



Factsheet: Exchange Visitor Program (J-1 Visa)

What is the Exchange Visitor Program?

The Exchange Visitor Program, or [J-1 visa](#), is a non-immigrant visa that allows eligible international candidates to travel and gain [experience](#) in the United States by participating in work- and study-based programs. At the same time, it allows Americans to learn about foreign countries, cultures, and traditions -- allowing us to hear from different views and perspectives.

What types of people use the J-1 visa?

Applicants can obtain J-1 visas for a number of purposes through a [variety](#) of program categories. J-1 visas allow visitors to come to the U.S. to teach, study, conduct research, demonstrate special skills or receive on the job training.

Specifically, foreign nationals can apply for J-1 visa as an [au pair](#), [camp counselor](#), [college and university student](#) sponsored by a university or government, [intern](#), [government](#) or [international visitor](#), [physician](#), [professor](#), [research scholar](#), [secondary school student](#), [short-term scholar](#), [specialist](#), [teacher](#) or [trainee](#). They can also apply through the [Summer Work and Travel](#) program. This category is designed for full time college or university students who come to the U.S. to work as [temporary](#) additional staff during the summer season such as for pool companies, amusements and water parks, national parks, beach and ski resorts and others.

Generally, participants are young leaders [seeking](#) to improve their skills, strengthen their English language abilities, and learn more about Americans, U.S. culture and the United States in general. About 86 percent of [exchange visitors](#) are younger than 31 and 54 percent are female.

How many exchange visitors are currently in the U.S.?

Around 300,000 [foreign visitors](#) from 200 countries and territories come to the U.S. through the J-1 Exchange Visitor Program each year. California currently hosts the largest number of exchange visitors (35,131), followed by New York (31,304) and Florida (15,123). Most of the J-1 visa holders [come from](#) China (39,038), Great Britain (20,152) and Germany (18,975).

Who is eligible for a J-1 visa?

The J-1 visa eligibility requirements [vary](#) from one program category to another, depending on the applicants' skills, abilities and purpose of their visit in the U.S. such as age restrictions, previous work experience, or enrollment in school. Most of the program categories are [designed](#) for current students, recent graduates, teachers and researchers. The State Department's full list of eligibility criteria and differences among the J-1 visa categories can be found [here](#).

How to apply for a J-1 visa?

After choosing the J-1 visa category that fits a candidate's profile, the candidate must find a [sponsor](#), who will support and monitor the candidate during his or her entire stay. The U.S. State Department designated over [1,500](#) for-profit, non-profit, federal, state, and local government entities as [sponsors](#) responsible for selecting the J-1 visa program participants. These sponsors [conduct](#) initial screenings of the applicants and connect them with employers in the U.S. Approved applicants are then issued Form DS-2019 or "Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor (J-1) Status" that allows them to apply at a U.S. embassy or consulate for the J-1 visa. After a second round of background checks and an in-person interview, Consular officers make the final decision about who receives a J-1 visa.

How long can J-1 visa holders stay in the U.S.?

The J-1 visa is only a temporary visa; therefore, the length of an exchange visitor's stay is limited. Duration of a participant's visit generally [ranges](#) from a few weeks to several years, depending on the J-1 visa category. While short-term scholars can [stay](#) for as little as only one day, physicians can be allowed to stay in the U.S. for up to seven years.

Also, J-1 visa holders under the Summer Work and Travel category can stay for up to 30 days after the completion of their work program to travel. During this additional time, the students are not [allowed](#) to work but can use the time to further explore our country and culture.

Can a J-1 visa be extended?

Some of the J-1 visa categories allow participants to [extend](#) their stay in the U.S. However, the length of extension is limited by requirements specific to each program category. With approval from the State Department, certain individuals can extend their J-1 visas beyond the maximum duration set for their program category if they experience some exceptional or unusual circumstances. However, the program cannot be extended beyond expiration date of their sponsor's designation, which is set by the State Department usually for one to two years.

Are J-1 visa holders allowed to switch J-1 visa categories or transfer to another sponsor?

Participants can [switch](#) from one J-1 visa category to another only if such transition is 1) clearly consistent with and closely related to original purpose of their visit and 2) necessary due to some extraordinary circumstances. A participant may transfer from one sponsor to another but only within the same program category and with approval from the responsible State Department officer.

How is the Exchange Visitor Program funded?

Funding to [support](#) visitors on a J-1 visa primarily come from [fees and](#) payments made by J-1 visa applicants, sponsoring entities, and employers. Out of the fifteen different categories, thirteen are privately-funded programs implemented with sponsorship of the Office of Private Sector Exchange in the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. Two J-1 visa categories, International Visitors and Government Visitors, are funded by the government to

allow U.S. federal, state or local government agencies to select and bring to the U.S. certain recognized industry leaders and other distinguished individuals.

Is the future of the program at risk?

The Trump administration [reportedly](#) has been considering major cuts to the Exchange Visitor Program after a review of immigration policies that could affect American workers required under the “[Buy American and Hire American](#)” executive order issued in April, 2017. Some of the sponsoring organizations even [informed](#) their participants in the fall of 2017 that the administration plans to eliminate the work-exchange parts of the program, however, the State Department stated that no changes had been made.

While critics of the J-1 visas [claim](#) that the program provides employers with opportunity to hire cheap foreign labor instead of American workers, the news about possible reductions in the program [spurred](#) worries among many employers, such as ski resort and national park operators, who [rely](#) heavily on this seasonal help.