



# **J-1 EXCHANGE VISITOR ORIENTATION HANDBOOK**

*Availability. Partnership. Dedication.*

# WELCOME!



Congratulations on being selected for a J-1 Exchange Visitor Program! We are confident that you will benefit immensely from your experience in the United States both professionally and personally.

## ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK



Please read this handbook as soon as you receive it and use it as a reference throughout your program. Should you have any questions before, during, or after your program, do not hesitate to contact SHRM. We strive to ensure that you have a rewarding exchange visitor experience.

## Top 10 Topics:



1. Applying for the J-1 Visa > Information and documents needed for your interview, visa interview preparation, and what to do in the event of administrative processing.
2. J-2 Dependents > Who they are, their purpose in the U.S., what they can do, and the responsibility of J-1 visitors for their J-2 dependents.
3. 212(e) > Explaining the 2-year home-country residence requirement for certain J-1 visitors.
4. Entering the United States > Important documents and steps you should follow as you enter in J-1 status for your BridgeUSA Program.
5. Validation in SEVIS > Required procedure to validate and begin your J-1 Program upon arrival to the U.S.
6. Applying for a Social Security Card > Steps to obtain your Social Security Number and Card in order to be paid for your Program.
7. Program Requirements > Requirements you must abide by as a J-1 Exchange Visitor to remain in good standing throughout your Program.
8. International Travel During Your Program > Explanation of your responsibilities when engaging in international travel during your program, procedures before and after your travel.
9. Ending your Program > Steps to take when ending your program in the U.S.
10. Driving in the United States > Information on driving in the United States, obtaining a drivers license, or other available transportation options.

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# CHAPTER 1: ABOUT THE J-1 EXCHANGE VISITOR PROGRAM

The J-1 Exchange Visitor Program, formally the BridgeUSA Program, was created by the U.S. Department of State to foster international understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries by means of educational and cultural exchange. It has been a successful component of U.S. public diplomacy for more than 50 years. Learn more about the program design and intent through the [U.S. federal regulations](#) that govern the programs.

All J-1 visa programs are temporary by design, and participants must depart the United States at the end of their exchange program. To this end, the program is intended to expose participants to U.S. techniques, methodologies, business practices, and expertise as well as to help them gain a better understanding of U.S. culture and society.

Please also read the [Department of State J-1 Welcome Brochure](#).

# IMPORTANT CONTACTS: SHRM



Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM)  
1800 Duke Street  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
Main Telephone: +703-535-6365  
Email: [EVP@shrm.org](mailto:EVP@shrm.org)

Your J-1 Program is sponsored by SHRM and administered by a Responsible Officer and Alternate Responsible Officers - "RO" and "ARO" for short. The RO and AROs are a resource that you can reach out to with any questions or concerns before, during, and after the program. You can reach the RO or AROs at SHRM during regular office hours at: [703-535-6365](tel:703-535-6365).

As SHRM staff positions may change periodically, you can find the most recent RO and ARO names and direct [contact information on our website](#).

For any emergencies outside of regular office hours, call our emergency hotline:  
[1-888-330-4686](tel:1-888-330-4686)

# IMPORTANT CONTACTS: BRIDGEUSA



Office of Designation  
Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs  
U.S. Department of State  
State Annex SA-5, Fifth Floor  
Washington, DC 20522-0505

*\*BridgeUSA is the formal program name for the U.S. Department of State J-1 Exchange Visitor Program.*

## Welcome to the Exchange Visitor Program



Questions or concerns regarding  
your exchange program?

Contact the sponsor listed  
on your Form DS-2019.



Still have questions **AFTER**  
speaking with your sponsor?  
Email [Jvisas@state.gov](mailto:Jvisas@state.gov)



Remaining concerns or need  
emergency assistance?  
Call the J-Visa Emergency  
Hotline at [1-866-283-9090](tel:1-866-283-9090)

**If you or someone else is in immediate danger, call 911!**



Please be assured that the Exchange Visitor Program rules protect you from any form of retaliation if you contact the Department of State for assistance.

# SHRM J-1 PROGRAMS

SHRM is designated by the U.S. Department of State to sponsor the J-1 Exchange Visitor Programs in the following categories:

- *Intern and Trainee*

The J-1 Intern Category of the Exchange Visitor Program allows college and university students or recent graduates to gain exposure to U.S. culture as they experience U.S. based business practices in their chosen occupational field. The maximum duration of participation in the J-1 Intern program is 12 months.

The J-1 Trainee Category of the Exchange Visitor Program allows foreign professionals to come to the United States to gain exposure to U.S. culture and to receive training in U.S. business practices in their chosen occupational field. The maximum duration of participation in the J-1 Trainee program is 18 months, except Hospitality and Tourism Trainee programs which are capped at 12 months.

\*If you will be a J-1 Intern or Trainee, refer to the J-1 Intern/Trainee Guide for specific program details, fees, and requirements.





## CHAPTER 2: PREPARING FOR YOUR EXCHANGE VISITOR PROGRAM

This chapter will provide details about the important steps you should take when preparing to start your J-1 Exchange Visitor Program, from planning and attending your J-1 visa appointment, to making travel arrangements, and considering the costs of your program.

Follow these steps closely to avoid any unexpected problems or delays in starting your programs.

*\*Note: Specific SHRM Program Fees can be found separately in your J-1 Category-specific guidebook. SHRM will provide your appropriate category guidebook for reference.*

# COSTS OF LIVING IN THE US

During your program, you must have sufficient financial resources to cover all of your expenses in the U.S. (and those of any J-2 dependents). Evidence of sufficient financial resources is required as part of the J-1 application process before SHRM will approve J-1 visa sponsorship.

It can be difficult to determine how much money you will need as the cost of living varies widely from U.S. city to U.S. city. When estimating the cost of living in your host community, your intended supervisor and your host organization's human resources (HR) or relocation services department can be helpful resources. Additionally, the following websites can help you estimate the cost of living in your community, including estimates for monthly rent, transportation, food, and other likely expenses:



[www.numbeo.com](http://www.numbeo.com)  
[www.bankrate.com](http://www.bankrate.com)  
[www.infoplease.com](http://www.infoplease.com)  
<http://livingwage.mit.edu/>

Personal needs and spending habits vary from person to person, so it is important that you create a personal budget for both you and any dependents that reflects your particular needs.

## • *Items to include in your personal budget:*

Below are ranges for each monthly expense. The actual cost may be more or less based on personal needs and preferences.

- Health insurance premiums (\$60 - \$125 per person)
- Rent (\$500 - \$3,000 depending on location)
- Food (\$200 - \$600 for at-home meals)
- Public transportation (\$75 - \$200)
- Cell phone (\$50 - \$200)
- Home internet (\$50 - \$150)
- Leisure and entertainment (\$200 - \$1,500)



# HOUSING



If you are responsible for securing your own housing during the program, we encourage you to start this process as soon as you have confirmed your program participation. Your host organization's HR or relocation services department as well as your intended supervisor can be helpful resources when you evaluate housing options. Additionally, SHRM is available to address any questions you may have. Please note that your residential address should be within 50 miles of your host organization. Rental costs and terms vary widely from city to city, but they should be clearly defined in the rental agreement. Please be sure to read and fully understand all terms of a rental agreement before signing it. If you have any questions as to the terms of the rental agreement, please do not hesitate to ask.

Generally, rental agreements require a security deposit prior to move-in. A security deposit is money paid in advance to finance repairs in the event that you damage the residence during your stay. Security deposits are often equivalent to one month of rent; if you damage the residence during your stay, the landlord will deduct money from the deposit to pay for repairs. The rental agreement will define the terms of the security deposit and, most importantly, what qualifies as damage. Thoroughly inspect the residence and note any defects and problems before you move in. After you move out, you will be refunded the security deposit minus the cost of repairs, if any.

Individuals renting an apartment or house should consider purchasing renters insurance to provide coverage in case of an accident (example: fire), burglary, or most natural disasters. In some states renters insurance is required for all renters, while in other states it is optional. Please check with your landlord to see what is required in your location. Coverage levels and exclusions can vary based on the policy and the location, so it is important to review your policy thoroughly to ensure it covers all necessary items. You can obtain quotes for coverage from most major insurance providers.

The following websites can help you find and evaluate housing options:

[www.zillow.com](http://www.zillow.com)  
[www.apartmentguide.com](http://www.apartmentguide.com)  
[www.apartments.com](http://www.apartments.com)  
[www.craigslist.org](http://www.craigslist.org)  
[www.airbnb.com](http://www.airbnb.com)



# MANDATORY HEALTH INSURANCE



U.S. federal regulations require that every J-1 participant and their J-2 dependents have medical insurance coverage with the following minimum benefits for the entire duration of their program:

- *Medical benefits of at least \$100,000 per accident or illness*
- *Repatriation of remains in the amount of \$25,000*
- *Expenses associated with the medical evacuation of the exchange visitor to their home country in the amount of \$50,000*
- *A deductible not to exceed \$500 per accident or illness*

SHRM must have proof of insurance coverage before we issue any sponsorship documents. Failure to possess and maintain insurance coverage that meets these required levels will result in termination from the J-1 program and will negatively impact the exchange visitor's ability to obtain future visas.

All Exchange Visitors, including any dependents, may be subject to the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Information on the ACA can be found at <https://www.hhs.gov/healthcare/about-the-aca/index.html>

Exchange Visitors should discuss with their host organization's human resource (HR) department whether their programs would be subject to the ACA.

# ACCOMPANYING J-2 DEPENDENTS

The Exchange Visitor Program allows J-1 Participants to bring family members to the United States to accompany them during their J-1 Programs. These family members may apply for their own J-2 Dependent Status. Each dependent must apply for their own DS-2019 form to be issued by SHRM and should apply for the J-2 visa at a U.S. embassy or consulate abroad. They may be included in your same J-1 visa application, attend your appointment with you, and travel to the U.S. with you. Or, they may attend the appointment separately and arrive at a later time to the U.S. if needed. Please communicate to SHRM if you will have any dependents applying or arriving at a later time than you.



- *Eligibility*

Legal spouse or  
Unmarried child under the age of 21

- *Abilities*

J-2 Dependents of working age may be eligible to work while in the U.S. They may submit a personal application for an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) by filing form I-765 with USCIS after arrival in the U.S. Please note SHRM does not assist with this process.

J-2 Dependents of school age may also be enrolled in U.S. schools. Check with the desired school or district to understand the enrollment process.

- *Responsibility*

In order to have accompanying J-2 dependents, you as the J-1 visitor will be responsible for them throughout your stay in the U.S. You will need to demonstrate that you have the financial ability to support them without the need for them to work.

If a J-2 dependent permanently departs the United States prior to the scheduled end date, SHRM must be immediately notified so that the J-2 can be closed out accordingly.

# APPLYING FOR THE J-1 VISA

J-1 Exchange Visitors and accompanying J-2 Dependents must have a valid J-1 Visa to request entry into the United States. To obtain a visa, you must schedule a visa appointment with a U.S. consulate or embassy once SHRM issues your Form DS-2019. Specific J-1 visa application procedures can be found on the website for the American embassy or consulate at which you will be applying for a visa.

Please refer to your SHRM "Applying for A J-1 Visa Handout" for detailed instructions.



## 212(E) TWO-YEAR HOME-COUNTRY PHYSICAL PRESENCE REQUIREMENT

Some, though not all, exchange visitors with J-1 visas are subject to a two-year home-country physical presence requirement\*. This requirement is part of U.S. law, in the Immigration and Nationality Act, Section 212(e). If subject, it requires you to return home for at least two years after the completion of your J-1 Exchange Visitor Program\*.

Programs that meet the following criteria will be subject to 212(e):

- *The program involves specialized knowledge or skills deemed necessary by your home country, as determined by the Exchange Visitor Skills List; or*
- *The program involves graduate medical training*
- *The program is funded directly or indirectly by either your government of the U.S. government;*

\*All of your J-2 Dependents will automatically become subject to 212(e) if you are subject.

\*This may be done all at once, or alternatively it can be fulfilled in small spans of time cumulatively (i.e. 6 months every year for 4 years, totaling 24 months).

## 212(E) CONTINUED

If and when you are subject to 212(e), and until you complete the two-year-home country physical presence requirement, you cannot\*:

- *change immigration status within the United States*
- *obtain H, L, K, or Legal Permanent Residence status in the United States.*



\*It does not prevent you from initiating another J-1 Program (if otherwise eligible), F-1 Student Status, or B-1/Visitor Status in the United States.

Your DS-2019 form will be checked either "Not subject to the two-year residence requirement" or "Subject to two-year residence requirement" on the bottom left side. In addition, your J-1 visa will also be noted either "Bearer is not subject to section 212(e)" or "Bearer is subject to section 212(e)."

The two-year home-country physical residence requirement serves to encourage Exchange Visitors to return home and share their skills and cultural experiences with friends and family in their home countries. As this is aligned with the spirit of international exchange and the tenets of the BridgeUSA Program, SHRM does not advise about alternatives to fulfilling the requirement.

### A Note on Repeat Participation of BridgeUSA Programs:

Certain J-1 Exchange Visitor Programs have rules against repeat participation in the same or a different J-1 category until a certain amount of time has passed, or other eligibility requirements have been met. These are sometimes known as "bars" on repeat participation. Refer to your J-1 category-specific guide for information specific to your J-1 category for more information.

# TRAVEL & ENTRY TO THE UNITED STATES



## TRAVEL TO THE U.S.

You may arrive no more than **30 days** before the program start date shown on your DS-2019 form. This is known as your pre-arrival "Grace Period". We recommend that you enter the US at least one week before your program start date to settle in, become familiar with the local area, and recover from jetlag. You must notify your host organization and SHRM immediately if there is any delay in your program or if you are not able to enter the US by your program start date. Please note that you cannot start your training or J-1 program until the start date listed on your DS-2019 form.

Although it is OK if you arrive to the U.S. slightly later than the start date on your DS-2019 due to unforeseen delays, you should not arrive more than 30 days late. If you need to arrive more than 30 days after your originally approved start date, then SHRM will need to amend your program dates and DS-2019 for a fee.

Below is a list of the documentation you should bring with you when you travel to the U.S. **DO NOT** pack these documents in your luggage, as you will need to present them at the port of entry.

- Passport with J-1 Visa
- Passport with J-2 Visa for all dependents
- Original signed DS-2019 form for self and all dependents
- Original signed DS-7002 form (\*for Intern/Trainee Programs only)
- Residential housing or hotel confirmation
- Host organization and SHRM contact information

Please visit CBP's website at <https://www.cbp.gov/travel/international-visitors> for travel tips, a travel smart checklist, and a list of prohibited and restricted items, as well as information on what you must declare when entering the US.

## AT THE PORT OF ENTRY

At the port of entry, a U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officer will review your travel documents and ask about your planned stay in the U.S. It is important that you inform the CBP officer that you will be a J-1 exchange visitor. Be prepared to provide the name of the host organization and the site of activity for your program. As part of the enhanced entry procedures, CBP officers may scan both of your hands with an inkless device and take a digital photograph of you. This process is known as "inspection".

After a successful inspection, the officer will stamp your passport and annotate the date of admission, class of admission, and admitted until date. For J-1 programs, this stamp should list J-1 as the class of admission (or J-2 in the case of dependents) and D/S (Duration of Status) as the admitted until date. Before you leave the CBP counter, please review the admission stamp to verify that all of the recorded information is correct. If not, return to the officer to complete or correct.

**Note:** In recent years, some airports have discontinued providing a physical admission stamp in the passport upon entry.

If you will be entering the U.S. by air or sea, CBP officials will scan your passport to create an electronic arrival record (Form I-94). Once the electronic record is created, you will need to print a hard copy of the I-94 arrival form. The electronic form can be accessed at [www.cbp.gov/I94](http://www.cbp.gov/I94).



## **CHAPTER 3: POST-ARRIVAL TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

This chapter will provide details about the important steps you should take after your arrival in the United States in J-1 status. It is very important for you to follow these steps for check-in with SHRM as well as other necessary steps to ensure you are able to be paid, manage your money, maintain your good standing in J-1 status, and know what to do when considering international travel during your program.

# IMPORTANT TASKS



## VERIFY YOUR I-94

Within 24-48 hours after your arrival, you should be able to access your electronic I-94 arrival record via the website noted on page 14. Please verify the date of admission, the class of admission (J-1), and your first and last name are entered correctly.

SHRM has noted that participants with single names (only a first or a last name), very long names, or names with unusual spellings or symbols can sometimes be entered incorrectly onto the I-94. Please alert SHRM if you notice any errors, and you will be guided on steps to request corrections from CBP Deferred Inspections.



## MANDATORY CHECK-IN WITH SHRM

After you enter the U.S. and begin your program, you must email your completed and signed Exchange Visitor U.S. Address Verification form (included in your acceptance email) within 10 business days of the program start date listed on your DS-2019 form:

After receiving this document, SHRM will validate your program. If you do not send this to us in a timely manner, you are at risk of entering into "no-show" status, which will negatively impact your ability to enter the US in the future. "No-show" status reflects that you have abandoned your J-1 program and could be subject to removal from the United States.

## GET YOUR SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER (SSN)

If you're on your U.S. host organization's payroll, you will need a Social Security Number (SSN) for tax purposes. The SSN is also usually required to lease an apartment or open a bank account. To apply for a SSN, you must:

- Send your arrival verification documents to SHRM
- Wait for 10 days after SHRM validates your program to ensure communication among government databases.
- Complete Form SS-5: Application for A Social Security Card.
- Bring the completed application and the original documents listed below to the nearest Social Security Administration (SSA) office:
  - Original DS-2019 form
  - Passport
  - I-94



The SSA office will mail your number and card as soon as it has verified your documents with the issuing offices, usually within 10 days.

## EMPLOYMENT VERIFICATION WITH YOUR HOST

In the United States, employers are required to complete Form I-9 to verify the identity and employment authorization of every new employee (both citizen and noncitizen). J-1 participants are authorized to work only under the terms of the Exchange Visitor Program and must complete and sign Section 1 of Form I-9 no later than the first day of employment and the employer completes Section 2 with you by the third day of work. You will need to bring your passport, DS-2019 form, DS-7002 form, and a printed copy of your I-94 card to complete the I-9 Form. Your host organization's HR department will retain a copy of your documents.

# MAINTAINING YOUR J-1 STATUS

## J-1 REQUIREMENTS AND RULES

All exchange visitors are required to abide by all of the below requirements per J-1 regulations:

- Sending your arrival verification documents to SHRM within 10 days after your arrival in the U.S.
- Obtaining travel validation from SHRM before traveling abroad.
- Maintaining valid medical insurance coverage for the entire duration of your stay for you and any dependents.
- Notifying your host organization and SHRM if your rights have been violated.
- Notifying SHRM as soon as possible of any potential issues related to your health, safety, and welfare while participating in the J-1 program.
- Maintain a valid passport throughout the entirety of the J-1 Program.
- Report lost, stolen, or damaged travel or immigration documents to SHRM.

\*Note: Each specific J-1 Category also has its own requirements for participation. Please refer to your specific SHRM J-1 Category guide for additional requirements.



## MANDATORY NOTIFICATION OF CHANGES

All exchange visitors are required to notify SHRM within 10 days if there are changes to any of the following items:

- U.S. Residential Address
- Site of Activity Address for your Program (host organization address)
- Program start or end dates
- Email address of the J-1 and any J-2 family members over the age of 18
- U.S. phone number of the J-1 and any J-2 family members over the age of 18
- Supervisor at your host organization
- Scope of work as approved on the DS-2019 form
- Permanent departure of any J-2 family members prior to the scheduled end date of the J-1 program

# INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL DURING YOUR PROGRAM



To travel outside the U.S. and re-enter while on a J-1 visa, SHRM must endorse your DS-2019 form for international travel.

SHRM is able to offer **two options** for travel validations:

1. Participants email a copy of their DS-2019 form (both front and back) to their SHRM contact for a digital travel validation signature. With this option, the participant will still need to travel with a physical copy of their validated DS-2019 form so they would need to print both pages of the DS-2019 form double sided and travel with that validated hard copy.

OR

2. Participants can send their original, physical DS-2019 form to the following address:

Society for Human Resource Management c/o J-1  
Visa/Exchange Visitor Programs  
1800 Duke Street  
Alexandria, VA 22314 U.S.

Participants traveling internationally must also ensure that their J-1 visa is still valid and permits multiple entries (M). Participants who travel internationally with expired J-1 visas must obtain a new J-1 visa before they can re-enter the U.S. Some exemptions exist for visitors to Canada, Mexico, or islands adjacent to the United States. Confer with SHRM before making travel plans which would require reentry into the United States.

For all international travel during their programs, exchange visitors should not spend more than 21 consecutive days outside the United States without prior approval from SHRM.



# HANDLING YOUR MONEY

## PERSONAL BANKING

SHRM recommends that exchange visitors open a checking account with a U.S. bank or with a home-country bank with widespread U.S. banking operations. This will help you avoid carrying large amounts of cash or paying international ATM withdrawal and currency exchange fees. Below is a list of large U.S. banks with multiple locations in the US:

- Bank of America
- Wells Fargo Bank
- JPMorgan Chase Bank
- Citibank
- PNC Bank
- SunTrust Bank



## U.S. TAXES



J-1 participants receiving a salary or stipend from the U.S. host organization's payroll are subject to federal and state taxes throughout their program. However, J-1 participants are exempt from paying Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA) and Federal Unemployment Tax Act (FUTA) taxes. For more-detailed information, please speak with your host organization's HR department or a tax professional. April 15 is traditionally the due date for filing your federal individual income tax return.

# OBTAINING U.S. HEALTHCARE

## TYPES OF HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

You will be able to seek health care from different types of providers in the United States. When you are sick, you should consider seeking the care of one of the below types of providers:



- ***Primary Care Physicians***

Non-emergency medical care is typically provided by a physician of your choice (often referred to as a "Primary Care Physician"). Check with your health insurance plan for available physicians that accept your insurance plan. Using physicians that participate with your insurance carrier (known as "in-network providers") may be less expensive.



- ***Urgent Care Providers***

If you require urgent attention, you can visit an urgent care facility or walk-in clinic, which don't require appointments. You can find them by contacting your insurance provider, or by searching "Urgent Care" or "Walk-in Clinics" on the Internet.



- ***Emergency Rooms***

In emergency situations, you should call 911 immediately. You can seek emergency care in an Emergency Room (ER). Most ERs are located in hospitals, however some are private ERs. Remember that visiting an ER when it is not a true emergency can be much more expensive than using a Primary Care Physician or visiting Urgent Care, and you may be subject to a required co-payment or payment towards your deductible.



- ***Pharmacies***

You can purchase medication or fill prescriptions at national pharmacies (CVS, Walgreens, Rite Aid), major regional supermarket chains, and other multi-purpose retailers (Wal-Mart, Target, Costco).

SHRM recommends that you have eye, dental, and general physical examinations before entering the U.S. Bring any prescription medications, eyeglasses, and medical records with you.

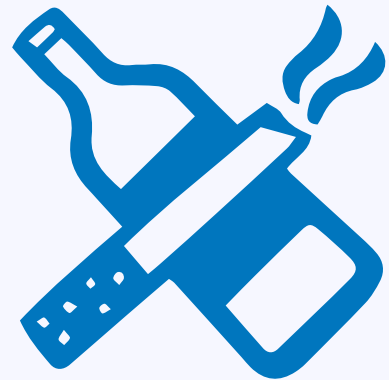
# FOLLOWING THE LAW



As a J-1 Program Participant, you are required to follow the laws of the United States while participating in your Exchange Visitor Program. Within the U.S., there are state-specific laws as well as federal (all U.S.) laws. As a J-1 Participant, you should know that penalties for not following the law or being arrested may jeopardize your current visa validity or your future requests for entry in the United States. Should you ever have any questions about specific laws, you may contact SHRM for guidance. For serious matters involving the law, you may need to enlist the assistance of a qualified attorney.

## NOTES ON DRUGS, ALCOHOL AND CIGARETTE USE IN THE UNITED STATES

Laws vary from state to state, but generally it is illegal in the U.S. to purchase, possess, or consume alcohol if you are under 21 years of age. Generally, it is also illegal to have an open alcoholic beverage in a public space and automobiles. It is also illegal to buy alcohol for individuals under 21 or to buy cigarettes for individuals under 18. Nationwide, it is illegal to drive under the influence of alcohol or drugs. If you get caught driving under the influence (DUI)\*, drinking in public, or buying alcohol and cigarettes for minors, you'll risk losing your visa and getting deported.



Though some states legally permit the purchase and/or use of marijuana, it is still illegal at the federal level. Therefore, SHRM advises J-1 participants avoid purchase and use of marijuana.

\*Starting on November 5, 2015, the U.S. Department of State requires consular officers to "prudentially revoke" the nonimmigrant visas for foreign nationals arrested for, or convicted of, driving under the influence, while intoxicated, or similar such arrests/convictions within the previous five years. In cases of a DUI or DWI arrest or conviction, the Department can revoke J-1 visa of the individual and any associated J-2 family members while they are in the United States. If this occurs, the foreign national cannot depart and re-enter the United States without reappearing before the consulate and obtaining a new visa. Also, SHRM may be required by the Department of State to terminate the originate program in the SEVIS system following departure from the United States.

# ENDING YOUR J-1 PROGRAM



- *On-Schedule Departure*

Provided you successfully complete your full program, you have a 30-day "grace period" to settle your affairs and leave the U.S. after your program end date. During this grace period, you may not continue your J-1 program or otherwise engage in employment. Every exchange visitor must depart the U.S. by the end of the grace period to avoid violating your visa status. You can lawfully travel around the U.S. during these 30 days, but you cannot depart the US and re-enter on the J-1 visa.

It is crucial that all J-1s and their dependents do not overstay the 30-day grace period, as they will be out of status and at risk for removal from the United States. SHRM is required to report overstays to the Department of State, and foreign nationals that overstay their visa may be limited in their ability to obtain future visas. If you have extraordinary circumstances that might prevent you from leaving the U.S. within your 30-day grace period, you must notify your host organization and SHRM immediately.

- *Early Departure*

In the event that you or any J-2 dependents do not intend to complete the full duration of your program and remain through the end date on your DS-2019, you must notify SHRM immediately. SHRM will adjust the end date on your DS-2019 and provide you a new copy. You must cease your J-1 program on this new date, and your 30 day grace period will begin starting after the new end date.

Note: NEVER stop participating in your J-1 program without notifying SHRM as this is a violation of your status.



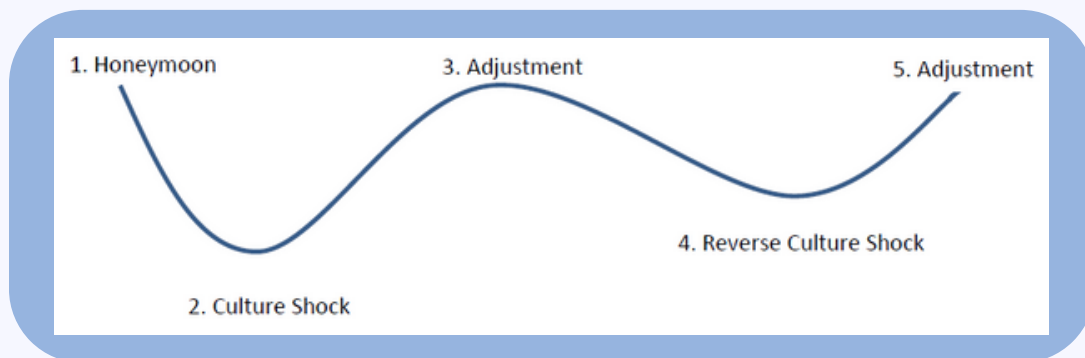


## **CHAPTER 4: LIFE AND CULTURE IN THE UNITED STATES**

This chapter will encourage you to get involved in your new U.S. community, teach you some aspects about U.S. culture, and provide tips and tricks for finding services and opportunities to expand your cultural experience in the United States of America.

# CULTURE SHOCK

Culture shock is the feeling of disorientation and homesickness when a person moves or visits a new country, or simply experiences a different kind of lifestyle and environment. It is a normal part of acclimating to a new environment, and many J-1 Visitors and their Dependents experience some level of culture shock. Here is what you can expect and how to find relief when symptoms arise.



1. The honeymoon period is usually experienced in the first few days after you arrive in a new place. Observed differences in culture and lifestyles are exciting and intriguing.
2. Culture shock is experienced as you struggle to adjust to a new time zone, language, culture, and physical environment. At this stage, you may want to return home and may experience anger, frustration, and loneliness. This emotional response is common and will eventually recede.
3. After some time, you will get used to the new environment as you establish a routine with training and daily activities. At this stage, you have accepted the cultural differences and feel independent, comfortable, and relaxed.
4. When you return home after your program, you may experience reverse culture shock after acclimating to life in the U.S.
5. After some time, you will adjust to your old lifestyle as you reconnect with friends and family.

## TIPS ON DEALING WITH CULTURE SHOCK

- Immerse Yourself in U.S. Culture: Become familiar with the local community, sightsee, make new friends, and expand your knowledge of English by learning local dialects and idioms.
- Focus on Positives: You're improving your English, advancing your career, and learning new skills that will help you in your future.
- Stay Busy: Visit tourist attractions, try new foods, and excel in your J-1 program.
- Maintain the Familiar: Talk to family and friends abroad, prepare your traditional food, share your culture with American colleagues and other members of your community.
- Connect with Fellow Foreign Nationals: Meet other exchange visitors and international assignees.
- Connect with Colleagues: Learn about the U.S. from American colleagues.
- Be Patient: Adjusting to life in a new place may take some time.
- Be Prepared: Learn about the U.S. and the community where you will be living before your trip.

# UNDERSTANDING AMERICAN CULTURE

## GENERAL CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS

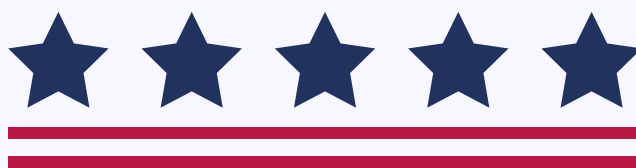
U.S. culture is diverse and hard to define. But here are some common characteristics:

- **Individualism**
  - Americans value self-reliance and independence. Consequently, you are expected to make your own decisions and take responsibility for your own actions.
- **Diversity**
  - The U.S. is incredibly diverse and open to other cultures. Don't be afraid to share your culture or learn about new cultures.
- **Equality**
  - Social status is less important in everyday life in the U.S. Economic, social, demographic, and cultural differences are not emphasized openly.
- **Punctuality**
  - Americans like to be on time and do things as efficiently as possible. Provide advance notice if you are going to be late for an event or meeting, business or social.
- **Greetings**
  - Don't be surprised if strangers say "Hello" or "Hi" and smile at you. When people ask "How are you?" they don't expect a negative answer. You should answer "I'm fine, thanks" or "I'm good, how are you?" or something along those lines.
- **English Language**
  - People may automatically assume you can speak English like a native speaker. Don't hesitate to politely ask the other person to slow down or repeat what they said if you don't understand or missed something.
- **Religion**
  - Religions are practiced openly in the U.S., but people don't usually talk about religion in the workplace.
- **Dining**
  - Breakfast (early morning): Consists of but is not limited to coffee, juices, milk, cereals, eggs, sausages, bacon, muffins, and donuts.
  - Lunch (midday): Lunch is typically a quick and lighter meal. People at work don't consume alcoholic beverages during lunch hours.
  - Dinner (evening): Heaviest meal of the day with meats, sides, and desserts.
- **Tipping**
  - At a restaurant, always leave a tip. Remember to tip on the total amount before any discounts, coupons, gift certificates, etc., but not including taxes. Tips can vary from 10% to 25% depending on the type of service.



## U.S. WORK CULTURE

- One's career or livelihood is very important. "What do you do for a living?" is a common question when you meet new people in the U.S.
- Men and women are treated equally and fairly, and they share the same responsibilities and expectations.
- Businesses value quality, quantity, and efficiency.
- Americans tend to be relatively direct (getting to the point quickly) when doing business.
- Although direct communication is used generally, indirect communication is used when making requests and giving feedback. "Would it be possible for your team to finish this by 5 p.m.?" is considered to be more polite than saying "Finish this by 5 p.m."
- When providing feedback, Americans typically try to mix negative with positive feedback and provide constructive criticism. Try to give a complete assessment, mentioning areas of strength along with areas for improvement.
- Physical contact is generally avoided in the workplace except for handshakes when greeting someone for the first time or when you conclude a meeting.
- Americans use informal style when addressing colleagues. Age and hierarchy don't play an important role in communication, and it's acceptable to call your boss by his or her first name.
- It is considered rude to answer a cellphone call during a meeting. If you must take a call during a meeting, politely excuse yourself from the meeting to answer your phone in another room.



## MAJOR HOLIDAYS AND CELEBRATIONS

- **New Year's Day - January 1**
  - U.S. federal holiday commemorating the first day of the year on the modern Gregorian calendar.
- **Martin Luther King Jr. Day - 3rd Monday of January**
  - U.S. federal holiday honoring Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a civil rights leader.
- **Valentine's Day - February 14**
  - U.S. cultural holiday where lovers, couples, and spouses express their love to each other by giving flowers, chocolates, and cards.
- **Presidents Day - 3rd Monday of February**
  - U.S. federal holiday honoring Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a civil rights leader.
- **Memorial Day - Last Monday in May**
  - U.S. federal holiday in honor of the men and women who died while serving in the U.S. Armed Forces.
- **Juneteenth - June 19**
  - U.S. federal holiday to commemorate the emancipation of enslaved people in the United States.

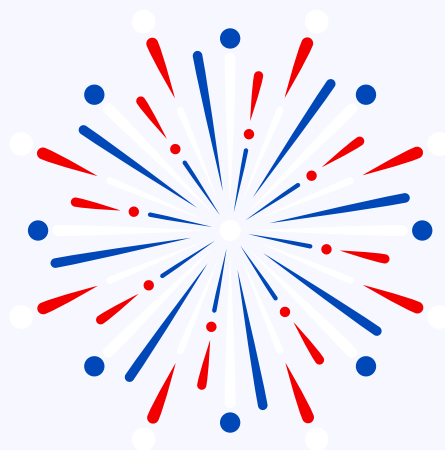
## HOLIDAYS AND CELEBRATIONS CONTINUED

- **Independence Day - July 14**
  - U.S. federal holiday commemorating the adoption of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 177
- **Labor Day - 1st Monday of September**
  - U.S. cultural holiday where lovers, couples, and spouses express their love to each other by giving flowers, chocolates, and cards.
- **Columbus Day - 2nd Monday of October**
  - U.S. federal holiday celebrating Christopher Columbus' arrival in the Americas.
- **Halloween - October 31**
  - U.S. cultural holiday where children wear costumes and masks and go door-to-door to "Trick or Treat," and people are expected to give them candy.
- **Veterans Day - November 11**
  - U.S. federal holiday commemorating those who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces.
- **Thanksgiving Day - 4th Thursday of November**
  - U.S. federal holiday which celebrates the first harvest of the year. Families and friends gather and enjoy a turkey and large meal.
- **Christmas Day - December 25**
  - U.S. federal holiday where many Americans celebrate by giving gifts and decorating trees.

Check with your host organization as to which of these are deemed to be days off during your program.

If you would like to learn more about U.S. customs and culture, please visit:

[www.culturecrossing.net](http://www.culturecrossing.net)  
[www.studentabroad.com](http://www.studentabroad.com)  
[www.everyculture.com](http://www.everyculture.com)



We encourage you to share your own holiday celebrations with American friends and colleagues as part of your J-1 Cultural Exchange!

# TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS

## PUBLIC OR FREE TRANSPORTATION

There are many public transportation options in the United States. The best public transportation option for you will depend on your needs and where you live. If you are not sure which option is right for you, you can ask a local transportation expert for help.

## OBTAINING A DRIVER'S LICENSE

Exchange visitors are eligible to apply for a driver's license or state identification card. The requirements for obtaining a driver's license and auto driver's insurance may differ from state to state. Visit your state's Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) website to find the nearest DMV office and state-specific information. Make sure you apply for your driver's license after you send your arrival documents to SHRM. In general, you will need to present the following:

- Passport
- Original form DS-2019
- Copy of I-94 Record
- Proof of Residence (copy of your lease, utility or phone bill with your U.S. address, etc.)

Some states allow exchange visitors holding a valid home country driver's license issued by a foreign country to operate a vehicle up to a certain time. Please visit the Department of Motor Vehicle (DMV) state-specific website to check the driving rules in the state(s) you'll be visiting to verify that you can use your non-U.S. driver's license. The document commonly referred to as an "international drivers license" is actually a legalized translation of the home country license and so requires that you carry both it and the home country license. You should keep the insurance and car registration forms in the car at all times.



# COMMUNITY RESOURCES

To ensure you have the most fulfilling and enjoyable cultural experience possible, we recommend you seek out different ways to get involved in your local community. Here are some ideas for you.

## • *Volunteering*

Speak with your supervisor at your host organization about possible opportunities to volunteer in your host city.

Volunteering is another great way to acclimate yourself with American culture. Some companies have volunteer projects already in place. You may want to see about speaking at a local elementary or middle school to share about your native country and culture.

## • *Places of Worship*

The United States is a religiously diverse country, and this diversity is reflected in the variety of places of worship that can be found throughout the country. There are churches, synagogues, mosques, temples, and other places of worship representing a wide range of faiths. These places of worship provide a place for people to come together to practice their faith, worship their God, and connect with their community.

## • *Public Libraries*

Many cities have local libraries that are accessible to the public and offer more than just books. Check out your local public library for computer and Internet access, newspaper and magazine collections, movies and DVDs, free classes, book clubs, and quiet meeting spaces.

## • *Shopping*

The U.S. features an expansive and vibrant retail industry giving consumers access to an array of stores and products. While local markets vary, there are some broad national trends:

- Large grocery stores are regional in scope, but some general retailers have national grocery operations (Walmart, Target, Costco).
- Clothing, electronics, furniture, home appliances, and other durable goods retailers can be found just about anywhere. Malls are common and provide a convenient centralized location to shop for a range of products.
- Stores are typically open 7 days a week but tend to close early on Sundays.
- Many stores have return policies where you can receive a refund for unsatisfactory or unwanted and unused goods.

## • *Recreation Centers*

Most cities and towns have recreation centers providing swimming pools, gyms, computer labs, party and game rooms, and other recreational activities at no or minimal charge. Recreation centers often offer free or low-cost classes for English language, cooking, and dancing, among other subjects.

## • *Visitor Centers*

Many U.S. cities have visitor centers where you can find maps as well as information on public transportation, restaurants, lodging, and local attractions. We encourage you to visit your city's visitor center or visitor bureau website to learn more about your new community and the resources it offers.

## • *Chambers of Commerce*

Business owners in towns and cities often form local chambers of commerce to promote and support local businesses and to communicate plans and agendas to the community. You can learn a lot about U.S. business practices and network with business owners by attending events organized by your local chamber of commerce.

# SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS



## PERSONAL SAFETY

Call **911** immediately in emergency situations and notify your host organization and SHRM as soon as possible. Here are some useful safety tips that all exchange visitors must be aware of:

- **DO NOT DRINK AND DRIVE.** It is illegal and can result in criminal charges and loss of visa status.
- **DO NOT CALL/TEXT AND DRIVE.** Distracted driving (driving while using a cell phone) is illegal in many states and very dangerous.
- Always buckle your seat belt when in a car. Police will stop and fine you for not buckling your seatbelt. This also applies to passengers.
- Always wear a helmet when you're riding a motorcycle or a bike.
- Be aware of which directions to look when crossing the road. Also, remember that in the U.S. cars drive on the right side of the road.
- If you are stopped by a police officer while driving, **DO NOT** get out of the car. Stay in the car and wait for the officer's instructions.
- Avoid walking alone at night.
- Walk in lighted areas at night. Always be aware of your surroundings.
- Avoid carrying large amounts of cash and use caution when using the ATM.
- Don't accept rides from strangers.
- Don't let strangers into your building or "buzz them in."
- Do not leave valuables in a vehicle or any other unsecure or public location.
- **NEVER** share your ATM/debit card pin number or leave around your ATM/debit card.
- Please use caution where you swipe your credit/debit card. Immediately report any unauthorized purchases on your debit/credit card to your bank or credit card company.

## WORKPLACE SAFETY

You are entitled to many rights as a J-1 Exchange Visitor performing your duties at your site of activity or workplace. You have the right to:

- Be paid fairly
- Be free from discrimination
- Be free from sexual harassment and sexual exploitation
- Have a safe and healthy workplace
- Request help from union, immigrant, and labor rights groups
- Leave an abusive employment situation

Please visit and bookmark the [Wilberforce Pamphlet on Nonimmigrant Rights](#) for future reference throughout your J-1 Program.



## THANK YOU!

Thank you for thoroughly reviewing this handbook. We hope it will be useful to you before, during, and after your BridgeUSA Program in the United States!