



J-1 Visa Exchange Programs

FACT SHEET

For more than 50 years, Cultural Vistas has facilitated meaningful connections between Americans and the international community through its role as a designated sponsor for U.S. Department of State J-1 Visa Intern and Trainee exchange programs.

Below we have compiled information to help you better understand the value of this important program.

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What is the J-1 Visa?

The Exchange Visitor Visa (J-1) is a non-immigrant visa issued by the U.S. Department of State to expose individuals from around the world to the culture and institutions of the United States. It has been a successful part of American public diplomacy for over 50 years.

The multifaceted J-1 Exchange Visitor Program, managed by the Department of State, enables foreign nationals to come to the United States to teach, study, conduct research, demonstrate special skills or receive on the job training. There are 15 different categories of the J-1 Visa, of which Cultural Vistas is a designated sponsor for three: *Intern, Teacher, and Trainee* exchange programs.

All J-1 Visa programs are temporary by design, ranging from a few weeks to several years. J-1 Visa holders must depart the United States at the conclusion of their programs.

The Intern and Trainee programs provide U.S. organizations with the ability to offer short-term cultural and training opportunities to overseas employees, university students, and recent graduates.

How did the J-1 Visa originate?

It was created through the Fulbright-Hays Act, also known as the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961, to foster a better understanding between nations on a variety of issues through educational and cultural exchange programs.

How does it benefit the United States?

For over 50 years, J-1 programs have proven to be an effective public diplomacy tool for showcasing American values and strengthening relationships between Americans and the world. Individuals from more than 200 countries, many with longstanding economic and political ties to the United States, take part in J-1 exchange programs every year.

The hundreds of thousands of exchange program alumni foster a positive image of the United States and the American people around the world. These alumni continue to be an asset to the United States as they move through their careers whether as officials of their government with whom we can engage, as key leaders in industry abroad, or as innovative social change leaders in their communities.

[Click to view Infographic: Top J-1 Interns and Trainee Sending Countries in 2016](#)

Communities in all 50 U.S. states welcome J-1 Visa holders into their businesses, NGOs, and academic institutions every year. During their stay, each exchange visitor contributes significantly to our economy, bringing thousands of dollars into the country through program fees, and money spent on travel, housing, entertainment, and everyday living expenses. Last year alone, international students contributed more than \$32 billion to the U.S. economy, and supported more than 400,000 jobs across the country in the process.

[Click to view Infographic: U.S. Destination States Hosting J-1 Interns + Trainees in 2016](#)

J-1 Visa programs support American business interests and positively impact the U.S. economy for years after the visitors return home. Hosting motivated and talented international interns and trainees enables organizations to connect with new markets, deliver training necessary to launch new ventures, and maintain global competitiveness.

Who comes to the United States on J-1 Visas?

The J-1 Visa enables foreign university students, research scholars, physicians, teachers, and business people to come to the United States where they are exposed to U.S. business practices and expertise and gain a firsthand understanding of American culture.

- **J-1 Intern participants** are either currently enrolled in postgraduate studies or have recently completed their degree. J-1 Interns may take part in internships in the United States for up to 12 months, after which they must return home.
- **J-1 Trainee participants** are professionals with a degree or certificate and at least one year of work experience or, if no degree, five years of work experience. J-1 Trainees may take part in formal on-the-job training for up to 18 months, after which they must return home.

How are visitors screened?

Visitors in each of the 15 categories of the J-1 Visa undergo a stringent and thorough review process by U.S. Department of State-designated sponsor organizations, such as Cultural Vistas, followed by a detailed application process and in-person interviews at U.S. consulates abroad.

What is the value of J-1 internships and training programs for participants?

These programs are highly beneficial for the participants that complete short term cultural exchanges here in the United States. Internships under the J-1 Visa are highly desired by university students, many of whom are required to complete an internship as part of their graduation requirements.

Recent graduates and professionals also prioritize an internship or training in the U.S. because they would like to learn how American businesses operate and they can gain an important professional skill international/American work experience, which can have a significant positive impact on their careers.

For many participants, their time training in the United States often brings them a lifelong love of the country, long-term connections with American citizens, and a deeper understanding and respect for American culture and values. As many become the future business and political leaders in their own countries, they become some of the most powerful champions and allies of the United States.

Who oversees these programs?

True to Senator Fulbright's vision for American exchange programs, J-1 Intern and Trainee programs operate as public-private partnerships. The Department of State partners with (and regulates) U.S.-based exchange organizations, known as sponsors, to facilitate the program.

Sponsors, such as Cultural Vistas, work closely with U.S. host organizations to create positive, memorable experiences for Intern and Trainee participants. Sponsors support participants throughout their stay in the United States by providing resources including cultural enrichment activities and orientations to American culture, assisting them with navigating life in the United States, including everything from obtaining a driver's license to opening a bank account.

Do J-1 programs negatively impact American workers?

No. Intern and trainee programs are not "jobs" programs. They do not replace American workers and federal regulations are in place that strictly prohibit an intern or trainee from displacing a full-time, part-time, or temporary U.S. worker. Interns and trainees follow a detailed "Training/Internship Placement Plan" that outlines learning objectives for their programs. These participants are learning from and being mentored by their U.S. host organizations, but are not simply engaging in work activities.

For U.S. organizations, one of the best ways to foster innovation and economic competitiveness is by having international students and professionals live, learn, and collaborate alongside American workers. Cross-cultural competence is a critical skill for Americans in today's workforce, as it equips individuals with the requisite knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal characteristics that enable them to function and conduct business effectively in culturally-diverse situations.

The connections and relationships that are made during these exchanges extend far beyond the end of their program. This in turn generates more revenue right here in the United States, which benefits both the U.S. organization and its American workforce.

Are these programs costly to the American taxpayer?

No. Intern and Trainee programs are funded by private sector entities, usually by the individual participant or host organization, and occur at no cost to the U.S. taxpayer. Exchange visitors pursuing a J-1 Visa in a non-government exchange program pay a SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System) fee, which is used to offset Department of State- and Department of Homeland Security-related costs associated with administering the J-1 Visa.

How specifically do J-1 Intern and Trainee programs foster understanding?

The U.S. Department of State launched the J-1 Exchange Visitor Program as an instrument of public diplomacy. In addition to providing the opportunity to experience everyday life living and learning alongside Americans, all J-1 programs include a robust cultural component and ample opportunities for educational and cross-cultural learning. All program participants must return to their home country upon completion of their program to share their experiences. Cultural components are expected to be an integral part of each program, and detailed documentation reflecting this is submitted to designated sponsors during the application process.

Hosting organizations cite planned activities that their staff will offer to the participant such as volunteer activities, exploring museums, and community festivals, and joining sports teams. They also offer more formal professional development opportunities to network within their respective fields.