



International Expert Resources

J1 EXCHANGE TEACHER

PRE-ARRIVAL GUIDE



WELCOME

Congratulations on being appointed to teach in the United States of America!

We are glad that you choose International Expert Resources (IER) teacher exchange program for your J1 Exchange Visitor Program.

This J1-Exchange Teacher Guide contains critical information about immigration regulations, programs and services for new exchange teachers. This guide will prepare you with new life ahead in the U.S. Be sure to read it through and contact us for any specific questions that you may have or contact host school directly with school related questions. This Guide is intended to address some of the most common questions applicable to all teachers.

CONTACT INFO

International Expert Resources

Teacher Exchange Program

TEL: 512-535-6699

Email: info@iexpertresources.com

Address: 166 Hargrave Dr. Ste C400-229, Austin TX 78737

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Program Overview	4
2. Checklist	5
3. Applying for a J-1/J-2 visa	6
4. Arrival	13
5. Identification Cards	16
6. Living Cost	17
7. Taxes/Payroll	18
8. Teaching License	20
9. 212(e) Requirement	22

1. PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The purpose of the teacher program is to enroll exchange visitors who teach full-time in primary and secondary accredited educational institutions. The Exchange Visitor Program is administered by the U.S. Department of State to promote the interchange of American and foreign teachers in public and private schools and the enhancement of mutual understanding between people of the United States and other countries. In this program, you are the ambassador of your own country. You can share your culture and educate your students, American colleagues and local community about your country. You can also participate in cross-cultural activities with Americans in schools and communities, and to return home ultimately to share the experiences and increased knowledge of the United States. Such exchanges enable our exchange teachers to understand better American culture, society, and teaching practices at the primary and secondary levels, and enhance American knowledge of foreign cultures, customs, and teaching approaches.

We want your stay in the United States to be a positive experience. Please contact us or review the official website of the U. S. Department of State for J-1 information, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs for additional information which can be found at: <http://j1visa.state.gov/programs/teacher>.

2. CHECKLIST

- Read all of the information provided in this guide to have a head start.
- Verify that all the information on your DS-2019 is correct and notify your sponsor and host school for any travel changes to the U.S.
- Pay the SEVIS Fee online at www.fmjfee.com/i901fee
- Apply for a J-1 Visa at your home country or country of residence.
- Enroll to IER J1 Group Health Insurance.
- For teachers from the Philippines, schedule a mandatory Pre-Departure Orientation Seminar (PDOS) hosted by Commission on Filipinos Overseas upon visa issuance.
- Coordinate your housing and transportation arrangement with your host school and inform IER for the relevant dates.
- USCIS requires all exchange teachers to demonstrate sufficient financial capacity upon arrival in the United States. To support a smooth transition during the initial settlement period, IER recommends bringing at least \$3,000 per individual to cover initial moving and living expenses.

3. APPLY FOR J-1/J-2 VISA

SEVIS FEE

All J-1 visa applicants must pay the SEVIS fee of \$220. The SEVIS fee must be paid at least THREE BUSINESS DAYS before the scheduled visa application interview at the U.S. Consulate or embassy. For most individuals, the SEVIS fee can be paid by electronically completing the Form I901 and paying with a credit card at www.fmjfee.com/i901fee.

You will need the information from your DS-2019 in order to complete the SEVIS Fee payment. Please print the electronic receipt immediately after payment has been made. You must show the receipt to the consular officer at the time of the interview. Spouses and dependent children (J2s) do not pay this fee. The SEVIS fee is not a visa application fee. It is used to operate and maintain the SEVIS system. The fee is non-refundable, even if the visa application is denied.

A valid J-1 visa is required to enter the United States on the Exchange Visitor Program. For information on processing times and procedures, visit the U.S. Department of State at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/study/exchange.html>

A **personal interview is required**, so you will need to schedule your appointment as soon as possible. Be aware there also could be substantial delays due to security checks, so please plan your travel arrangements accordingly. Immediate family members (spouse and children under the age of 21) who will accompany you to the United States may apply for J-2 visas using the DS-2019 forms enclosed. If your family will join you later, a DS-2019 form will be issued by IER upon request.

3. APPLY FOR J-1/J-2 VISA

Canadian Citizens are not required to obtain a visa stamp for the U.S embassy generally but must pay for the SEVIS fee at least three (3) business days prior to arrival at a port of entry into the U.S. If you are a Canadian Landed Immigrant, please check with the nearest U.S Consulate about whether or not you require a J-1 visa stamp, as requirements vary depending on country of citizenship.

VISA INTERVIEW PROCEDURE

To ensure you are ready to apply for your J-1 visa, please review the checklist below.

- Locate the U.S. Embassy or Consulate in your home country by reviewing the website at <http://www.usembassy.gov>.
- Review the Embassy's website for the non-immigrant visa process and fees.
- Before you receive the J-1 Visa packet, you should begin gathering documents and making preparations to file your application.
- Make arrangements to apply for your J-1 visa immediately! During the busy summer months and holidays, processing times will be delayed.
- Make arrangements to pay the \$160 VISA APPLICATION FEE per visa applicant.
- Make arrangements to pay the \$220 SEVIS FEE for the J-1 visa www.fmjfee.com/i901fee.
- Book your visa interview

3. APPLY FOR J-1/J-2 VISA

CHECKLIST FOR J-1/J-2 VISA APPLICATION

Bring these documents with you at the day of visa interview in the consulate office.

1. Original, signed DS-2019 Form Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor (J-1) status. The J-1 applicant should sign the bottom of the first page of all forms and submit them for the visa application. The DS-2019(s) will be returned to you to present at the U.S port of entry
2. A separate DS-2019 form for each of your accompanying dependents/spouse (if applicable)
3. Receipt showing payment of the SEVIS fee (J-1 visa only) and visa application fee for each applicant
4. Visa application form for each visa applicant.
5. Passport(s) valid for at least 6 months into the future, for each visa applicant.
6. Proof of ties to your home country. Consult the website of your local U.S. Consulate/Embassy for suggestions.
7. Proof of financial support. Bring the signed school contract to show the financial support.
8. Two passport-size photos for each visa applicant often required (check with U.S. Consulate).
9. Marriage certificate and birth certificates (in English with attached translation) of children carrying their own passport (J-2 visa only).

3. APPLY FOR J-1/J-2 VISA

VISA INTERVIEW TIPS

Ties to your home country. Under U.S. law, all applicants for non-immigrant visas, such as the J-1 visa, are presumed to be immigrating to the U.S. and will be denied a visa unless they can convince the Consular Officer that they intend to return home. You must therefore be able to show that you have reasons for returning to your home country. "Ties" to your home country are the things that bind you to your hometown, homeland, or current place of residence, such as job, family, financial prospects that you own or will inherit, investments, etc. Examples of evidence which shows ties to your home country include property ownership, bank statements from accounts, rental agreements or leases, financial investments (i.e. retirement, stocks, etc.) that you own or will inherit, family owned businesses, personal vehicle title, birth certificates of immediate family members who live in your home country, letter from previous employer indicating intent to rehire you upon your return, and any other evidence that you will return.

Speak for yourself. Do not bring parents or family members with you to the interview, unless they are applying for J-2 visas. The consular officer wants to interview you not your family. You must be polite, but you should also speak with assertiveness and confidence.

Know how the IER Program fits into your career plans. If you are able to articulate the reasons that you want to participate in the IER Exchange Teacher program and how your participation in this program will benefit your professional career upon your return to your home country, you will most likely be able to convince the consular officer of your nonimmigrant intent. You should also be able to explain the IER Program to the Consular Officer, the processes you undertook to become part of the Program, and a brief description of the IER Program.

3. APPLY FOR J-1/J-2 VISA

Be brief: Because the volume of applications received, all consular officers are under considerable time pressure to conduct a quick and efficient interview. They must make a decision, for the most part, on the impressions they form during the first minute of the interview. What you say first and the initial impression you create are critical to your success. Keep your answers to the officer's questions short and to the point

Additional Documentation: It should be immediately clear to the consular officer what written documents you are presenting and what they signify. Lengthy written explanations cannot be quickly read or evaluated. Remember you will have 2-3 minutes of interview time, and you must have your evidence organized and clearly labeled.

Maintain a positive attitude: Do not engage the consular officer in an argument. You should be polite at all times, but assertive. If you are denied a J-1 visa, you should ask the officer for a list of documents he/she would suggest you bring to overcome the refusal and try to get the reason(s) you were denied a visa in writing.

Truthfulness: You should answer all questions on your visa applications and to any question that the consular officer asks you completely and fully. Misrepresentations or falsification of information can lead to a permanent bar from entering the United States.

Financial Resources: If you intend to bring your family with you to the US, you should be prepared to have evidence to show financial resources available for your family members to support themselves in the US. This can include bank statements, investments, title to property, etc.

3. APPLY FOR J-1/J-2 VISA

J-1 VISA GRANTED/DENIAL. Upon completion of the interview, you will be notified by the officer if you are granted or denied the J-1 visa. Once it is granted, you will be informed to leave the passport, so visa can be stamped on it. Generally, it takes about 5-8 business days for you to receive your passport with visa stamped on it. If you are denied, you should be receiving a letter explaining the denial. If not, ask for the specific reason of denial in writing. Additionally, ask the consulate officer what documents you can present when you reapply for the visa to override the original denial. Contact IER and your host school immediately.

APPLY J2 VISA

AJ-2 visa is a temporary, nonimmigrant visa that allows a spouse or unmarried child under age of 21 to accompany a J-1 teacher to the U.S. and then return home in furtherance of the range of the cultural exchange objectives of the IER Program.

J-2 VISA QUALIFICATION Only legal spouses and unmarried children under the age of 21 are eligible for this J-2 sponsorship. Children who marry or who turn age 21 during the course of the Program will need to leave the U.S. and obtain their own visa as they will no longer be eligible for sponsorship in J-2 status. If your spouse or child is not planning to accompany you full-time, he or she might consider obtaining a visitor's visa or traveling under the Visa Waiver Program. For further details on these visas, visit the U.S. embassy web site for your area.

Before applying for J-2 visa for your family members you should consider:

- You are required to maintain financial support for yourself and your J-2 dependent family members.
- All J-2 dependents of Exchange Teachers are required to maintain adequate health insurance policy while their J-2 status remains active, at your own expense.
- A spouse or child who plans to enroll in full-time, post-secondary education in the U.S. will need to enter under a student visa.

3. APPLY FOR J-1/J-2 VISA

APPLYING FOR THE J-2 VISA Family members must apply for the J-2 at a U.S. embassy or consulate in their country of citizenship or legal permanent residency and must meet all of the requirements as set forth for all non-immigrant visa holders. J-2 visa applicants should be able to demonstrate to a U.S. Consular Officer proof of the following:

- They have binding ties to a residence in a foreign country which they have no intention of abandoning and that they are coming to the U.S. for a temporary stay.
- Any spouse is legally married to the J-1 holder, and any children are unmarried and under the age of 21
- They have sufficient financial resources to cover all expenses in the U.S.
- The level of evidence required by a Consular Officer may vary greatly depending on the applicant's individual circumstances.

4. ARRIVAL

Please present the following documents to the U.S Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officer at the U.S. port of entry.

- Passport(s) containing a valid J-1 visa (or J-2 visas for accompanying family members).
- Signed Form DS-2019(s) for you and any accompanying family members.

Foreign visitors to the U.S. arriving via air or sea no longer need to complete paper Customs and Border Protection Form I-94 Arrival/Departure Record or Form I-94W Non Immigrant Visa Waiver Arrival/Departure Record. You will need to print your form I-94 form online at <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94/consent.html> and print the record for your SSN application.

The officer should return:

- Passport(s).
- Stamped Form(s)DS-2019 for you and any accompanying family members.

Even though you may possess a J-1 visa, the Immigration Official makes the final decision about your admission into the U.S. If the Immigration Official has questions about the admissibility of a foreign national, they may allow the person into the U.S. for 30 days for further inspection at local USCIS (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services) offices. **This is known as a deferred inspection. Should this occur, please contact IER. In the event of a denial of entry into the U.S., you should contact IER immediately.**

4. ARRIVAL

Entry program: Customs officers will review your travel documents such as your passport and visa, and ask you questions about your stay in the U.S. You will then be asked to put both index fingers onto a glass plate that will electronically capture two fingerprints. Customs officers will also take your picture.

Exit program: When you leave the U.S. you will be asked to scan your documents and repeat the finger printing process at an automated self-service machine. An exit confirmation will be added to your travel records to demonstrate compliance and record status for use in future visits to the U.S. **It is critical that ALL J-1's and J-2's go through the U.S. VISIT Exit Program every time they leave the U.S.** You should also turn in your I-94 card if any, especially if finishing your exchange program. By submitting this card you record your compliance with J visa regulations and protect your status in future visits to the U.S.

You are required to coordinate your arrival pick-up with your host school and ensure that IER is informed of your flight details in advance.

When booking your flight, please observe the following arrival guidelines:

- If your host school is three (3) hours or more by driving distance from the arrival airport, your flight should arrive no later than 3:00 PM.
- If your host school is within three (3) hours or less by driving distance from the arrival airport, your flight should arrive no later than 6:00 PM.

If your arrival is scheduled after 7:00 PM, you will be required to arrange a one-night accommodation near the airport. It is highly recommended to choose a hotel that provides a free airport shuttle service for convenience. You may book accommodation through: www.orbitz.com.

You must also provide IER and/or your host school with your hotel details so that proper pick-up arrangements can be made for the following day.

4. ARRIVAL

What to bring: These are the documents/things that you will need to bring with you.

1. Official travel documents: Passport and DS2019 form
2. Proof of insurance if you will obtain one for yourself and or your family
3. Home Country Driver's license
4. An International Driver's license is highly recommended
5. Money to cover at least one month living expense (See item 9 Living Expenses)
6. Personal Medication if any
7. Local US Address and Emergency Contact Information

Recommend to bring with you

- Health Record
- Cultural materials for your classroom and community

PROGRAM DATE AND ACTIVITIES

Your application for a J-1 visa using the enclosed Form DS-2019 indicates your acceptance of the terms and conditions stated on the second page of the form. Upon entry to the United States, you will be authorized to participate in the program activity specified in Item 4 of the DS-2019, for the duration indicated in Item 3.

Important Note:

Your authorized program period may be extended after your arrival, upon the request of your host school and subject to eligibility and approval. For J-1 teachers, the standard maximum participation period is three (3) years, with the possibility of a one-time extension of up to two (2) additional years, depending on program requirements and approval conditions.

5. IDENTIFICATION CARDS

SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER

In addition to your official documents (Form DS-2019 and J-1 visa), you will be required to apply for a Social Security Number (SSN) upon arrival in the United States. The SSN is essential for payroll processing and tax purposes. Once you arrive, you must promptly notify IER so that your arrival can be validated in the SEVIS system. Please note that SEVIS validation is required before you can proceed with your SSN application. Without an active and validated SEVIS record, you will not be eligible to apply. If you already have an SSN, you are not required to apply again. Once issued, keep your SSN card in a secure location. It is strongly advised that you do not carry your SSN card with you on a daily basis to avoid loss or misuse. For more information, you may visit the Social Security Administration website: <https://www.ssa.gov/ssnumber/>

DRIVER'S LICENSE

It is highly recommended that you are able to drive in the United States, as this will greatly help with your mobility and day-to-day transportation needs. You are encouraged to bring a valid driver's license from your home country, and if possible, obtain an International Driver's Permit (IDP) before departure. Once you have received your Social Security Number (SSN), you may apply for a U.S. driver's license through your local Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), in accordance with state requirements. For more detail about driving in the U.S, visit <https://www.usa.gov/visitors-driving>.

BANK ACCOUNT

Most US schools require you to submit your bank account information for direct deposit of your payroll. Some major banks like Wellsfargo Bank or Bank of America will allow you to open a bank account without SSN however, most of local community banks do require SSN. It is recommended to set up a direct bank deposit for your payroll, so you do not need to go to the bank each time to deposit the check. A bank direct deposit form can be requested at the bank and give it to the Payroll Staff in the school. You will also need the bank account to write a check to pay for your bills, such as utilities bills, house rent...etc.

6. LIVING COST

Here is an updated estimate for the monthly cost of living in the United States based on the current 2026 economy. Please remember that this is a general estimate and the actual costs may be completely different depending on the state, city, and neighborhood where you choose to live

Updated Monthly Cost of Living Estimate (Per Person)

- Security Deposit: \$1,000 and up (usually equals one full month of rent).
- Rent (Shared apartment or teacher housing): \$600 to \$1,200 per month.
- Rent (Living alone or a full house): \$1,400 and up per month.
- Internet: \$70 to \$150 per month (varies by speed) (p. 1).
- Electricity: \$140 to \$200 per month.
- Water & Sewer: \$50 to \$100 per month (p. 1).
- Food & Groceries: \$350 to \$500 per month.
- Cell Phone: \$60 to \$90 per month (p. 1).
- Child Care: \$1,000 and up per month (per child).
- Transportation (Car loan/lease + Gasoline): \$500 and up per month.
- Car Insurance: \$120 to \$210 per month (for standard full coverage).

Helpful Tools to Check Rates by State

If you want to see specific prices for a certain area, you can explore this online tool: **MIT Living Wage Calculator**.

Sources:

<https://groceriestracker.com/blog/average-grocery-cost-per-person-2026>

<https://www.saveonenergy.com/resources/electricity-bills-by-state/>

<https://www.hireahelper.com/advice/average-cost-of-utilities/>

<https://www.joshandjolene.com/average-utility-bill-month-2026/>

7. TAX AND PAYROLL

Estimate Monthly Salary Deductions

The figures and categories below represent a general baseline. Actual payroll deductions vary dramatically based on your specific state, local school district, and personal situation.

Federal Income Tax Deductions

Category / Bracket	Rate / Amount	Note
Taxable Income Bracket A	15%	Lower-tier earnings (Single filing) (p. 1)
Taxable Income Bracket B	25%	Higher-tier earnings (Single filing) (p. 1)
Dependent Credit / Deduction	\$1,000	Standard adjustment per qualifying dependent (p. 1)

FICA (Social Security & Medicare) Taxes

- Social Security Tax (Employee portion): 6.25%
- Medicare Tax (Employee portion): 1.45%
- Crucial J1 Exemption Rule: J1 Teachers are typically exempt from Social Security and Medicare taxes for their first calendar year and the first semester of their second calendar year. Regular deductions generally begin in January of your second full year of teaching.

State & Local Payroll Deductions

Deduction Type	Estimated Percentage / Cost	What to Expect
State Payroll Tax	~6% Average	Varies entirely by state; some states have 0% income tax (p. 1).
Teacher Retirement	6% to 12%	Mandatory contributions to the state pension fund (p. 1). You can usually request a full refund of your portion once you finish teaching in that state (p. 1).
Retiree Health Care	~1%	State-level medical safety-net fund contribution (p. 1).
School Health Insurance	\$0 to \$750 / month	District-provided plans covering routine check-ups, dental, and vision (p. 1). Premiums depend heavily on single vs. family coverage (p. 1).

7. TAX AND PAYROLL

Income Tax Exemption Status & Treaties

Some countries maintain unique tax treaties with the United States. If your home country qualifies, a significant portion or even the entirety of your teaching income may be exempt from federal income taxes for up to 2 years

Always research your specific country's status and understand what your financial obligations will look like once that temporary exemption period expires. You can explore active agreements directly through the [IRS United States Income Tax Treaties A to Z Page](#)

Disclaimer: This organization cannot legally provide personal tax advice or endorse specific tax accounting services. The data provided above is purely for initial research and budgeting preparation. It remains your responsibility to understand and fulfill your personal U.S. tax obligations.

8. TEACHING LICENSE

You are generally required to receive a teaching license in the state that your host school is located for public schools. Some states have a license that is specifically designed for J-1 teacher while some states don't. As J-1 teacher under IER's Exchange Teacher Program, you must be a licensed teacher at your home country and have taught at school setting for three years or more. Most state department of education will issue a provisional license based on your current credential at your home country. You are required to submit an educator licensure application to the department of education for review.

Then specific requirement for the standard license will be stated on the review result for you to complete. While some states will issue a standard license based on teaching experiences and teaching license at your home country. Each state has different rule and regulation for the educator license. You will need to check with the department of education for more detail.

These are the general documents required for the educator licensure application in the U.S. All documents must be in English or English translated authenticated copy. An Original Detail Course by Course Evaluation Report by a private accredited agency.

You can check with department of education for the list of the agencies or visit NACES for a list of members <http://www.naces.org/members.html>.

- Official Transcripts from University and College. We recommend that you request several copies of the official transcripts from the schools you have graduated or attended.
- An educator license issued from the country of residency or nationality.

8. TEACHING LICENSE

- Educator License is in good standing. An original written statement provided by the authorized licensing agency in the issuing country that the credential is in good standing, and has not been revoked, suspended, or sanctioned for misconduct and is not pending disciplinary or adverse action.
- An English language proficiency
 - Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOFEL). Some states require TOFEL and or
 - Completion of an undergraduate or graduate degree at an institution of higher education outside the United States where the primary language or instruction was English or;
 - Completion of an undergraduate or graduate degree at an institution of higher education in the United States
 - Teaching Verification Form. This should indicate on years of teaching experience and days per calendar year worked, and grade level taught.
- Educator License Application for the state that you will apply for it.
- Educator License Application Fee. Fee is varied in each state.

You will need to contact individual state department of education for detail information of their licensure application process.

9. 212(E) TWO YEAR HOME RESIDENCY REQUIREMENT

A key principle of the J-1 Exchange Visitor Program is that it promotes **cultural exchange and the sharing of knowledge between the United States and your home country**. Because of this, the program is built on the expectation that you will return home after completing your program and apply what you have learned to continue contributing to education and community development in your own country.

As a J-1 exchange teacher, you **are expected to understand the core intent of the program**: it is temporary in nature and focused on impact in your home country. You should plan with the understanding that you will complete your teaching assignment in the United States and then return home afterward to fulfill the program's purpose of cultural exchange and professional growth.



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512-535-6699

info@iexpertresources.com

www.iexpertresources.com