



2024 HANDBOOK

ORIENTATION TO J-1 CULTURAL EXCHANGE

Welcome to International Alliance Group
and the J-1 Exchange Teacher Program!

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WELCOME MESSAGE

Welcome to the United States and to International Alliance Group (IAG) Program.

IAG teachers have access to a wide variety of resources from IAG including visa process support, teacher certification support, access to GO Destination Services for travel, housing, and transportation support, professional development and mentoring throughout your program, and a consular affairs expert.

IAG teachers' visas may be sponsored by the affiliate of IAG (ITA by ESI) OR by partner agencies such as Greenheart Exchange or CICD by Intrax.

By participating in the International Alliance Group Program, you are taking part in a cultural exchange program that has a rich history in facilitating cross-cultural communication and understanding between our two countries.

International Alliance Group Program offers international teachers the opportunity to participate in a cultural exchange program in the United States, while learning valuable professional skills, improving English language capability, and learning about the culture and history of the U.S. At the same time, each school that hosts International Alliance Group exchange teachers will see their students' worldview expanded as they interact with a teacher from another part of the world.

[Exchange Visitor's Rights and Protections](#)

[Exchange Visitor's Official Welcome Brochure](#)



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Purpose

The J-1 Teacher Exchange Visitor Program was established by the United States Department of State to increase understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries through educational and cultural exchanges. This important exchange program assists the Department of State in furthering the foreign policy objectives of the United States.

International Alliance Group Program offers the opportunity for qualified teachers from around the world to participate in a three-year cultural exchange program in the United States. Selected teachers will have the opportunity to immerse themselves in an English-speaking environment and learn about the culture of the United States through working and interacting on a daily basis with the people of the United States. Moreover, teachers will develop enhanced professional skills and learn new educational techniques by collaborating with teachers and school administrators in the United States, which will help them in their careers when they return to their home countries. Returning to your home country is an expectation of the J-1 Teacher Exchange Visitor Program, whether you return after 3 years or an approved extension to 5 years.

Host schools in the United States will benefit from hosting an International Alliance Group teacher in many ways – by sharing the rich culture that the teacher brings from his or her home country and by exposing teachers from the United States to different ideas and professional techniques that the exchange teacher offers.



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Cultural Goals and Components

Participating teachers must participate in two cross-cultural activities per year and report participation to the visa sponsor. IAG will assist all teachers, regardless of visa sponsor, in the development and facilitation of the cross-cultural activities. However all J-1 teachers must turn in evidence of cross-cultural activities to their visa sponsor.

Exchange teachers are required to complete at least two cross-cultural activities per academic/calendar year. Be aware that the completion of the cross-cultural activities is essential to your J-1 visa compliance. The cross-cultural activities must include at least one of each of the following:

- An activity for the classroom, host school or district, or the host community to give an overview of the teacher's culture (including history, traditions, heritage, economy, educational system) of his or her home country. If a teacher is placed at an international school, you must conduct at least one cross-cultural activity per academic year outside of your host school in nearby schools or communities where international opportunities may be more limited.
- An activity that involves U.S. student communication with schools or students in another country, preferably in the school where you teach in your home country.

Please find IAG support documents at the end of this handbook that will guide you in designing and facilitating your cross-cultural activities.



TEACHING POSITION

By working as a teacher, you have the tremendous responsibility and honor to educate and inspire the youth in the United States.

Below is a list of some of the expectations your school, including your colleagues, your school administration, and your students have for you, as an effective teacher:

- Work cooperatively with administration, teachers and staff to best meet the educational needs of the student population
- Teach and be present in the school for no less than 35 hours per week, and arrive at expected time, prepared to teach class
- Teach to the very best of your ability by using instructional time effectively, and maintain a stimulating learning environment
- Consider the differences in students' abilities and learning speeds, and utilize a variety of teaching methods to address those varying needs
- Use problem-solving skills and critical thinking to modify instruction for students not performing appropriately with grade level materials
- Use current research relevant to instructional strategies in most effectively organizing classroom activities
- Help students develop positive self-concepts, strong life skills and positive habits of mind
- Support and implement school programs to promote positive student behavior
- Manage disruptive behavior positively and appropriately to U.S. norms while promoting physical and social well-being
- Demonstrate sensitivity to the needs and feelings of students, and demonstrate caring, warmth, generosity and friendliness towards students and school community
- Share your professional experience and techniques from your home country with your colleagues and supervisors
- Develop enhanced professional skills and learning new educational techniques by collaborating with teachers and school administrators in your host school



FEES & COSTS INFORMATION

It is important that you carefully plan a budget for your International Alliance Group program.

As part of the application process, you completed a Budget Exercise to calculate your expected income and expenses. ***Participating teachers should be aware that your income may not cover your total expenses, including the cost of the program, visa application/ SEVIS fees, travel, housing, transportation, and living expenses.***

You should have at least \$4,000 - \$6,500 available when you arrive in the United States for settling costs, including transportation to your host school, housing deposits, food, and other personal expenses until you receive your first paycheck. Be aware that some states require a SSN to be paid and there may be delays in your first paycheck. You must come financially prepared.

Program Fees and Costs

International Alliance Group program fees are covered by cooperating host school districts' program fees. These fees will cover International Alliance Group administrative costs for screening, orientation, and supervising participants, as well as the participant's supplementary medical insurance (from departure from home country to when you transfer to your school's medical insurance coverage, plus repatriation and evacuation coverage throughout your program).

Beyond the program fees paid by the host school, International Alliance Group will not charge participants program fees.

International Alliance Group partners, including universities and foreign departments of education, have committed to not charging applicants fees for their referral services. If any third party attempts to charge you additional fees for International Alliance Group program, please contact International Alliance Group for support.



FEES & COSTS INFORMATION

Other costs that participants will likely incur while in the United States include:

PRE-ARRIVAL COST		
Program Fees	\$-	\$0 paid to IAG
Visa Application Fee	\$185.00	Paid directly to US government by applicant
SEVIS Fee	\$220.00	Paid directly to US government by applicant
Flight/ travel to host school	\$1,200.00	Estimated, paid by applicant
Transcript Evaluation/ Translation	\$250.00	<u>Estimated, paid by applicant</u>
Total Pre-Arrival Cost	\$1,830.00	Estimated

UPON ARRIVAL COST		
Fingerprint cost (if applicable)	\$80.00	Fingerprinting & Background Check.
Teaching Certification	\$200.00	Required by the Dept. of Educ. Estimated \$60-\$210.
Apartment/Housing deposit	\$3,770.00	Usually first month's and last month's rent estimated Assume 35-40% of income This estimated cost can be shared with roommate situations.
Apartment/Housing Application Fee	\$75.00	Estimated usually management requires this fee.
Apartment/Housing Cleaning Fee	\$400.00	Estimated usually management requires this fee.
Apartment/Housing Processing Fee	\$75.00	Estimated usually management requires this fee.
Utilities	\$500.00	Estimated deposits required for electricity, water, etc.
Other settling in expenses	\$1,000.00	Estimated for food, phone service, general transportation, etc.
Total Upon Arrival Cost	\$6,100.00	Estimated

TOTAL COST: Pre-Arrival & Arrival	\$7,930.00	Resource: https://www.fool.com/the-ascent/research/average-monthly-expenses/
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FEES & COSTS INFORMATION

Wages

Your salary information was provided to you as part of the Letter of Intent to Hire from your school district . You should receive a paycheck directly from your school on your school's pay schedule (typically every 2 weeks but you must ask to clarify. Some districts pay once per month). You will notice that federal and state taxes will be taken out of your paycheck at a rate between 15-20% of your paycheck.

If your paycheck includes any deductions (for housing, transportation, or anything else) that you do not understand, please ask your school's financial officer or Human Resources department. Your host school should provide you with a written explanation for any deductions from your paycheck. For the first 2 years, you should NOT see deductions for FICA or Medicare.

Sample Budget

As part of the application process, a Budget Exercise will be assigned to you, with a calculation of salary and expected take-home pay after taxes, minus monthly expenses, to have a general idea of what you will be earning and spending each month. The Budget Exercise also considers required program and pre-arrival costs, so that you can calculate your expected annual net income. We encourage you to create a monthly budget and review actual spending while you are on the program.



PROGRAM RULES

As part of the International Alliance Group exchange program, it is important that participating teachers follow the program rules.

- Upon approval of your visa, let IAG know right away so we can support in your travel, arrival, and housing options.
- Within 7 days of arrival in the United States, submit an Arrival Report to IAG to confirm arrival and travel details.
- Maintain an accurate and up-to-date host school and housing address, as well as contact information, including phone number and email with IAG.
- Report to IAG any address change or change in your contact information including email address and phone number within 10 days of any change.
- Complete your monthly check-ins from IAG.
- Teach effectively and work cooperatively with administration, teachers, and staff in your designated school to best meet the educational needs of the student population.
- Follow the rules, policies, and procedures of the school and district.
- Participate only in authorized employment that has been approved by your J-1 visa teach program as reflected on your DS2019.
- Maintain the minimum medical insurance coverage required by Department of State regulations for yourself and any family members.

Important Note:

It is extremely important to inform International Alliance Group when you arrive in the U.S. and if you make any address or contact information (email, phone) changes OR if there are any changes in your family or situation that may impact your visa.



PROGRAM RULES

All program participants are expected to stay with their original host school placement for the duration of their program.

Requests to change host school may be approved on a case-by-case basis and International Alliance Group Program can never guarantee that a replacement position will be found for the participant.

If, for any reason, an exchange teacher thinks they need to change host schools, they must immediately contact your sponsor, International Alliance Group Program via email at visa@iagusa.org. An exchange teacher's visa sponsor MUST approve a transfer request in order for IAG to support the teacher in seeking a replacement position.

Department of State regulations prohibit J-1 Teachers from changing host schools without visa sponsor approval of the transfer, new host school, and new Offer Letter before changing host schools. A request does not guarantee an approval. It is at the sole discretion of IAG, the visa sponsor, whether or not a change of host school will be approved. After the sponsor along with International Alliance Group Program completes its review of the request, the decision shall be final.

Upon receiving approval of the change from International Alliance Group Program, the participant may be responsible for paying the change of host school fee and other related fees to visa renewal depending upon the nature of the transfer. The teacher will be informed of the fees expected at the time of transfer job letter of offer. Should an IAG program teacher choose to transfer for reasons within their control, the teacher shall be responsible for their transfer fees. IAG management shall determine whether the transfer is the teacher's decision and within the teacher's choosing as opposed to district internal, external, or extraordinary circumstances.

J-1 Program Extensions are possible through your sponsor's application process. IAG and ITA/ESI teachers must be in good standing at their school, have evidence of intent to hire for the extension, and have all cultural activities completed successfully. Due dates will be communicated but expect to complete all cultural activities by Jan 15 of the extension application year. It is expected for the extension to be at the host school site, but if not possible, exceptions will be reviewed.



VISA INFORMATION

How to Apply for a J-1 Teacher Program Visa

Below are the recommended steps to apply for a J-1 visa. These are general suggestions.

International Alliance Group always recommends that you review the website of your local embassy or consulate to ensure accurate information specific to your home country.

For more information on applying for a J-1 visa, see the U.S. Department of State's website here: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/study/exchange.html>

1. Complete the Online Visa Application Form

- Online Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-160 – Learn more about completing the DS-160 by visiting the website of the embassy/consulate where you are applying. You must:
 - 1) complete the online visa application, and
 - 2) print the application form confirmation page to bring to your interview.
- Photo – You may be required to upload your photo while completing the online Form DS-160. *Your photo must be in the format explained in the Photograph Requirements. NOTE: Not all Consular Offices require this step. Check if your Consular Office requires it or if you have to make an appointment to take biometrics and photos.*

2. Schedule a visa interview

- You should schedule an appointment for your visa interview at the U.S. Embassy or Consulate in the country where you live. Review the instructions for how to apply for a visa on the website of the embassy or consulate where you will apply.



VISA INFORMATION

How to Apply for a J-1 Teacher Program Visa

3. Pay a visa application fee

To apply for a visa, you must pay a visa application fee to the Department of State. The fee for applying for a J-1 teacher program visa is \$185. If your visa is approved, you may also need to pay a visa issuance fee, if applicable to your nationality. Be aware that some nationalities pay a reciprocity fee.

Consult this site to see if this applies to you:

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/Visa-Reciprocity-and-Civil-Documents-by-Country.html>

4. Pay a SEVIS I-901 fee to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), before your visa interview.

The SEVIS fee is \$220 for J-1 Teacher Program visa applicants. You may securely pay your SEVIS fee online here: <https://fmjfee.com/i901fee/index.html>

- For more information on SEVIS, see <https://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901>

Important Note: Unfortunately, no refunds are given by the United States government for the SEVIS or visa application fees if you are denied a visa or cancel your program.



VISA INFORMATION

How to Apply for a J-1 Teacher Program Visa (Continued)

5. Attend a visa interview

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 beyond your period of stay in the United States (unless exempt by country-specific agreements).
- Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-160 confirmation page
- Application fee payment receipt
- Photo – You will upload your photo while completing the online Form DS-160. If the photo upload fails, you must bring one printed photo in the format explained in the Photograph Requirements.
- Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor Status, Form DS-2019
- SEVIS Fee receipt

A consular officer will interview you to determine your qualifications for an exchange visitor visa and may request additional documents, such as evidence of

- **The purpose of the travel;**

Evidence of your employment and/or your family ties may be sufficient to show the purpose of your travel and your intent to return to your home country.

- **Your intent to depart the United States after your travel;**

- **Your ability to pay all travel costs;**

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.



VISA INFORMATION

How to Apply for a J-1 Teacher Program Visa

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 the visa is approved, you may need to pay a visa issuance fee (if applicable to your nationality) and make arrangements for the return of the passport and visa to you.

Review the visa processing times to learn more about the visa processing times. Review the website from the Consular Office where you are applying. IAG will provide a webinar, video, and guidance on this process to support you. Be aware that the final decision to approve or deny the visa is from the Consul and IAG has no ability to change the Consul's decision.



J-2 VISA INFORMATION

J-2 Visa for Spouse and Dependents

As part of your J-1 visa, you may have your spouse and/ or children (under the age of 21) apply for a J-2 visa to accompany you to the United States. You may apply at any time however the J-1 visa community recommends successfully teaching in the USA 1-6 months before you apply to bring your family.

Your spouse or children must adhere to the same program rules as you, including submitting an Arrival Report to International Alliance Group within 7 days of arrival to report your housing address, providing updated address information, and reporting any change within 7 days, and maintaining DOS compliant medical insurance throughout the program.

The costs of J-2 health insurance that meets minimum regulatory requirements, as well as other costs for the J-2 associated with living in the United States are the responsibility of the J-1. There are fees to apply for a J-2 and each sponsor will provide you those fees. For those teachers sponsored by ITA-ESI with IAG, the

fee to apply for a J-2 program is \$500 for the first dependent and \$250 for each additional. J-2 insurance costs are based on age. Rates for spouse coverage start at \$100 per month.

Rates for spouse + 2 dependents start at \$140 per month.

Additional notes: J2 spouses may apply for an Employment Authorization once they reunite with their J1 visa spouse. Applying for an EAD should not be the main reason to apply for a J2 VISA, but getting reunited to their family member traveling for the Visitor Exchange program. Applying for a Social Security Number will be contingent upon the J2 having an EAD.

The issuance or denial of the J2 visas depends solely on the interview performed by the Consul and his/her decision is unappealable. Fees covered by the applicants are non-refundable.



STATE TEACHING ELIGIBILITY **INFORMATION**

State Teaching Eligibility Requirements

Each U.S. state has slightly different requirements for J-1 Exchange Teachers. For example, in the state of Arizona, J-1 Exchange Teachers must apply for an International Teaching Certificate ([see more information here](#)).

The International Teaching Certificate requires that you apply for a fingerprint clearance card. This will occur once you arrive in the United States.

Before you depart your home country, International Alliance Group will guide you on the requirements that must be completed for the state where you will teach.



TRAVEL INFORMATION

Travel Plans

You will connect with IAG Global Mobility department to arrange your travel. IAG has partnered with an agency, GO Destination Services, that will work with you to obtain the best pricing and coordinate your travel plans. Though some IAG teachers will prefer to arrange their own travel, it is expected that every IAG teacher meet with IAG Global Mobility to inform IAG of all travel plans.

Arrival in the United States

According to the U.S. Department of State, 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) 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.

REMEMBER TO BE SURE YOUR NAME IS ENTERED AS SHOWN ON YOUR PASSPORT. Your I-94 will be used for obtaining your social security card and the social security office will check to see if your name matches on your I-94 and passport as well as visa.

The Form I-94 is the DHS Arrival/Departure Record issued to aliens who are admitted to the U.S. A CBP officer generally attaches the I-94 to the non-immigrant visitor's passport upon U.S. entry (when is paper based – entering by land). Currently when entering by air, the CBP officer will not issue a paper based I94, but it will be available electronically. CBP will provide each traveler with an admission stamp that is annotated with date of admission



TRAVEL INFORMATION

Arrival in the United States

How to retrieve an electronic I-94:

- 1.- Go online: <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94/#/home>
- 2.- Go to "Get Most recent I-94"
- 3.- Fill up required information.
 - First and last name (middle name is first name for this purpose).
 - Birth Date
 - Document Number (passport number)
 - Country of Citizenship (Country issuing their passport/ not country where they were born).

It is important that you keep the I-94 Arrival/ Departure Record in a safe place. You will need your I-94 card to apply for a Social Security Number and to record that you returned to your home country in accordance with your J-1 Teacher Program. Learn more about admissions and entry requirements, restrictions about bringing food, agricultural products, and other restricted/prohibited goods, and more by reviewing the CBP website.

Remember:

Within 7 days of arrival in the United States, submit an Arrival Report to International Alliance Group to confirm your safe arrival and report your housing address, so that your visa sponsor may validate your program in SEVIS and so that IAG may confirm your safe arrival.



HOUSING INFORMATION

You will connect with IAG Global Mobility team and GO Destination Services to establish your housing plan.

Temporary Housing

Before arrival in the United States, you will need a short-term housing arrangement, so that you have a safe place to stay, while you search for a more permanent housing solution.

You will need at least a one-week temporary housing plan. You can make a hotel reservation online through [hotels.com](https://www.hotels.com) or [orbitz.com](https://www.orbitz.com).

Long-Term Housing

For long-term housing, we recommend talking with your teacher co-workers or supervisor for suggestions on affordable and safe housing options in your area.

Roommate to Share Housing Cost

To reduce housing expenses, you may want to consider sharing an apartment or home with another teacher or local community member. You can also search for housing options online. Please use caution when using any websites. Never send money directly to individuals.

Don't do anything if you don't feel it is safe. Always ask for help with the process if you feel something is not right.

Here are some apps for finding roommates:

- [Craigslist](https://www.craigslist.com)
- [Circle of Roomies](https://www.circleofroomies.com)
- [PadMapper](https://www.padmapper.com)
- [Circle for Roommates](https://www.circleforroommates.com)
- [Roommates](https://www.roommates.com)
- [RoomEasy](https://www.roomeasy.com)
- [Roomster](https://www.roomster.com)
- [SpareRoom](https://www.spareroom.com)
- [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com)
- [BunkUp](https://www.bunkup.com)
- [Cirtru](https://www.cirtru.com)
- [Diggz](https://www.diggz.com)
- [Roomgo](https://www.roomgo.com)
- [Roomaters](https://www.roomaters.com)



HOUSING INFORMATION

You will connect with IAG Global Mobility team and GO Destination Services to establish your housing plan.

Housing Options

You can search for housing options at apartments.com; craigslist.org; nextdoor.com; or zillow.com. Craigslist and NextDoor often advertise roommates wanted in a shared apartment or house.

Housing Cost

Housing costs in the United States vary, but you should expect to pay 35-40% of your take-home salary in rent. You also typically have to pay separately for utilities, such as electricity/heat/air-conditioning, water, garbage, and internet.

Additional Cost

Most apartments and rental homes require a move-in deposit, typically “first and last month’s rent” (meaning two months of rent) when securing a place to live. They also generally require a fee for an application, cleaning and security deposit. Most will require a lease, which is a contract typically of one year to pay rent to the landlord.

Budget

Please review your budget to be sure you are planning accordingly and are realistic with your housing cost. You will be expected to go over your budget exercise with your IAG Global Mobility team member.



TRANSPORTATION INFORMATION

You will connect with IAG Global Mobility and GO Destination Services to establish your transportation to get to and from work

Public Transportation

Public transportation in the United States may be more limited than in your home country. Most larger cities in the United States will have a public bus system and some have public train/subway/rail systems.

Other smaller cities or towns do not have a public transportation system and are more reliant on cars as the primary means of transportation.

Walking or Bicycling

Purchasing a bicycle or walking are also possibilities for transportation, but you should consider the climate of the season in your host community.

Carpooling

For transportation plans, we recommend talking with your teacher co-workers or supervisor for suggestions on affordable and safe transportation options in your area such as carpooling with a coworker and sharing the cost of gas. You can investigate ride sharing options for your area. Here is another carpool option for Arizona, check here: <https://sharetheride.com/#/>

Uber and Lyft

Here is information on Lyft and Uber in case you need transportation and others are not available to assist. These are great short-term options but are very costly for a long-term solution to transportation needs.

- <https://www.uber.com/global/en/price-estimate/>
- <https://www.uber.com/en-GB/blog/how-to-use-uber-fare-estimator/>
- <https://www.lyft.com/rider/fare-estimate>



TRANSPORTATION INFORMATION

Purchasing Your Own Vehicle

You may also consider purchasing your own vehicle during your international exchange program. You may obtain a driver's license from your state motor vehicle department and there are also schools that offer driving schools.

We recommend that you carefully consider transportation options that are reasonably available when you secure housing.

International Alliance Group is available to assist you if you have any problems securing transportation options on an ongoing basis.



LOCAL COMMUNITY RESOURCES

After you arrive at your host community, you will want to identify the community resources that are available locally to support you throughout your program. International Alliance Group encourages you to investigate the following community resources in your community:

- **Library** – Most communities have local libraries, which typically provide to community residents free book rental, free internet or computer usage, and free movies. Some larger libraries may also provide free museum passes and other free community services.
- **Public Transportation** – Many cities have a local bus system that offers discounted rides to public commuters. If you are unsure if your community has a public transportation system, please ask your host school.
 - Some smaller towns may not offer public transportation, and cars or shared rides will be required.
 - Remember that you should obtain a U.S. state driver's license if you plan to drive a car.
 - Many cities also have taxi, or Uber/ Lyft car services that can provide a car ride on demand.
- **Medical Centers** – Most urban communities will have local medical centers and hospitals. If you are feeling very sick and cannot wait to make an appointment to see a doctor, you can visit an "Urgent Care" facility, which typically costs less than a hospital emergency room.
- **Schools** – Some communities offer low-cost adult classes and programming through a local community college.
- **Recreation Centers** – Some communities have town recreation centers, which may provide access to a gymnasium, a pool, fitness class, art classes, or other organized activities.
- **Banks** – Most communities will have a local bank that offers a free or low-cost checking or savings account, where you can deposit your paychecks or set up a "direct deposit" (an electronic transfer of your paycheck). When considering a bank, be sure to ask if there are monthly fee charges or cash withdrawal charges.

Once you arrive to the US, make sure you know where the closest Embassy/Consulate is located in case you need support from your Consulate. For instance, a Consulate provides the service of renewing your passport.

IAG works actively on creating and maintaining a strong consular network. For further information you may contact lucia@iagusa.org.



MEDICAL INSURANCE AND HEALTHCARE

As part of the International Alliance Group program, 100% covered benefits include medical, dental, vision, life and employee assistance program services. Medical insurance, provided by GeoBlue, satisfies the J1 Visa US Department of State requirements. [Click here](#) to view the Health Insurance Benefits website page.

GeoBlue medical coverage summary - participating provider benefits			
Coverage Year Limit	\$1,000,000	Deductible	\$500
Out of Pocket Maximum	\$5,000	Emergency Medical Evacuation	\$100,000
Physician Office Visit	After the Deductible is satisfied, 80% of the Allowed Amount after a \$30 Copay per visit	Repatriation of Mortal Remains	\$50,000
Emergency Hospital Services	After the Deductible is satisfied, 80% of the Allowed Amount after a \$250 Copay per visit. If admitted to Hospital, then 100% of Copay Waived	Urgent Care	After the Deductible is satisfied, 80% of the Allowed Amount after a \$75 Copay per visit
Hospital and Physician Outpatient Services	After the Deductible is satisfied, 80% of the Allowed Amount after a \$50 Copay per visit	Generic Drugs Brand Name Drugs	\$15 Copay \$30 Copay

If you need to see a doctor while in the United States, International Alliance Group recommends that you call your medical insurance company first, to ensure your visit will be covered.

If you need to see a doctor urgently, consider visiting an Urgent Care office, which generally is lower cost than an Emergency Room.

If you visit an Emergency Room and are not admitted, you may be responsible for a large co-payment. In a true emergency, dial "911" from any phone for immediate medical attention.



LIFE AND CUSTOMS IN THE USA

The culture of the United States is considered a “melting pot”, meaning that it is a mix of large groups of people from a huge variety of backgrounds. The United States is a nation of immigrants – from all parts of the world – and its religion, ethnicities, food, music, and all other cultural aspects have developed as a result of the mix of cultures and backgrounds.

The United States has significant regional differences as the third-largest country in the world. For example, an American citizen born in New York City may bring an entirely different perspective than a citizen who was born in rural Mississippi, and someone born in northern California may have a different perspective than someone born in Florida. Each region has its own accent, its own favorite foods, and its own political and social attitudes.

Common American values include independence, directness, privacy, equality, informality, competition, time and efficiency, work ethic, and consumerism. The following website gives good information about how these values are demonstrated in daily life:

<https://usahello.org/resources/american-values/>

Be aware also that the USA has a very strict law framework and there is zero tolerance on committing a felony. Be aware of the laws and follow common sense. For instance, the penalties for driving under the influence (DUI) include mandatory jail time which would terminate your contract with the host school. Also, in the U.S social media interactions or relationships with a minor is illegal, even though in some other countries is acceptable. Please ask or research if in doubt.



LIFE AND CUSTOMS IN THE USA

You may see the following values demonstrated in your life in the United States as a teacher:

- Time – At work, you are expected to arrive at least 10–15 minutes early to any work function, and generally social functions start on time. In many districts, it is expected that teachers arrive 30 minutes prior to student arrival and remain 30 minutes following student dismissal; however, these policies are dependent on the expectations of your district / school. Check with your direct supervisor and/or school district's human resources department regarding your contract start and end time."
- Directness – In classes, Americans may challenge their teachers' ideas. Questions and debates of ideas are encouraged.
- Equality – In a classroom, all students should be treated equally by their teachers. No student should be favored.
- Independence – Americans often give each other more space in public situations than people in other cultures. They tend to stand with a bit of space between them, typically the distance of an outstretched arm.
- Please be aware that in a school/classroom environment it is customary to keep religious beliefs private. The public school system in the USA has kept a separation between church and school in an effort to be respectful of all creeds.

To learn more about culture in the United States, we encourage you to review these websites:

<https://www.livescience.com/28945-american-culture.html>

<https://www.frommers.com/destinations/usa>

<https://www.goabroad.com/articles/study-abroad/10-hilarious-surprises-for-international-students-in-america>



TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM

Applying for a Social Security Number

You will be supported by IAG Global Mobility and GO Destination Services in securing your social security number (SSN). IAG will guide you on the social security (SS) application which can be completed 45 days prior to arrival. You will have the application number to reference for your in-person meeting with the social security office.

A Social Security Number (SSN) is important to have while working in the United States because your host school will use this number as your identification and for payroll purposes.

You also will use your Social Security card as identification if you apply for a driver's license, open a bank account, and more.

You will need to provide your original documents to the SS in-person at a SS office. You can find the office closest to your host community here:

<https://secure.ssa.gov/ICON/main.jsp>

You will go to the SS office as part of your onboarding tasks for employment. Not having evidence of your social security appointment could delay your payroll processing.

To apply for a SSN, you will need to bring the following original documents:

- Passport
- I-94 card (arrival card from U.S. Customs)
- DS-2019 form
- Letter of Intent/ Employment Agreement issued by your host school
- Welcome letter from your visa sponsor to apply for a SSN
- You also will need to bring a completed Social Security application form, called an SS5 form: <https://www.ssa.gov/forms/ss-5.pdf>



TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM

Applying for a Social Security Number

An officer at the Social Security Administration Office will pull your application and review or will fully submit the information once again. Make sure you review the whole application and check for errors on names and dates. Any mistake will delay the issuance of the card. Make sure all documents match. Your name should appear fully in each and every document (including middle name). Also, your date of birth should match. You will receive the Social Security card in the mail approximately two to six weeks after applying. **Be sure to write your home or school address correctly on the SS5 form because this is where your Social Security card will be mailed.**

Please ensure you have your name written in/on the mailbox. The federal postal service will only deliver federal documents when a person's name is noted on the mailbox. In other words, with no name in/on the mailbox, no social security card will be delivered.

Note: Failure to complete your Arrival Report to your sponsor and International Alliance Group immediately upon arrival in the United States will cause a delay in processing your Social Security Number because you will not be activated in SEVIS.



TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM

Applying for a U.S. State Driver's License

To apply for a driver's license or state identification card, you will need to visit your state's Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) office. We recommend researching the driver's license requirements and application process for your state before you go in-person to the DMV office.

We recommend that you bring your passport, your I-94 card, your DS-2019 form, your Social Security card, as well as any international driver's license or home country driver's license you have.

For Arizona, for example, you may be given a vision exam. A written exam and a driving test may also be required.

Opening a Bank Account

To open a bank account, it is important that you research your local bank's requirements.

We recommend that you bring your passport, your I-94 card, your DS-2019 form, your Social Security card, your state driver's license or ID card, as well as a piece of mail showing your housing address (usually a utility bill or apartment lease/ contract).

When opening a bank account, we recommend that you inquire about:

- ATM/ cash machine fees and availability
- Any required minimum balance
- Any monthly fees

We recommend that you open a bank account and do not recommend that you store large amounts of cash or paper paychecks on yourself or in your housing, as they could easily be lost or stolen.



TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM

Employee Rights and Legal Protections in the U.S.

While working in the United States, it is important that you understand your rights as an employee.

You have the right to:

- Be paid fairly
- Be free from discrimination
- Be free from sexual harassment and sexual exploitation
- Have a healthy and safe workplace
- Request help from a union, immigrant, and/or labor rights groups
- Leave an abusive employment situation
- If you are injured or get sick at work, you may seek medical treatment.
- In most cases, for work-related injuries, your employer should provide free medical treatment and part of the wages lost while injured. You may have to file for workers' compensation in the state where you work.

Learn more about your rights and legal protections by reviewing the Wilberforce Pamphlet found here: https://jlvisa.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Wilberforce_Pamphlet_October2016.pdf



IAG TEACHER EXCHANGE: CROSS-CULTURAL ACTIVITY REQUIREMENTS

According to Department of State regulations, all J-1 exchange teachers are required to complete and document **a minimum of two cross-cultural activities** each academic year. *Exchange teachers should plan to complete at least one cross-cultural activity each semester.*

Teachers must document two different types of activities* yearly:

Activity #1 (Local): Share your culture with Americans in your classroom/community (*local*).

Activity #2 (International): Dialogue between students in the U.S. and your home country.

**Whenever possible, classroom activities should align with standards/support learning goals.*

Activity #1: Share your Culture (Local)

Design an activity for your classroom / school community to provide an overview of your home country's history, traditions, heritage, culture, economy, educational system and/or other attributes. **Activity #1 should be completed during the fall semester, if possible.**

Suggested activities:

- **Take a virtual field trip.** Use student-friendly online educational or travel sites to take your students on a tour. Create a student-centered "travel guide" to help them prepare and follow along. If available, consider using VR headsets to create an immersive experience.
- Teach your students/other staff how to **play a sport or game** popular in your country.
- Share about a **celebration or holiday tradition** around the time it occurs in your country.
- Explain about your country's **political / election system** and compare it to the U.S. system.
- **Teach a cooking class** and prepare favorite/traditional food from home for your students to try. Provide recipes for them to take home. (*Be mindful of any food allergies.*)
- Share about **hobbies** you participate in that are unique to your culture.
- Have students **research aspects of your country** and present them to each other.
- Help your students make a **traditional craft from your country/region**.
- Share about your country's **history and geography**.
- **Read a folk tale** from your country and discuss the literary elements/compare it to American folk tales.
- Share **traditional and/or popular music** and discuss how it compares American music.
- Host a **fashion show** that highlights cultural/traditional dress.
- Discuss the **education system** in your country in comparison to the U.S. system.
- Teach key phrases from your **native language** and integrate them into the classroom (greetings, call-backs, etc.).
- Create a **gallery walk** with stations where students can learn about your country's culture and participate in activities.
- Consider **partnering with a local international club, globally-minded group, or other teachers** to present activities.



IAG TEACHER EXCHANGE: CROSS-CULTURAL ACTIVITY REQUIREMENTS

Activity #2: Student Dialogue (International)

Facilitate a dialogue between **U.S. students and students in another country** (*preferably your home country/home school*). This can be through a virtual exchange or other means to supplement the goals of the in-person exchange. **Activity #2 must be completed by the end of March.** (*Activities can be completed either semester; activity #2 requires planning ahead.*)

Suggested Activities:

- Coordinate an international **pen pal exchange** – this can be written or by email, depending on resources at both schools. For information on how to facilitate a written exchange, visit:
<https://www.aroundtheworld.com/how-to-run-a-successful-international-penpal-exchange/>
- Have students **create a video** answering questions about your classroom/school/community to send students in your home school and have them send one back.
- Plan a **ZOOM or Skype session** for classes to conference in real time.
(*Time zone differences and technology will need to be considered.*)
- Organize a **virtual book club**: have students in both classrooms read the same text(s) and share their reflections with each other through email or video chat.
- Select **student ambassadors** and have them design a culturally-rich lesson/activity for a class in another country and ask that class to respond/provide activities for your class.

Cross-Cultural Activity Completion and Documentation Guidelines

Thorough documentation of cultural activities is essential; a report form has been provided.

Documentation of each cross-cultural activity **must contain**:

- **date(s)** when the activity was completed
- activity **location(s)** (site/school name(s), etc.).
- **audience/participants** involved (*do not use full student names for privacy*).
- the **topic** (key focus / main idea)
- a **detailed overview** (a thorough narrative description of all steps, procedures, etc.)
- **estimated impact** (the response/outcome for participants).

Reports should include **supporting evidence** such as photos/videos, presentation slides, relevant files, handouts, and/or samples of student work. (*Videos or large files must be included*

as an unrestricted link.) Save reports as: **Name_CCA#_Year** (Ex: TomSmith_CCA1_23.24)

▷ **Report #1** must be submitted by **December 31st**

▷ **Report #2** must be submitted by **April 1st**

Reports should be submitted to your Records portal in your "**On Program**" folder/Cross-Cultural Activities file. (**Link:** <https://iagusa.tedk12.com/records>).

If you have any questions about CCA requirements, please email: kristen@iagusa.org



IAG PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TEACHER SUPPORT

Pre-Arrival:

As part of our commitment to ensuring a seamless transition into the U.S. education system, all international educators are required to participate in preservice training through the International Alliance Group (IAG). The specially designed coursework will equip you with the foundational knowledge necessary for a successful and smooth transition. The comprehensive preservice curriculum covers essential aspects of the U.S. education system. The coursework will delve into topics such as understanding the structure and dynamics of the U.S. education system, effective lesson planning strategies, and techniques for differentiating instruction to meet diverse student needs. Teachers will gain insights into working with English learners, developing inclusive practices for students with disabilities, and mastering classroom management strategies. Additionally, the curriculum will provide a deep understanding of cultural norms and laws within the U.S. educational context, fostering a well-rounded preparation for international teachers entering the American school system.

Arrival:

Within your first few weeks in your new school placement, you can anticipate receiving initial training from your school/district that is specific to your district's policies, procedures, curriculum, and educational philosophies. To ensure a smooth transition, each new educator will be paired with a mentor from the district. This mentorship program aims to provide personalized guidance and support as you navigate your new role.

Post Arrival:

Post-arrival, educators can expect to engage in ongoing professional development provided by their respective school district. Attendance at these sessions is mandatory unless otherwise directed, ensuring that educators benefit from a comprehensive understanding of the district's initiatives, methodologies, and curriculum frameworks.

Furthermore, educators will have the opportunity to enhance their professional growth through supplemental and optional resources offered by the International Alliance Group (IAG). In addition to the district-led initiatives, IAG provides access to professional learning sessions that teachers may conveniently engage with to further enrich their skills. Additionally, IAG offers coaching services tailored to individual needs, ensuring personalized support for a successful transition into the international teaching experience.

We are enthusiastic about the collaborative journey ahead and confident that these robust support systems will contribute to your success within your cultural exchange program!



WHO TO CONTACT FOR ASSISTANCE

Our team is here to support you throughout your International Alliance Group program. Please save numbers to your visa sponsor and these below into your phone so you have them in any situation you may need.

If you have any questions, concerns, or any problems throughout your program, please contact International Alliance Group program.



International Alliance Group Email
visa@iagusa.org



Emergency Phone Number

24-hour availability in the event of an emergency: (602) 596-6429



Office Address

1982 Promontory, Prescott, AZ 86305

Responsible Officers at International Alliance Group		
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WHO TO CONTACT FOR ASSISTANCE

Contacting the Department of State

The Exchange Visitor Program is administered under the oversight of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Private Sector Exchange, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA).

<p>U.S. Department of State Office of Designation</p> <p>Private Sector Programs Division</p> <p>State Annex SA-4E 2201 C Street NW Washington, DC 20520</p>	<p>Fax: 202-203-7779</p> <p>Email: jvisas@state.gov</p> <p>https://jvisa.state.gov/participants</p>	<p>Regular Communications or questions**</p> <p>Email: jvisas@state.gov</p> <p>**This e-mail address is to communicate non-emergency issues, questions, and concerns.</p>
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Report Abuse or Exploitation

If you are mistreated and/or your rights are violated, and you feel that your sponsor is not providing the help you need, contact the Department of State for assistance:

J-1 Visa Emergency Hotline*

1-866-283-9090

**This line is for use by exchange visitors and third parties in the case of urgent situations and is available 24 hours a day.*

