



Exchange Visitor Teacher Program: Letter of No Objection Procedures

Current and Prospective Program Sponsors

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Authority and Oversight of the Exchange Visitor Teacher Program

The BridgeUSA Exchange Visitor Program is authorized under the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961, commonly known as the Fulbright-Hays Act. The Act was established to promote mutual understanding between the people of the United States and those of other nations through educational and cultural exchanges.

Under this authority, the United States Department of State (USDOS) designates eligible organizations, or Program Sponsors, to administer exchange visitor programs. Program Sponsors may include government agencies, academic institutions, cultural and educational organizations, corporations, and other business entities.

In South Carolina, international educators (i.e., Exchange Visitor Teachers) may be placed in South Carolina public school classrooms through Program Sponsors, designated private companies approved for this purpose. These Program Sponsors are required to obtain a Letter of No Objection from the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) prior to placing teachers in public schools within the state.

Updated SCDE Guidance for Program Sponsors

All Program Sponsors seeking to place teachers in South Carolina school districts as part of the BridgeUSA cultural exchange program must achieve and then maintain no objection status with the SCDE. This guidance document outlines updated timelines and requirements for Program Sponsors to obtain and renew a Letter of No Objection from the SCDE.

2026–27 School Year Timeline for All Program Sponsors

Beginning with the 2026-27 school year and annually thereafter, a Letter of No Objection Letter issued by the SCDE will be valid for one school year and expire on June 30 of the designated school year. **The SCDE will no longer issue no-objection status for a period longer than one year, and all current Letters of No Objection will expire on June 30, 2026.**

All Program Sponsors, both current and prospective, must submit the appropriate application to receive a Letter of No Objection for the 2026-27 school year.

- **Prospective Program Sponsors** seeking initial approval in South Carolina must submit a completed application no later than **March 17, 2026**, to be considered for participation in the 2026–27 school year.
- **Current Program Sponsors** must submit a renewal application no later than **March 17, 2026**, to receive a renewed Letter of No Objection for the 2026–27 school year.

The sections below provide specific information for submitting both initial and renewal applications.

Procedures for Prospective Program Sponsors

Organizations intending to place Exchange Visitor Teachers (i.e., international educators with a valid J-1 visa) in South Carolina public school districts must meet one of the following criteria:

- Hold a current designation from the DOS as an authorized J-1 visa sponsor, or
- Be actively pursuing USDOS designation.

Organizations applying for USDOS designation may request a probationary Letter of No Objection from the SCDE, subject to the following conditions. The organization

- Must submit a Certificate of Existence issued by the South Carolina Secretary of State, and
- Must reapply at the end of the probationary year and submit the USDOS Letter of Designation.

A probationary Letter of No Objection issued by the SCDE is valid for one school year and cannot be renewed. To continue as an approved Program Sponsor, the entity must receive the appropriate USDOS designation.

Information about the federal designation process is available on the [BridgeUSA Teacher](#) webpage.

Application and Business Plan Requirements

Program Sponsors seeking initial approval must submit an application and a comprehensive business plan that includes the components detailed below.

1. Sponsor Details

The application must include the following information.

- Legal name of the organization, physical and mailing addresses, and business type (e.g., S Corporation, LLC, LLP).
- Contact details for each of the following: Responsible Officer, Alternate Responsible Officer, and the South Carolina primary contact (if different).
- DOS designation letter or DOS application for designation.
- Number of authorized J-1 placements.
- States where teachers are placed and the number of placements.

2. Teacher Eligibility

Sponsors must ensure that all teachers meet both USDOS and South Carolina certification requirements. Screening procedures must comply with [22 CFR 62.10\(a\)](#), and the business plan must detail the Program Sponsor's procedures for ensuring the following requirements are met.

- English Proficiency: Sponsors must describe the process used to evaluate each teacher's English language skills. This evaluation is the responsibility of the Program Sponsor; school districts may not conduct this evaluation.
- Teaching Experience: Teachers must have a minimum of two years of experience in the subject area or grade level they will teach and must currently be employed in their home country or meet applicable USDOS criteria.
- South Carolina Certification Requirements: To be issued an appropriate educator certificate in South Carolina, each Exchange Visitor Teacher must have earned the U.S. equivalent of a bachelor's degree in education and completed a teacher preparation program that includes an internship.

3. Sponsor Responsibilities

The business plan submitted with the application must provide a detailed description of how the Program Sponsor will

- Maintain records of each teacher's cultural exchange activities and submit this documentation to the SCDE annually.
- Assist teachers in obtaining a Social Security Number prior to certification.
- Conduct site visits and provide timely support to teachers and school districts.
- Provide pre-arrival and in-country orientations.
- Cover one round-trip airfare for each teacher.
- Arrange airport pickup, transportation to the host community, and temporary lodging.
- Assist with obtaining a South Carolina driver's license and provide interim transportation support.
- Help teachers open bank accounts and secure housing.
- Provide access to local mentors or advisors.
- Monitor certification progress and ensure each teacher has submitted all required materials no later than October 31.
- Offer 24-hour emergency assistance.
- Provide legal, financial, and tax-related guidance.
- Collaborate with school districts on teacher placement and professional development.

4. Contracts

Sponsors must execute annual contracts with both teachers and school districts.

Contracts with Teachers

Teachers must not be charged placement or renewal fees; these costs must be covered by the school district or waived. Contracts must include:

- Coverage of travel costs (round-trip airfare and ground transportation).
- Sponsor contact information, including emergency support.
- Responsibility for the following fees: Visa and SEVIS fees, South Carolina certification fee, fingerprinting and background check, extension fees.

- Transcript evaluation process.
- Details of any first-year loan options.
- Monthly insurance cost estimates.

Contracts with School Districts

District contracts must include:

- A detailed list of all fees paid to the sponsor.
- Disclosure of any initial placement or third-party recruitment fees.
- Procedures for teacher removal and replacement.
- Refund policies if a teacher departs and no replacement is available.
- Employment terms guaranteeing full-time classroom teaching, compensation equal to U.S. teachers with similar qualifications, and direct payment from the school district.
- Benefits equivalent to those provided to similarly situated U.S. teachers, including Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA) deductions, sick and vacation leave, and insurance coverage meeting USDOS requirements.

5. Disclosure of Business Partners and Potential Conflicts of Interest

Sponsors must disclose any financial interests or business partnerships that could affect their work with teachers, South Carolina school districts, or the SCDE. The business plan must include:

- A list of parent companies, partners, or subsidiaries the prospective sponsor utilizes as part of the exchange program or that already have a working relationship with the SCDE.
- Confirmation that no sponsor staff or their immediate family members are currently employed by the SCDE, employed by a South Carolina public school district, serve on a South Carolina district school board or board of trustees, or serve in the South Carolina General Assembly.

6. Required Attachments

In submitting the application and comprehensive business plan, the prospective Program Sponsor must include the following materials:

- Sample teacher contract
- Sample district contract
- USDOS Letter of Designation
- Certificate of Existence issued by the South Carolina Secretary of State

Renewal Procedures for Approved Program Sponsors

A Program Sponsor with current no-objection status must submit an annual renewal application that:

- Verifies existing information on file with the SCDE.
- Indicates any sponsor or program updates or changes.
- Includes any additional documentation required to meet current standards.

During the annual renewal application process, a Program Sponsor will have the opportunity to provide the SCDE with updates on programmatic changes based on evaluation data and feedback from teachers and districts. The sponsor should also address any concerns identified during the review process.

Annual Application Timelines Beginning Effective for 2027-28

Initial Application Timeline

Prospective Program Sponsors seeking initial approval for the 2027-28 (or a subsequent year) must submit the application and business plan to the SCDE during an annual application period beginning on October 1 and closing on December 1. Applications submitted during this annual enrollment window will be considered for issuance of a Letter of No Objection for the following school year. For example, to be issued an initial Letter of No Objection for the 2027-28 school year, a prospective Program Sponsor must submit the application and business plan between October 1 and December 1, 2026.

Renewal Application Timeline

Renewal applications for the following school year will be accepted between January 1 and March 1 annually. For example, to be issued an initial Letter of No Objection for the 2027-28 school year, a prospective Program Sponsor must submit the application and business plan between October 1 and December 1, 2026.

SCDE Reviews

The SCDE reserves the right to conduct intermittent reviews of any Program Sponsor with no-objection status. Non-compliance with federal and state requirements, including failure to maintain and produce required documentation, may initiate an intermittent review and result in the revocation or non-renewal of the Letter of No Objection and notification of the status change to USDOS.