Crossing Borders

Managing Immigration Risk for International Student Travel

José González, Ed.D. | 2026 Wilderness Risk Management Conference

18-MINUTE SHORT TALK

Picture this…

“One student does not clear immigration. The rest of the group does. What happens next?”

Who stays? • Who supervises the group? • Who calls home? • Who decides?

The border is part of the risk environment

CHANGING RULES

Entry, transit and reentry requirements can change.

DIFFERENT TRAVELERS

Citizenship, passports, visas and dual nationality can create different requirements.

MINORS

Consent and documentation requirements vary by destination and circumstance.

DEVICES

Border inspection can include electronic devices and locally stored data.

The 5 questions to remember

Ask before every international program.

1	**TRAVELER**	Can everyone legally complete this specific itinerary?
2	**DOCUMENTS**	Does everyone have what they need and appropriate backups?
3	**DAT A**	What sensitive information are we carrying across the border?
4	**STAFFING**	What happens if a student or leader cannot proceed?
5	**RESPONSE**	Who decides, communicates, manages the group and documents?

BEFORE the border: build readiness

1. Review the traveler against the actual itinerary, including transit and reentry.
2. Verify passports, visas/authorizations, minor consent, medication documentation and backups.
3. Recheck requirements close to departure; do not rely only on the registration-stage review.

TRAVEL ELIGIBILITY CHECKPOINTS

→ Trip approval

→ 60–90 days before departure

→ Immediately before travel

Plan for separation before separation happens

The question is not only: “What if a student cannot proceed?”

Also ask: “What if a leader cannot proceed?”

- Who stays with the student, when permitted?
- Who supervises the rest of the group?
- Who has authority to wait, separate, continue or modify the itinerary?
- Do we have enough staffing redundancy to avoid a single point of failure?

Customs and Border Protection (CBP) DEVICE SEARCHES

2026 policy update • U.S. border crossings

SEARCH AUTHORITY	Basic: manual review without individualized suspicion. Advanced: external equipment; additional approval and legal/policy thresholds.
LOCAL DATA, NOT CLOUD	CBP policy limits searches to data resident on the device; network connections should be disabled before inspection.
IF A DEVICE IS SEARCHED	Expect possible delays or device retention. Notify your organization; document the facts; follow counsel-approved guidance.

Operational takeaway: minimize sensitive local data and prepare staff for a search or delay.

Sources: CBP Border Search of Electronic Devices (Directive 3340-049B, 2026); DHS OIG-26-33 (Sept. 2026).

AT the border: respond without improvising



Field leaders manage the situation.
&
Organizational leadership manages the system.

Family communication: one voice, four questions

WHAT WE KNOW
Confirmed facts

WHAT WE DON'T KNOW
Uncertainty without speculation

WHAT WE ARE DOING
Actions underway

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT
Next update + decision point

Think back on the opening activity…

“One student does not clear immigration. The rest of the group does. What happens next?”

Who stays? • Who supervises the group? • Who calls home? • Who decides?

What is your protocol when a student doesn't make it through the border?

TRAVELER → DOCUMENTS → DATA → STAFFING → RESPONSE

