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## BridgeUSA: Exchange Visitor Teacher Program Overview

The United States Department of State (USDOS), [Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs \(ECA\)](#), launched BridgeUSA as the new brand identity for the Exchange Visitor Program. Since its establishment as part of the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961 (The Fulbright-Hays Act), the Exchange Visitor Program has served as a valuable and important diplomatic tool of United States (U.S.) foreign policy. Its mission – to increase mutual understanding between Americans and people of other countries – remains vital to U.S. national security and to building people-to-people connections around the world. The program provides nationals of other countries with opportunities to participate in cultural and educational exchange programs in the US, and then return home to share their experiences.

The Exchange Visitor Teacher category promotes the interchange of teachers from other countries with teachers, students, parents, and communities in the U.S. Exchange Visitor teachers sharpen their professional skills, participate in cross-cultural activities in schools and communities, and return home after the program to share their experiences and increased knowledge of the U.S. and the U.S. Educational System. Such exchanges give teachers a better understanding of U.S. culture, society and teaching practices, and enhance U.S. students' knowledge of other languages, cultures, costumes and teaching approaches. The essence of intercultural education is acquiring the ability to see the world as others see it, and to erode the culturally rooted wariness of other peoples and cultures, which may exist.

The South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) is a designated sponsor of an Exchange Visitor Teacher program. Through this USDOS designation, the SCDE is able to sponsor teachers from countries, with which it shares a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The SCDE currently has an MOU with the following countries:

- France (Région Académique Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes)
- Germany (The Senate of Berlin/Check Point Charlie Foundation)
- Spain (The Ministry of Education and Culture)

The established agreements are a means of broadening the cultural understanding between countries and fostering the exchange of educational ideas, methods, and practices. The partnerships allow licensed teachers from France, Germany, and Spain, who meet eligibility criteria, to be classroom teachers in South

Carolina. Teachers travel to South Carolina on a J1 Visa and will serve as full-time classroom teachers in a K-12 public school for up to three years. The Exchange Visitor Program offers school districts an opportunity to provide programs that are linguistically and culturally rich and prepare students for success in their personal, academic, and professional lives. Exchange Visitor teachers arrive before the start of the school year and are issued a South Carolina International Educator Certificate.

In addition to the Exchange Visitor teacher's regular duties as outlined in his/her teaching contract, during each academic year of program participation, the Exchange Visitor teacher must engage in cross-cultural activities and submit a report on the activities to the SCDE.

Exchange Visitor teachers, who have successfully completed a teacher exchange program, are eligible to participate in subsequent exchange programs, provided they have resided outside the US for at least two years following the successful completion of their most recent teacher exchange program, and continue to meet the eligibility requirements.

## **Eligibility Requirements**

### **22 CFR 62.24(d)**

***Teacher Eligibility*** Foreign nationals are eligible to participate in exchange visitor programs as full-time teachers if, at the time of initial application to the sponsor, an individual making such application demonstrates to the satisfaction of the sponsor that he or she:

#### ***(1) Either:***

*(i) Meets the qualifications for teaching at the primary, including pre-kindergarten, or secondary levels in schools in his or her home country; is working as a teacher in his or her home country at the time of application; and has at least two years of full-time teaching experience; or*

*(ii) Is not working as a teacher in his or her home country at the time of application, but otherwise meets the qualifications for teaching at the primary (including pre-kindergarten) or secondary levels in schools in the home country; has had at least two years of full-time teaching experience within the past eight years; and, within 12 months of his or her application submission date for the program, has or will have completed an advanced degree (beyond a degree equivalent to a U.S. bachelor's degree) in education or in an academic subject matter that he or she intends to teach or that is directly related to his or her teaching subject field;*

***(2) Possesses, at a minimum, a degree equivalent to a U.S. bachelor's degree in either education or the academic subject field in which he or she intends to teach;***

***(3) Satisfies the teaching eligibility standards of the U.S. state in which he or she will teach (e.g. meets minimum educational requirements, has passed teacher training coursework at a sufficiently proficient level, has provided an evaluation of foreign teaching preparation coursework,***

*has demonstrated the requisite prior teaching experience), to include any required criminal background or other checks;*

**(4)** *Is of good reputation and character; and*

**(5)** *Agrees to come to the United States temporarily as a full-time teacher of record in an accredited primary or secondary school. Exchange teachers may teach a variety of subjects and levels at their host school or schools, if qualified, but at the pre-kindergarten level, may teach only in language immersion programs.*

#### **Additional Eligibility Requirements per 22 CFR 62.24(e) Teacher Selection**

Exchange Visitor teachers must:

- Provide references from one colleague and one current or former supervisor, attesting to that teacher's good reputation, character and teaching skills;
- Possess sufficient proficiency in the English language to function in U.S. classrooms and to function on a day-to-day basis, in accordance with the provision set forth at § 62.10(a)(2); and
- Submit a letter from the head of a school in another country, which indicates that school's willingness to work with the Exchange Visitor teacher on the cross-cultural activity component set forth in paragraph (h)(1)(ii). The letter submitted as part of the teacher's application must be signed by the head of the school or another individual in an appropriate position of authority; the official signing the letter must list both email and telephone contact information. The letter may be submitted in English or in the original language of the home country with an English translation; the name, title/organization and contact information of the translator must be noted on the translation.

Upon receipt of the completed application, the information will be reviewed by the SCDE. A telephone conference is conducted to gain further knowledge of the candidate's suitability, motivation and overall expectations of the program. The host school or district will conduct interviews with the candidates they have an interest in hiring and the SCDE will and facilitate the interview(s).

### **The Role of the South Carolina Department of Education**

The SCDE' Alternate Responsible Officer (ARO) coordinates the Exchange Visitor teacher program with the assistance of educational partners from France, Germany and Spain. Responsibilities include the following:

- Provide detailed program information and materials to prospective Exchange Visitor teachers and host organizations at the time of recruitment, and before teachers enter into agreements and/or pay non-refundable fees.
- Review completed application packages to ensure prospective Exchange Visitor teachers' eligibility for program participation.
- Serve as ARO for U.S. Immigration and Customs Services (SEVIS) to issue a DS-2019 form required for a J-1 visa.

- Provide program participants the following:
  - information on the length and location of the program, and a summary of the significant components of the program, to include fees and costs associated with participation, and a written statement of the teaching requirements, related professional obligations, and the compensation package to be provided;
  - an appropriate orientation, as defined in the federal regulations;
  - information related to insurance requirements;
  - rules that teachers are required to follow as participants in the Exchange Visitor program, to include the requirement to report to the sponsor or sponsor designee, within ten calendar days, any changes in his or her telephone number, email address, actual and current U.S. address (*i.e.*, physical residence).
  - contact information of the sponsor, to include the Responsible Officer (RO) and ARO's name, address, email address, and telephone number;
  - contact information of the Office of Designation: address, telephone number, facsimile number, Web site and email address;
  - a copy of the Exchange Visitor Program brochure and other USDOS materials as appropriate or required;
  - Wilberforce Pamphlet on the Rights and Protections for Temporary Workers;
- Report in SEVIS any change in the Exchange Visitor teacher's U.S. address, telephone number, email address, and/or primary site of activity within ten business days of notification; and report the email address for each accompanying spouse and dependent, if applicable.
- Provide support and guidance on educator certification requirements.
- Maintain completed Exchange Visitor application packages, copies of DS-2019 forms, record of participation in an appropriate orientation, and yearly cultural activity reports for three years from the date of Exchange Visitor program completion.

## **The Role of the Educational Partners**

- Identify, screen, and select candidates to ensure that they meet ***§62.24 Teachers (d) Teacher Eligibility*** and **62.24 (e) Teacher Selection** criteria for the Exchange Visitor Teacher Program.
- Ensure that a complete application package is submitted for each Exchange Visitor teacher selected.
- Provide selected Exchange Visitor teachers with a home country orientation, to include information on how to apply for a J1 visa, life, culture and customs in the US, health insurance coverage, etc.

## **The Role of the Host School District**

School districts begin their participation in the Exchange Visitor Teacher program through contact with the SCDE. Once the school district identifies an Exchange Visitor, who they wish to hire, they must send the SCDE a "Letter of Intent". Along with a letter of intent, the school district must submit the following:

- A job description of the position that the Exchange Visitor will occupy.
- A description of the support team who will provide assistance to the Exchange Visitor teacher prior to and throughout their program, to include, an administrative liaison and a teacher mentor from the same school.
- Contact person, who will be available to discuss personnel issues with the SCDE during the hiring process.
- At the time that an Exchange Visitor is selected, and before the Exchange Visitor signs any contracts with the school district, the district must provide the following information, either within the teacher's contract or in a separate document:
  - the name, location, and brief description of the host school;
  - the terms of compensation, to include all deductions from gross salary;
  - any provisions affecting the ability of the Exchange Visitor to be accompanied abroad by a spouse or dependents, if applicable;
  - insurance costs for illness and accident coverage if insurance is obtained through the host school district via payroll deduction.

Participating school districts must also:

- Assist Exchange Visitor teachers with arranging housing and transportation in South Carolina, to include housing options and anticipated costs, local transportation options between the teacher's residence and the host school, and estimated costs.
- Provide transportation from the airport and two nights lodging in a hotel, if needed and requested by the teacher.
- Provide local school district orientation for the Exchange Visitor teacher;
- Assist and evaluate the Exchange Visitor teacher using the Assisting, Developing, and Evaluating Professional Teaching (ADEPT) processes. Districts are required to provide induction programs for teachers in their first year; Exchange Visitor teachers are teaching in South Carolina for the first time and they must be offered the same supports as a beginning teacher.
- Provide opportunities for the Exchange Visitor Teacher to complete, during each academic year of program participation, the required cross-cultural activities component of the program.
- Provide information on community events, community culture, American culture, holidays, and places of interest.

## **The Role of the Exchange Visitor Teacher:**

Individuals, who wish to participate in an Exchange Visitor Program in South Carolina, are screened, to ensure that they meet all eligibility requirements, and interviewed by the Educational Partners in their home countries. The names and profiles of the candidates are communicated to the ARO, who connects the teachers with the school districts in South Carolina. School and district administrators conduct their own interview(s) with the candidates via video calls before making an offer for a contract.

## J1 Visa

The SCDE sponsors the J1 visa (and J2 for family members – spouse and children under the age of 21, if applicable) valid up to three years. Once a teacher receives a job offer from a school district, the individual decides whether or not to accept. If the teacher chooses to accept, he or she will then complete the BridgeUSA SCDE Exchange Visitor Teacher Program Application. Using the information provided, the ARO generates a DS-2019. Upon receipt of the DS-2019, the Exchange Visitor applies for a J-1 visa and makes an appointment for an interview at the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate. The Exchange Visitor will also pay the [SEVIS I-901](#) fee prior to their appointment. The DS-2019 form, receipt of SEVIS payment, and employment letter must be taken to the visa interview, and must also be in hand when arriving in the U.S. Teachers must keep their copy of the DS-2019 in a safe place, and ensure that it is signed annually. Using the J1 visa, the teacher can apply for a Social Security Number ten days after arriving in the U.S.

## South Carolina Educator Certificate

As the sponsor, the SCDE will assist teachers with their certification. Teachers participating on an Exchange Visitor program are certified under a South Carolina International certificate.

## Cross-cultural Activity Component

During each academic year of program participation, Exchange Visitor teachers must complete at least one cross-cultural activity from each of the following two categories:

**22 CFR 62.24(h)(1)(i)** *An activity for the teacher's classroom, larger host school or host school district population, or the community at large designed to give an overview of the history, traditions, heritage, culture, economy, educational system and/or other attributes of his or her home country. Sponsors of exchange teachers placed at international schools must require their exchange teachers to conduct at least one cross-cultural activity per academic year outside the host school in nearby schools or communities where international opportunities may be more limited than those found in their host school; and*

**22 CFR 62.24(h)(1)(ii)** *An activity that involves U.S. student dialogue with schools or students in another country, preferably in the exchange teacher's home school, through virtual exchange or other means, in order to supplement the goals of the in-person exchange.*

Exchange Visitor teachers must obtain a letter from the head of a school in another country, which indicates that school's willingness to work with the Exchange Visitor teacher on the cross-cultural activity component set forth in paragraph (h)(1)(ii). The letter submitted as part of the Exchange Visitor teacher's application must be signed by the head of the school or another individual in an appropriate position of authority; the official signing the letter must list both email and telephone contact information. The letter may be submitted in English or in the original language of the home country with an English translation; the name, title/organization and contact information of the translator must be noted on the translation.

Teachers must submit an annual report to the SCDE detailing the cross-cultural activity component of their exchange program, to include both of the completed activities. The annual report must include the exchange teacher's full name and the program sponsor's name. The report section about the cross-cultural activity component must contain the following information:

*22 CFR 62.24(h)(2)(i) The date(s) of each activity;*

*22 CFR 62.24(h)(2)(ii) The location of each activity;*

*22 CFR 62.24(h)(2)(iii) The audience for and participants in each activity;*

*22 CFR 62.24(h)(2)(iv) A general overview of each activity, including the topic; and*

*22 CFR 62.24(h)(2)(v) The estimated impact of each activity.*

## **Required Notifications to Sponsor/ARO**

Form DS-2019 is created in a computerized system known as the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). This system is administered by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and is used to collect and maintain information on the current status of non-immigrants and their dependents in the sponsor's program during their stay in the U.S. Upon arrival in the U.S., teachers must contact the sponsor to ensure that their data in SEVIS is accurate and updated. Failing to maintain an updated status could result in serious consequences and may affect a teacher's ability to remain in or return to the U.S.

In addition, for the duration of their program, Exchange Visitor teachers are responsible for informing their sponsor within ten days of any changes in address, phone number, etc. Please note that the ARO's signature is required on the DS-2019 form when traveling to and from the U.S. The signature is valid for only one calendar year, and updated signatures should be requested in advance of your desired departure to allow for processing and mailing time.

## **Federal and State Income Taxes**

School districts are required to withhold taxes from the Exchange Visitor teacher's paycheck. In turn, Exchange Visitor teachers are required to file yearly federal and state tax returns by the April 15 due date. Exchange Visitor teachers are exempt from FICA taxes (Medicare and Social Security Tax) until they have been in the U.S. more than two calendar years (when they become "resident *aliens*").

## **Retirement Fund Deductions**

As non-permanent employees, as stated by the U.S. Department of State, Exchange Visitor teachers can exempt from participating in the SC Retirement System.

## **Housing and Transportation**

The cost housing in the US reflects approximately 30% of a household's budget, and is dependent on the location, size and amenities offered. Most single people live in a one-bedroom studio, or a two-bedroom apartment. It is also common for people to live in apartment communities, which are usually equipped with a stove, oven, microwave and refrigerator. Most offer a pool and fitness facilities, as well as a shared laundry

onsite. An important thing to consider regarding housing in the US is that most accommodations come unfurnished.

The majority of US cities does not offer the type of reliable public transportation methods, which Exchange Visitor Teachers may be used to. Therefore, other transportation options, such as leasing or buying a car should be considered.

Other expenses, for which Exchange Visitor teachers should budget, include utilities (electricity and water), cell phone service, cable TV, food, clothing, travel, and entertainment.

## **Additional Resources**

[Code of Federal Regulations - Exchange Visitor Program](#)

[BridgeUSA Exchange Visitor Program - Teacher](#)

[The Exchange Visitor Program - Welcome Brochure \(PDF\)](#)

[United States Department of State Office of Private Sector Exchange](#)

[William Wilberforce Brochure](#)

[Life in the U.S.](#)

[US Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)

[U.S. Customs and Border Protection - International Visitors](#)

[IRS - Information for International Taxpayers](#)

[Non-Immigrant Visa Application](#)

[SEVIS Fee Processing Information](#)

[Obtaining a Social Security Number](#)

[Driving in the United States](#)

[State of South Carolina](#)

[Discover South Carolina](#)

[South Carolina Department of Education](#)