

# Exchange Visitor Visa


## Overview


Generally, a citizen of a foreign country who wishes to enter the United States must first be granted a visa. Either a nonimmigrant visa for a temporary stay, or an immigrant visa to permanently move to the United States. Exchange visitor (J) visas are nonimmigrant visas for individuals approved to participate in exchange visitor programs in the United States.


## Exchange Visitor Categories Include:

<a href="#"><u>Au pair and EduCare</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Short-term Scholar</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Camp Counselor</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Specialist</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Government Visitor</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Student, college/university</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Intern</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Student, secondary</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>International Visitor</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Summer Work Travel</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>(Dept. of State use)</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Teacher</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Physician</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Trainee</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Professor and</u></a>	
<a href="#"><u>Research Scholar</u></a>	


## Exchange Visitor Programs:

[Summer Work Travel Pilot Program: Australians](#) 

[Summer Work Travel Pilot Program: New Zealanders](#) 

[Intern Work Travel Program: Irish](#) 

[WEST \(Work, English Study, and Travel\) Program:](#)

[South Koreans](#) 

## Exchange Visitors cannot travel on the Visa Waiver Program or with Visitor (B1/B2) Visas –

Exchange Visitors participating in an exchange program must be issued an exchange visitor visa, or J-visa, to travel to the U.S.

Foreign nationals may not travel to the U.S. to participate in an exchange on a visitor (B1/B2) visa, or through the Visa Waiver Program (VWP). For more information see [Visa](#)

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waiver Program.**Acceptance in Exchange Visitor Program –**

- Step One - Apply for an exchange visitor program through a pre-approved organization in the United States. Visit the Department of State J-1 Visa Exchange Visitor Program website to learn about more about these programs.
- Step Two - Be accepted into a qualifying program. Once you are accepted into a program, you will automatically be registered in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS).
- Step Three - Once you are notified your registration is active, pay the SEVIS I-901 fee. (In some cases the fee is not required, consult your exchange visitor program sponsor). To learn more about SEVIS and the SEVIS I-901 Fee, visit the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) [website](#).

**How to Apply**

There are several steps to apply for a visa. The order of these steps and how you complete them may vary by U.S. Embassy or Consulate. Please consult the instructions on the embassy or consulate website.

**Complete the Online Visa Application**

- **Online Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-160** – Learn more about completing the DS-160. You must: 1) complete the online visa application and 2) print the application form confirmation page to bring to your interview.
- **Photo** – You will upload your photo while completing the online Form DS-160. Your photo must be in the format explained in the Photograph Requirements.

**Schedule an Interview**

Interviews are generally required for visa applicants with certain limited exceptions. Consular officers may require an interview of any visa applicant.

You should generally schedule an appointment for your visa interview at the U.S. Embassy or Consulate in the country

where you live. You may schedule your interview at another U.S. Embassy or Consulate, but be aware that in some cases it may be more difficult to demonstrate that you qualify for a visa outside of the country where you live. Wait times for interview appointments vary by location, season, and visa category. **You should apply for your visa early.** Review the interview wait time for the location where you will apply:

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## Prepare for Your Interview

- **Fees - Pay the non-refundable visa application fee** if you are required to pay it before your interview. If your visa is approved, you may also need to pay a visa issuance fee, if applicable to your nationality. Fee information is provided below:

### Application Fee

#### Select your nationality to see

#### \$185 Issuance Fee

Select a country/authority or are: 

### All Fees

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- Review the instructions available on the website of the embassy or consulate where you will apply to learn more about fee payment.
- **NOTE:** U.S. government sponsored exchange visitor (J visa) applicants and their dependents are not required to pay application processing fees if participating in a Department of State, a U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), or a Federally funded educational and cultural exchange program which has a program serial number beginning with G-1, G-2, G-3, or G-7 printed on Form DS-2019, Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor Status. U.S. government sponsored exchange visitor (J visa) applicants and their dependents are also not required to pay applicable issuance fees.

## Gather Required Documentation

Gather and prepare the following required documents

before your visa interview:

- **Passport** valid for travel to the United States - Your passport must be valid for at least six months after your period of stay in the United States (unless allowed by [country-specific agreements](#)<sup>↗</sup>). Each individual who needs a visa must submit a separate application. This includes any family members listed in your passport.
- **Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-160 confirmation page.**
- **Application fee payment receipt**, if you are required to pay before your interview.
- **Photo** – You will upload your photo while completing the online Form DS-160. Pay attention to the visa photo requirements where you are applying. See more in [Photograph Requirements](#).
- **Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor Status, Form DS-2019** – After your program sponsor enters your information in the [Student and Exchange Visitor Information System \(SEVIS\)](#) database, they will send you the DS-2019 form. All exchange visitors must be registered in SEVIS. If your spouse and/or minor children will live in the United States with you, they will each receive a separate DS-2019 form.
- **Training/Internship Placement Plan, Form DS-7002** – J-1 visa applicants participating in Trainee and Intern categories also need the DS-7002 form. (See Box 7 on Form DS-2019). Learn more about the [Trainee](#) and [Intern](#) programs.

## Legal Rights and Protections

You must read the [Legal Rights and Protections](#) pamphlet to learn about your rights in the United States and protection available to you. Review this important pamphlet before applying for your visa.

## More Additional Documentation May Be Required

The website where you apply may suggest or require you provide additional documents related to:

- The purpose of your travel;
- Your intent to depart the United States after your

travel;

- Your ability to pay all travel costs;
- Other documents, as required.

Evidence of your employment and/or your family ties may be enough to show your reason for travel and your intent to return to your home country. If you cannot cover all the costs for your travel, you may show evidence that another person will cover some or all costs for your travel.

Review the instructions for how to apply for a visa on the website of the [embassy or consulate](#) where you will apply.

## Attend Your Visa Interview

A consular officer will interview you to determine whether you are qualified to receive an exchange visitor visa. You must establish that you meet the requirements under U.S. law to receive a visa.

Ink-free, digital fingerprint scans are taken as part of the application process. They are usually taken during your interview, but this varies based on location.

After your visa interview, the consular officer may determine that your application requires further [administrative processing](#). The consular officer will inform you if this is required.

After your visa is approved, you may need to pay a visa issuance fee (if applicable). You will also need to make arrangements for your passport and visa to be returned to you. Review the [visa processing times](#) to learn more.

## Two-year Home-Country Physical Presence Requirement

If you participate in an Exchange Visitor Program and meet one of the criteria below, at the end of your program you must return to your home country for two years. This requirement under immigration law is based on section 212(e) of the Immigration and Nationality Act.

**Conditions for the Two-year Home-country Physical Presence Requirement** - J-visa holders must follow the two-year home-country physical presence requirement if the following is true:

- **Government funded exchange program** - The program is financed in whole or in part directly or indirectly by the U.S. government or the government of the exchange visitor's nationality or last residence;
- **Graduate medical education or training** - The exchange visitor entered the United States or acquired J status to receive graduate medical education or training; or
- **Specialized knowledge or skill (Skills List)** - The exchange visitor is a national or permanent resident of a country which the Secretary of State has designated as clearly requiring their specialized knowledge or skill. This is shown on the Exchange Visitor Skills List. **Review the Exchange Visitor Skills List 2024.**

**Restrictions** - If the two-year home-country physical presence requirement applies to you, you must return to your home country for a cumulative total period of at least two years before you can do any of the following:

- Change status<sup>↗</sup> while in the United States;
- Adjust status<sup>↗</sup> while in the United States to lawful permanent resident (LPR);
- Receive an immigrant visa at a U.S. embassy or consulate; or
- Receive a temporary worker (H), intracompany transferee (L), or fiancé (K) visa at a U.S. embassy or consulate.

### **Waiver of Two Year Home-Country Physical Presence Rule -**

If you are subject to the requirement to return to your home country, you may pursue a waiver of the requirement.

Select [Waiver of the Exchange Visitor Two-Year Home-Country Physical Presence Requirement](#) to learn more about this requirement and how to request a waiver.

### **Entering the United States**

A visa does not guarantee entry into the United States. A visa only allows a foreign citizen to travel to a U.S. port-of-entry (generally an airport or land border) and request permission to enter the United States. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS), U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officials at the port of entry have authority

to permit or deny admission to the United States.

After you present your passport, visa, and DS-2019 at the port-of-entry, a CBP official will make this decision. Once you are allowed to enter the United States, the CBP official will provide an admission stamp or paper Form I-94, Arrival/Departure Record.

Learn about procedures for students (with F or M visas) or exchange visitors (J Visas) entering the United States on the CBP website under [Arrival Procedures for Students or Exchange Visitors](#)<sup>↗</sup>. Visit the [CBP website](#) to find out about entering the United States. Learn about rules, restrictions, and what food and agricultural products are restricted. You can also find information about other goods that are restricted or prohibited.

## Extending Your Stay

See [Program Extension](#) on the Department of State Exchange Visitor Program website to learn about requesting to extend your exchange visitor program beyond the date listed on your Form DS-2019.

More information on maintaining exchange visitor status is on the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement SEVP website under [Maintaining Your Immigration Status While a Student or Exchange Visitor](#)<sup>↗</sup>.

Failure to depart the United States on time will result in being out of status. Under U.S. law, anyone are out of status will have thier visa automatically voided ([Section 222\(g\) of the Immigration and Nationality Act](#)<sup>↗</sup>). Any multiple entry visa that was voided due to being out of status is not valid for any future travel to the United States.

Failure to depart the United States on time may also result in you being ineligible for visas in the future, in some cases. Review [Visa Denials](#) and [Ineligibilities and Waivers: Laws](#) to learn more.

## Change of Status

If your plans change while in the United States (for example, you receive a job offer), you may be able to request a change in your nonimmigrant status through U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). See [Change](#)

[My Nonimmigrant Status](#) on the USCIS website to learn more.

While you are in the United States, receiving a change of status from USCIS does not require you to apply for a new visa. However, once you depart the United States, you must apply for a visa at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate in the appropriate category for your travel.

## More Information

- There is no guarantee that you will be issued a visa. Do not make final travel plans or buy tickets until you have a visa.
- For information about working in the United States during your exchange program, review [Exchange Visitors](#) and [Employment Authorization](#) on the USCIS website.
- Spouse and children
  - Your spouse and unmarried children under the age of 21 may be able to apply for J-2 visas to accompany or join you at a later date to reside with you during the duration of your J program, if permitted on your exchange program category. While they do not need to pay an additional SEVIS fee, your program sponsor must issue them separate DS-2019 Forms, which are required when they apply for their visas. They will also need a copy of the primary visa holder's J-1 visa and proof of relationship.
  - Your minor children are permitted to attend school while in the United States on J-2 visas and are not required to obtain [student \(E\) visas](#).
  - U.S. Embassies and Consulates treat visa applications from same-sex spouses the same as opposite-sex spouses.
- A valid U.S. visa in an expired passport is still valid. Unless canceled or revoked, a visa is valid until its expiration date. Therefore, a valid U.S. visa in an expired passport is still valid. If you have a valid visa in your expired passport, do not remove it from your expired passport. You may use your valid visa in your expired passport along with a new valid passport for travel and admission to the United States.



## Can I enter the United States more than 30 days in advance?



Exchange visitors are not permitted to enter the United States earlier than 30 days before their program start dates. If you want to enter earlier than 30 days, you must separately apply and qualify for a visitor (B) visa.

After you are admitted to the United States by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officials in visitor (B) visa status, you must separately apply to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for a change of status to exchange visitor (J) status. You must apply and be approved prior to the start of your exchange program. You will not be permitted to begin your exchange program until the change of status is approved. Alternatively, you may depart the United States and re-enter on your exchange visitor (J) visa.

## What is an International Cultural Exchange Visitor Q-1 visa?



There are two nonimmigrant visa categories for persons to participate in exchange visitor programs in the United States. The J-1 visa is for educational and cultural exchange programs designated by the Department of State.

The Q-1 visa is for participation in certain international cultural exchange programs. These programs provide practical training and employment, and allow program participants to share their home country's history, culture, and traditions in the United States. Applicants who wish to join an international cultural exchange program must be approved in advance by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) on the basis of a petition filed by the U.S. sponsor.

Select [Temporary Worker Visas](#) to learn more.

## Visa Renewal



Whether you are applying for the first time or renewing your visa, you will use the same application process (please review [How to Apply](#), above).

## Visa Refusal and Ineligibility



Review [Visa Denials](#) for detailed information about visa ineligibilities, refusals, and waivers.

## I was refused a visa, under section 214(b). May I reapply?



You may reapply if you have additional proof of your qualifications for an exchange visitor (J) visa, or you believe your circumstances have changed. Review [Visa Denials](#) to learn more.

## Misrepresentation or Fraud



Attempting to obtain a visa by the willful misrepresentation of a material fact, or fraud, may result in the permanent refusal of a visa or denial of entry into the United States.

Review [Ineligibilities and Waivers: Laws](#).

## Citizens of Canada and Bermuda



Citizens of Canada and Bermuda may enter the United States as exchange visitors without a visa. They must present a valid DS-2019 form at the border or airport for admission. For more information see [information for Citizens of Canada and Bermuda](#).

Additional resources for Canadian visitors to the United States can be found on the [U.S. Embassy and Consulate websites in Canada](#).

## Further Questions



- **Case-Specific Questions** - Contact the U.S. Embassy or Consulate handling your visa application for status information. Select [U.S. Embassy or Consulate](#) for contact information.
- **General Questions** - review [Contact Us](#).