software/hardware for a client	TN or L-1 Visa
Attending trade show (no direct selling)	B-1 Visitor Status
Directly selling at a trade show	TN or L-1 Visa
Training or managing U.S. employees	TN or L-1 Visa

### **Preparation Steps for Employees**

- 1. Know the purpose of your visit** and be able to clearly and confidently explain it.
- 2. Bring a letter from your Canadian employer** on company letterhead, outlining:
  - Your role.
  - The purpose of the U.S. trip.
  - Where you will be staying and for how long.
  - Confirmation that you will not be paid by any U.S. entity (if applicable).
- 3. Carry supporting documents**, such as:
  - Invitation letters from U.S. contacts.
  - Return airline ticket or travel itinerary.
  - Hotel confirmation.
- 4. Ensure your passport is valid** for the duration of your travel.
- 5. Dress and behave professionally** at the border—demeanour matters.
- 6. Avoid carrying sensitive or excessive business materials** (e.g., contracts, software, manuals) unless they are directly relevant and you are authorized to explain them.
- 7. Be ready for your devices to be inspected.** CBP officers may request passwords. While you can refuse, refusal may result in denial of entry.

### **What Employers Should Do to Prepare Employees**

- **Provide an official travel letter** that outlines the employee's role, destination, purpose of travel, and assurances regarding compensation.
- **Clarify the employee's visa status** and whether a B-1, TN, or other visa is required.
- **Ensure employees understand what they are allowed to do** under their travel status.
- **Advise employees to avoid carrying sensitive or unnecessary company data**—use cloud-based systems where possible.
- **Develop and share a border crossing preparation checklist.**
- **Instruct employees to contact HR or legal counsel** immediately if they encounter issues at the border.

# Checklist for Employees Travelling to the U.S. for Work (May 2025)

## Documents to Bring

- Valid Canadian passport.
- Travel letter from employer (on official letterhead).
- Meeting or conference invitation.
- Return travel itinerary.
- Hotel/accommodation confirmation.
- Proof of travel insurance (if applicable).
- Required visa (if applicable: TN, L-1, etc.)

## Before You Go

- Confirm visa requirements for the type of work.
- Review the purpose of your trip and how you'll explain it.
- Ensure your device(s) contain only necessary information.
- Log out of or remove personal/private apps or files.
- Avoid storing company IP on your local hard drive.
- Back up your devices in case they are seized.

## At the Border

- Be polite, brief, and honest in your responses.
- Stick to the facts—do not overshare.
- Answer only what is asked.
- If detained or sent to secondary inspection, contact your employer.

## Final Thoughts

Cross-border business travel remains critical for many Canadian industries, but it requires a higher level of preparedness than ever before. By taking proactive steps to educate and equip employees, HR managers and executives can protect both the company and its people.

Understanding the nuances of visa categories, aligning with digital privacy protocols, and maintaining clear internal policies is key to avoiding costly and disruptive incidents at the border. Preparation is not optional—it's a strategic necessity.