



The International Center
for Language Studies

PARTICIPANT ORIENTATION HANDBOOK

J-1 INTERN & TRAINEE PROGRAMS

Participant Orientation Handbook

Version: 04.2025

WELCOME

Welcome to the International Center for Language Studies (ICLS) Intern and Trainee Program!

We know the process of coming to the United States on a J-1 visa can feel complex. This handbook will help prepare you for your program. Rest assured, ICLS will be available to assist and guide you each step of the way. We wish you a successful training and a wonderful experience in the United States!

PROGRAM SPONSOR CONTACT INFORMATION

The International Center for Language Studies (ICLS) is your Program Sponsor. Throughout the duration of your program, please stay in regular contact with ICLS. Should you have any concerns, questions, or emergencies, contact ICLS. We are here to help you and we want you to have a successful program. Below are your contacts for the Intern and Trainee Program.

Name	Position	Email	Phone Number
Jessica Hines	Program Director / Responsible Officer	jhines@icls.edu	+1 202-991-6010
Ricki Schwab	Program Coordinator / Alternate Responsible Officer	rschwab@icls.edu	+1 202-839-5524

International Center for Language Studies (ICLS), Inc.

1133 15th St NW, Suite 600

Washington, DC 20005

Phone: +1 202 639-8800

Email: internships@icls.edu

For life-threatening or medical emergencies, call 911. For program-related emergencies that cannot wait until the next business day, call the ICLS emergency customer service line: 202-964-7242.

Situation	Contact #1	Contact #2
I am having a life-threatening emergency.	911 to reach police, fire, or hospital/ ambulance	Once you are safe, contact ICLS.
I have an emergency related to my program and visa.	ICLS	
I have non-emergency questions related to my visa.	ICLS	
I have recently arrived and need to submit my arrival documents & schedule an orientation	ICLS	
I have questions regarding my health insurance.	Health Insurance Provider	ICLS and/or placement partner if they arranged your insurance.
I have concerns about my program and training.	ICLS	Placement Partner
I am sick and/or will be late for my training.	Host Supervisor / Host Company	Contact a medical doctor to seek help, if needed
I want to apply for a program extension.	ICLS	Placement Partner
I want to travel internationally during my program.	ICLS	Host Supervisor / Host Company
I have to take an unplanned trip due to a family or other type of emergency.	ICLS	Host Supervisor / Host Company
I am finishing my program soon and need to make sure everything is complete and request a certificate.	ICLS	

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BRIDGEUSA PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The purpose of the BridgeUSA Program is for "Educational and Cultural Exchange," not employment. The 1961 Fulbright-Hayes Act created the J-category with the purpose of "increasing mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries by means of educational and cultural exchanges."

At the end of your program, you are expected to return to your home country to utilize the experience and skills you have acquired while in the United States.

The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs administers the [BridgeUSA Program](https://j1visa.state.gov/basics/). You can learn more about this program at <https://j1visa.state.gov/basics/> and <https://j1visa.state.gov/participants/>. Click to view the [Department of State's Exchange Visitor Program Brochure](#).

US Department of State
Office of Designation
Private Sector Programs Division
ECA/EC/D/PS - SA-5, Floor 5
2200 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20037

Phone: (844) 300-1824
Fax: (202) 203-7779
Email: jvisas@state.gov

COMMON WORDS & PHRASES: ICLS PROGRAM DICTIONARY

Intern Category

The Intern Program provides a structured and guided work-based learning program to reinforce the student's or recent graduate's academic study as described in the Training/Internship Placement Plan (Form DS-7002). The Intern Program recognizes the need for work-based learning experience, enhances the intern's knowledge of American culture and society, and tests their career field knowledge through exposure to American techniques, methodologies, and expertise. Interns must possess sufficient English comprehension and speaking skills to become eligible for the internship program.

Interns can participate in the program for up to 12 months.

An **Intern** is a foreign national who:

- 1) Is currently enrolled in and pursuing an academic degree/certificate at a post-secondary academic institution outside the United States.
- 2) Has graduated from a degree/certificate-granting post-secondary academic institution outside the US no more than 12 months prior to their exchange visitor program start date, and
- 3) Enters the US to participate in a structured and guided work-based internship program in his/her academic field.

Trainee Category

The Trainee Program provides participants an opportunity to enhance skills in their career or occupational field through participation in a structured and guided work-based learning program described in the DS-7002 Training/Internship Placement Plan (training plan). The program enhances a trainee's understanding of American culture and society while augmenting their career/occupational field through exposure to American techniques, methodologies, and expertise. Trainees must possess sufficient English comprehension and speaking skills to become eligible for the training program.

Trainees can participate in the program for up to 18 months, except for trainees in Hospitality and Tourism as they are limited to 12 months.

A **Trainee** is a foreign national who:

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- 1) Has either a degree or professional certification from a foreign post-secondary academic institution and at least one year of prior related work experience in his/her occupational field gained outside the United States, or
- 2) Has five years of work experience outside the United States in his/her occupational field, and
- 3) Enters the United States to participate in a structured and guided work-based training program in his/her occupational field.

Program Sponsor

The US Department of State designated **ICLS** to serve as a program sponsor for two exchange programs – Intern and Trainee. To participate in this program, you need to apply for a J-1 non-immigrant cultural exchange visa from outside of the US. ICLS is responsible for screening, selecting, and enrolling qualified candidates for the Intern or Trainee Programs. ICLS issues the following application forms to students to apply for a J-1 visa:

- DS-7002 – Training Internship Placement Plan (training plan)
- DS-2019 – Certificate of Eligibility for obtaining a J-1 Status

Partner

The partner, also called a third party, is a partner of ICLS who identifies and screens potential J-1 program participants and/or host organizations. ICLS works closely with our partners to ensure a successful program. While you are on the program, you will often communicate with the host organization, the partner, and your sponsor. **Be advised that ICLS is the program sponsor designated by the US Department of State and should be your first point of contact for any concerns.**

Important Program Documents

DS-2019 Certificate of Eligibility: The DS-2019 is used to show your legal status in the US. It contains your program information including your official program dates, unique SEVIS ID number, internship/ traineeship field, approved host organization, and your sponsor's information.

DS-7002 Training Internship Placement Plan: The DS-7002 (training plan) is like a syllabus for your program. It outlines what you will learn, when you will learn it, and how you will be taught. It includes information about your supervisor, cultural activities, and your host in general.

The purpose of the training plan is:

- to enhance your skills through participation in a structured training program;
- to improve your knowledge of US techniques, methodologies, and expertise within your educational or occupational field;
- to enhance your understanding of US culture and society; and
- to enhance US colleagues' knowledge of foreign cultures and skills.

J-1 Visa: The J-1 Visa, found in your passport, was granted to you based on the approved DS-7002 and DS-2019. Your visa will often display an annotation that describes your program sponsor (ICLS) and whether you are subject to 212(e). It is primarily used to enter and exit the US, not to determine your program length. You must have a valid J-1 visa to enter the US.

If you lose or misplace your DS-2019, DS-7002, Passport, or J-1 Visa, please contact ICLS immediately.

I-94 Arrival/Departure Information

The I-94 Arrival/Departure Record is a record that is generated by Customs Border Protection (CBP) upon the legal entry of a nonimmigrant individual into the United States.

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The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) issues the I-94 Arrival/Departure record to individuals who are:

- Admitted to the US
- Adjusting status while in the US
- Extending their stay

All persons need an I-94 except US citizens. Air travelers will be issued an electronic I-94 number during the admission process at the Port of Entry. When you arrive in the United States and your passport is scanned by Customs and Immigration, your travel history and other traveler information will be saved on your I-94 Arrival/Departure Record. The CBP officer may also give you a stamp in your passport (information below). You can access your record directly through the [Department of Homeland Security](https://i94.dhs.gov/) after you've arrived. Be sure to select "Get Most Recent I-94." Your I-94 is automatically generated when you go through Customs/Immigration.

Duration of Status (D/S)

When the CBP officer issues your passport admission stamp, they may write "**D/S**" (**Duration of Status**). This means that you may remain in the United States as long as you are properly maintaining status and your DS-2019 is valid. You are required to keep the passport entry stamp for the duration of their visit.



Host Company / Host Supervisor

Your host company is a US organization willing to host international interns/trainees and participate in the J-1 BridgeUSA Exchange Program. Your host company is not your employer, and you are not an "employee," rather an intern/trainee gaining practical training and exposure to American business culture at their office or place of work. Your primary supervisor (listed on your DS-7002) will be your daily supervisor responsible for training you. You will also have a secondary supervisor who should assume the duties of your primary supervisor in his/her absence. **The use of the Intern and Trainee Program for ordinary employment or work purposes is strictly prohibited.**

SEVIS

The Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) is the web-based database that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) uses to maintain information on J-1 visa Exchange Visitors (you).

Sponsors (ICLS) are responsible for maintaining accurate information in SEVIS about exchange visitors and host organizations. Additionally, ICLS is required to use SEVIS to:

- Fulfill the sponsor's legal reporting responsibility regarding exchange visitor addresses, sites of activity, program participation, training, and compliance with the terms of the J-1 status
- Issue Forms DS-2019 (Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor (J-1) Status)
- Update Sponsor information and apply for re-designation every 2 years

The 2 Two-Year Rules

There are two 2-year rules that pertain to J-1 Interns and/or Trainees. One is part of the J-1 Intern and Trainee Program Regulations and one pertains to immigration law.

Intern and Trainee-Specific Two-Year Rule

Trainees are eligible for additional training programs after a period of at least two years residency outside the United States following completion of their training program. Participants who have successfully completed

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internship programs and no longer meet the selection criteria for an internship program may participate in a training program if they have resided outside the United States or its territories for at least two years. Additional details are in [22 CFR 62.22\(n\)](#).

212(e) Home-Country Physical Presence Requirement

Some exchange visitors with J-1 visas are subject to **212(e)**, a two-year home-country physical presence requirement. It requires you to return home for at least two years after your exchange visitor program. Some countries have agreements with the United States that exchange visitors learning certain skills or who are in certain industries, must return home after their programs to contribute their newfound knowledge/skills to their home economies/industries.

The image below is the portion of a DS-2019 where the consular officer gives their signature and provides their 212(e) finding. If you are subject to this rule, Box 2(A-C) will be checked. If you are not subject to this rule, Box 1 will be checked.

PRELIMINARY ENDORSEMENT OF CONSULAR OR IMMIGRATION OFFICER REGARDING SECTION 212(e) OF THE IMMIGRATION AND NATIONALITY ACT AND PL 94-484, AS AMENDED (see item 1(a) of page 2).

The Exchange Visitor in the above program:

1. ☐ Not subject to the two-year residence requirement.
2. ☐ Subject to two-year residence requirement based on:
 - A. ☐ Government financing and/or
 - B. ☐ The Exchange Visitor Skills List and/or
 - C. ☐ PL 94-484 as amended

(ALL USAID PARTICIPANTS G-2-00263 AND ALL ALIEN PHYSICIANS SPONSORED BY P-3-04510 ARE SUBJECT TO THE TWO-YEAR HOME RESIDENCE REQUIREMENT)

_____ Name	_____ Title
_____ Signature of Consular or Immigration Officer	_____ Date (mm-dd-yyyy)

THE U. S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE RESERVES THE RIGHT TO MAKE FINAL DETERMINATION REGARDING 212 (e).

Common Abbreviations

ICLS	International Center for Language Studies	SSN	Social Security Number
EVP	Exchange Visitor Program	SSO	Social Security Office
EV	Exchange Visitor	TIPP	Training Internship Placement Plan
DOS	Department of State	DS-7002	Training plan or "TIPP"
DHS	Department of Homeland Security	DS-2019	Certificate of Eligibility
DOL	Department of Labor	SEVIS	Student Exchange Visitor Information System
CBP	Customs and Border Protection	SEVP	Student and Exchange Visitor Program
POE	Port of Entry		
GE	Global Entry		

PREPARING FOR ARRIVAL

Before you arrive to the US, it is important that you prepare and understand the rules and regulations of the J-1 Intern and Trainee Programs. You are responsible for understanding your obligations. ICLS is here to guide you and answer any questions you may have.

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Rules, Terms, and Conditions

Below is a summary of the terms and conditions of the program, including the terms and conditions of employment activities, and other conditions and restrictions of the program.

Your responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- Safeguarding and maintaining a valid passport and DS-2019, contact ICLS if either are lost or damaged
- Maintaining an active health and accident insurance plan
- Following the DS-7002 Training Plan
- Not changing your host organization without official ICLS' authorization
- Not engaging in unauthorized employment
- **Immediately reporting to ICLS any changes to:**
 - ◊ Your home address in the US, phone number, or email address
 - ◊ Your host's contact information (address, phone, email)
 - ◊ Your host supervisor (primary and secondary),
 - ◊ Your training plan
 - ◊ Your physical or mental health and well-being
- Submitting midpoint and final evaluations to ICLS
- Maintaining your financial status and reporting issues that may affect your ability to participate, such as:
 - ◊ Covering your living expenses (rent, meals, transportation), and
 - ◊ Finding appropriate housing and transportation within your budget
- Training at least 32 hours per week
- Informing ICLS of any pre-existing or ongoing physical or mental health issues
- Maintaining a high level of professionalism both inside and out of the workplace

Please note this list is not exhaustive. For complete US Department of State rules and regulations for the Intern and Trainee Program, visit: <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-22/chapter-I/subchapter-G/part-62/subpart-B/section-62.22>.

Social Media and Professionalism

As a participant of the Intern and Trainee Program and a recipient of a J-1 Visa, you are held to a high standard of professionalism. It is expected that you will display professional behavior and handle yourself as in a mature way while you are in the United States. As such, please keep in mind that it is very common for employers, coworkers, and others to "look you up" on social media both before you arrive and after your program starts. Please do a thorough review of your social media accounts to ensure your profiles are either public and professional or simply keep all accounts private.

Health Insurance

You are required to have health and accident insurance. For the complete list of insurance requirements, visit: <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-22/section-62.14>. **Short term travel insurance does not cover pre-existing conditions or pregnancies.** This insurance is generally meant to cover acute illnesses, injuries, and emergencies incurred while on program. It is not meant to cover extensive medical care, long-term treatment, or testing. Any training-related injuries may be covered by your host's Workers' Compensation insurance and must be reported to your supervisor as soon as possible. Vision and dental insurance are NOT included in health insurance coverage.

Be sure to review your insurance brochure for details on coverage, how to find a provider, and how to submit a claim. **Insurance requires you to submit a claim every time you use it.** Details on how to do this are located on your insurance card and in your brochure. ICLS is not responsible for your medical bills nor are we responsible for completing medical claims on your behalf. If you do not submit all required information, insurance may not cover their portion of expenses.

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ICLS also reserves the right to end your program early if there are concerns about your health, safety, welfare, or insurance coverage. Willful failure to maintain health insurance coverage is grounds for termination from the J-1 Intern and Trainee Program [22 CFR 62.14] followed by an immediate departure.

Healthcare Before Arrival

Your health, safety, and welfare are our top priorities, so it's important that you are in good health before you start program. Interns and trainees should schedule routine physical and dental appointments before arriving in the US. If you have a pre-existing condition (see insurance brochure), you must tell ICLS. We will provide guidance on insurance coverage and evaluate your options on a case-by-case basis.

Please keep in mind:

- Prescriptions you take at home might not be available in the US, or they may be too costly to purchase as your health insurance will not cover pre-existing conditions.
- Over-the-counter medications, vitamins, and supplements might be difficult for you to find in the US. Bring them with you and research their availability in the US.
- Dental, vision, prenatal, maternity, and preexisting conditions are NOT covered by your health insurance.

ICLS is not able to adequately support participants who suffer from serious and potentially life-threatening medical or mental health conditions that require ongoing treatment. Participants are required to disclose pre-existing serious and potentially life-threatening conditions at the time of application, and failure to do so is grounds for dismissal from the ICLS program. For any serious medical or mental health conditions that occurs on program without prior symptoms, ICLS will evaluate on a case-by-case basis whether they may remain on program. If we decide that the participant or others are at risk, or the participant requires ongoing treatment, they will be withdrawn from the program so they can continue treatment at home, unless otherwise indicated.

Estimated Costs and Budgeting

Living in the US is expensive. Be sure to consider all expenses and remember, your stipend from your host company might not cover all your expenses while you're in the US. Be sure to bring additional personal funds to support yourself. If you receive a stipend, it may be several weeks before you receive your first paycheck. **It is important to have emergency funds and a financial sponsor at home who can send you money in case of emergency.** Consider writing out your expenses in a budget such as the one provided below.

Expenses	Cost	Note
Program Cost		<i>One-time expense</i>
Health Insurance		<i>Monthly/One-time expense</i>
Flight		<i>One-time fee for round-trip flight</i>
Housing		<i>Monthly/Weekly expense</i>
Transportation		<i>Monthly/Weekly expense</i>
Utilities (electric, gas, internet, phone, trash removal, water, etc.)		<i>Monthly/Weekly expense</i>
Groceries		<i>Monthly/Weekly expense</i>
Taxes		<i>Per paycheck (federal, state, local income tax)</i>
Leisure		<i>Monthly/Weekly expense</i>
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$_____ per month/week	

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Visa Appointment

You cannot schedule a visa appointment until you have received your DS-2019 and DS-7002. ICLS will provide instructions for scheduling a visa appointment at the appropriate time in the process. It is important to check the US Embassy where you will apply. However, here is general guidance:

1. Complete the [Form DS-160](#); print and save the DS-160 Confirmation Page
2. Complete the [Form I-901](#); pay the SEVIS Fee of \$220 online, print and save the SEVIS Receipt
3. Pay the Visa Processing Fee (varies by country); print and save the receipt

Take the following documents to your visa appointment:

- DS-160 Confirmation
- SEVIS Fee Confirmation
- Visa Payment Receipt
- DS-2019
- DS-7002
- Passport
- Financial Statement / Proof
- Photographs for visa, [follow the US Embassy guidelines for submitting photos](#)

Pre-Arrival and US Port of Entry

As part of your pre-arrival preparation, please re-read this Orientation Handbook in detail and watch the ICLS Orientation Videos to gain a better understanding of program and arrival procedures. The orientation videos will be emailed to you once you confirm your visa is approved. Read all emails from ICLS carefully!

You will need to present documents at **US Immigration Customs and Enforcement at the US Port of Entry** before retrieving your luggage. Be sure to pack the following documentation in your carry-on luggage:

- Passport with US Visa
- DS-2019 Certificate of Eligibility
- DS-7002 Training Internship Placement Plan (TIPP)
- Financial Proof Documentation

ARRIVING IN THE UNITED STATES

Submitting Arrival Information

Once you arrive in the US, log into Hanover and complete the Arrival Information section. Be sure the following are submitted through Hanover **within 3-days** of your entry into the United States:

- 1) **Arrival date**
- 2) **US Address with room/apartment number, if applicable**
- 3) **US Phone Number**

Program Validation and Active SEVIS Status

Once you submit your completed arrival information, we will validate your program and change your SEVIS status from initial to **ACTIVE**. You will receive an email confirmation once this is complete. **Do NOT apply for a SSN until 3+ days after you receive this email confirmation from ICLS.**

ACTIVE status is required to begin your internship and training program. Your status will remain active until the end of your program as long as you adhere to the J-1 Program Regulations and ICLS sponsorship program

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guidelines. Please contact ICLS at internships@icls.edu or your ICLS representative directly with any questions regarding your status.

Social Security Number (SSN)

You are eligible to apply for a Social Security Number (SSN) 3 business days after ICLS informs you that your SEVIS status has been activated. If you apply for your SSN too soon, they will not be able to issue you an SSN. To apply for your SSN, you must go to a Social Security Administration office in-person. You must bring your DS-2019, Passport, ICLS Social Security Letter, and your I-94 number. You will fill out a SSN application, the application will be processed, and your SSN will be issued in approximately 2-4 weeks. Your host company needs your social security information only to add you to their payroll.

Note: SSNs are confidential and should only be shared with your host company, banks, official government offices and/or emergency responders. ICLS does not need to know your social security number. The Social Security Administration will never call you – do not give your SSN over the phone. If someone is asking you for your SSN and you are unsure what to do, speak to your host supervisor or ICLS for guidance. For more information on Social Security Fraud/Identity Theft, please see more information from the [Office of the Inspector General](#).

Payroll & Paychecks

If you are receiving a stipend, your host company will provide you with this stipend in one of two ways:

1. As a **paid** individual on their payroll
 - ◇ Meaning you will receive a paycheck with all applicable taxes taken out and a W2 to file taxes.
2. As a **paid contractor** (1099) on their payroll
 - ◇ Meaning you will receive a paycheck that does not have taxes taken out yet. You'll be responsible for taxes.

When you complete your orientation with your host company, they will inform you whether they choose to put you on their payroll or will give you 1099 information. They will also provide you with tax forms to fill out. Be sure to ask any questions you may have so that you have a clear understanding of their payment system!

Tax Information

If receiving a stipend, J-1 Program participants are required to pay the following taxes:

- Federal Income Tax
- State Income Tax (if applicable)
- Local/City Income Tax (if applicable)

J-1 Program participants are NOT required to pay the following:

- Social Security & Medicare (FICA)
- Federal Unemployment Tax (FUTA)

Note: If you have questions related to taxes, ICLS may be able to assist. However, we at ICLS are not tax professionals nor are we tax authorities, and as such cannot give tax information or advice beyond what is provided in orientation and with social security information.

ICLS recommends you contact [Sprintax](#) for filing tax returns. They specialize in non-resident taxes and will ensure you file the correct tax returns. For other tax or withholding questions, you may contact your host's HR department or the [Internal Revenue Service](#).

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Frequently Asked Questions About Training

What will be the typical duties while training with my Host Company?

Please refer to your specific DS-7002 Training Plan for the duties outlined in your program. Trainees and Interns should not be in unskilled or casual labor positions, should not be in positions that require or involve childcare, elder care, or patient care, and should not perform more than 20% clerical work. A list of prohibited occupations can be found on the final page of this handbook.

How many hours per week should I be training?

You should train full-time, a minimum of 32 hours per week and a maximum of 40 hours per week. In some cases, a limited amount of overtime may be allowed if both you and the host agree upon the terms, FLSA regulations are followed, and ICLS has given permission.

What will my paycheck look like?

Your paycheck will depend on your unique agreement with your host company. Some host companies will pay a stipend per month or per week, some host companies will pay an hourly wage, and some host companies do not pay Interns or Trainees. If you are paid, you are responsible for paying taxes at the federal, state, and local level, where applicable, even if they have not been withheld from your paycheck. Some hosts may provide housing or transportation. If that is the case, you may see deductions on your paycheck for these expenses. Talk to your host supervisor if you have questions about how taxes or any other deductions in your paycheck are withheld. Contact ICLS if you need further assistance.

What is Workers' Compensation?

Workers' Compensation is an insurance policy purchased by companies in the United States that covers work-related injuries. Your DS-7002 Training Plan will indicate whether your host company has Workers' Compensation insurance and if it applies to J-1 exchange participants. If you are injured at your host company or while performing duties for your host company, tell your host supervisor and ICLS immediately. Failure to report injuries in a timely manner may result in denied insurance claims.

Internship – Orientation Phase (Phase 1)

In order to make the internship experience more beneficial for you and to ensure you have a successful start, we suggest you **discuss the following topics with your host supervisor during their first day** (or two) in the office. The following topics should be discussed with your host supervisor during orientation to the company:

1. Office policies/culture. This might include information about:

- The host's mission, goals, objectives, standard operating procedures, work, business ethics, safety
- Office management and structure, including whom the intern directly reports to
- Answering the telephone (e.g. "Thank you for calling ABC company" or "Good Morning")
- Use of office equipment
- Dress code

2. Schedule

- What are regular business hours for the office? What is a daily schedule for the intern/trainee?
- Are there regular staff or division meetings that the intern will be expected to attend? Are there regular meetings that the intern will not participate in?
- Whom should the intern contact if they are ill?
- What special events—if any—are on the calendar that the intern should be aware of? Is the intern expected to assist? Attend?
- Which federal holidays does your office observe? For example, will the office be closed for Columbus Day, Veterans' Day, Election Day, Labor Day?

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- If the intern plans a weekend trip that requires leaving early on a Friday (or similar) with whom should they discuss it?

3. Breaks / Lunch

- *All employees and interns in an office are guaranteed time for lunch during the day.* Most companies offer either 30 minutes or 1 hour. What is the lunch policy of your host company?
- Does your host company offer breaks throughout the day? When?

4. Job descriptions & tasks – Training/Internship Placement Plan (DS-7002)

- Discuss the basic tasks for which the intern will initially be responsible.
- What projects does the supervisor expect the intern to complete within the first 4-6 weeks? 8-14 weeks, etc.? By the end of the internship?
- What recurring tasks will the intern be asked to do? How do these fit the mission/structure of the organization?
- Discuss with the supervisor possible new projects or areas of research with which you might be involved in.
- Discuss with the supervisor what you should do if you complete a task, and no one is available for reviewing it immediately or for assigning you another project. Is there ongoing industry or company related issues or topics that the intern should research or read-up on in the meantime?

5. Monitoring and Evaluation

- Discuss with your supervisor how you will be monitored and evaluated throughout the program, including discussing how the supervisor evaluates your work as well as procedures for introducing new tasks and follow-up meetings for review and approval.

WHILE ON PROGRAM

Maintaining ACTIVE SEVIS Status in the US

While in the US, it is your responsibility to maintain your ACTIVE SEVIS status. The following are ways in which you can maintain your ACTIVE SEVIS status:

- Submitting evaluation reports on time
- Keeping in contact with ICLS
- Updating ICLS with any pertinent information including, but not limited to: changes to your host, training plan, US address, email address, or phone number; financial hardship; unsafe housing or training environments; wage issues; health issues; any other information that was previously recorded in SEVIS and may need updating; any other information that is or might affect your ability to complete your internship and/or training program as planned.
- Reporting any incidents that may arise, either with your host, housing, commute, etc.
- Reporting any disruptions to your training plan
- Maintaining medical and accident insurance
- Following all applicable J-1 BridgeUSA regulations and ICLS rules for the Intern and Trainee Programs

Please note that applying for a change of status is discouraged as it is not in the spirit of the J-1 Exchange Program. When you received a J-1 visa, it was given to you under the belief that you would return home. However, please be aware that when a change of status is approved by the US government, your ACTIVE J-1 status will immediately end in SEVIS. This is an automatic function that occurs in SEVIS that ICLS cannot stop or undo.

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Monitoring & Evaluation: Evaluation Reports

All ICLS exchange participants and hosts must follow the Training/Internship Placement Plans (DS-7002) to maintain their status and complete their programs successfully. This plan should be the primary guide to your training. **If there are any plans to alter training activities significantly, ICLS should be notified immediately.**

Your host plays a huge role in monitoring your professional development while on program. **Any changes to host supervisors should be reported to ICLS right away** so that ICLS update documentation.

As part of your monitoring and evaluation, both you and your host must submit evaluation reports to ICLS at the midpoint and end of the program. Links to the evaluations are below:

- Intern/Trainee's Evaluation Form: <https://form.jotform.com/70363391284154>
- Host's Evaluation Form: <https://form.jotform.com/63403927456965>

Evaluations are a US Department of State requirement for the program. These evaluations will help you to track your progress and keep ICLS informed of any issues that may arise.

Incidents While Training

While the great majority of our Interns and Trainees have positive and enriching experiences while in the United States, we recognize that occasionally incidents may arise. ICLS is here to support you and your best interests while in the United States.

Some Examples of Problems and Incidents while at the Host may include, but are not limited to:

- Routinely being asked to perform tasks outside of your training plan
- Being required to train for more than 40 hours per week
- Being required to train without appropriate breaks
- Being harassed/intimidated/abused in the workplace
- Being denied your agreed upon stipend or pay

Please remember – your host company does not control your visa. Your host company cannot cancel your visa or threaten deportation. Your host company should never hold/withhold your passport from you.

If you are in a situation in which you are uncomfortable, or are experiencing any of the incidents listed above, please contact ICLS. Our staff will work with you and your host to resolve the issue. ICLS supports its interns and trainees and strives to find solutions that ensure safety and wellbeing above all.

Illness & Missing Training

Interns and trainees in the United States may take sick leave to rest or recuperate from illness. Please note you may be required to submit **a signed doctor's note** covering the time of absence.

Please be sure to:

1. Ask your host about sick days and sick leave so that you understand your host's policies and procedures
2. Follow your host's policies and procedures to request time off due to illness.
3. See the section on health insurance regarding doctor visits.

Excessive absences due to illness may interfere with your ability to complete the program as planned. ICLS reserves the right to shorten a program if we believe it is necessary and in the best interest of the intern/trainee's health, safety, and welfare.

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Travel: Domestic & International

Before considering domestic or international travel, be sure to speak with your host company about their leave policies and paid time off (PTO). Please note that time off requests may be denied by your host company, and excessive travel may interfere with your ability to complete your program as scheduled.

If you wish to travel within the US during your program, you must:

1. Notify your host and get your time off approved.
2. Notify ICLS.

Participants who wish to travel *outside* the US during the program must:

1. Notify your host and get your time off approved.
2. Notify ICLS.
3. Send ICLS your travel itinerary and your approved time off.
4. Ensure your midpoint evaluations are completed.
5. Ensure your visa sticker is not expired.

Once this is completed, ICLS will issue you a new DS-2019 with travel authorization.

NOTE: Excessive travel may not be approved. Travel requests for longer than 30 days will not be approved.

Traveling while on program is a privilege, not a right. Although you may have all the documentation needed to re-enter the US, a Customs and Border Protection officer may still decide to reject your re-entry.

Program Extensions

Extensions are granted based on 1) successful participation in the program, 2) the need for additional training, and 3) eligibility. The extension is granted within the maximum duration of each category:

- **Intern** Category = 12 months maximum
- **Trainee** Category = 18 months maximum
 - The maximum duration of a Hospitality Trainee Program is 12 months

The timeline for processing an extension varies, and extensions are time-sensitive. If you are considering a program extension, please contact ICLS as soon as possible to receive guidance.

To be considered for a program extension, participants must submit the following:

1. Program Extension Checklist
2. New training plan phases for extension period
3. Proof that host company supports extension
4. Updated financial proof
5. All applicable evaluations for participant and host

A non-refundable extension fee will be charged upon approved extensions. Participants must have health insurance coverage for the extension period.

NOTE: Extensions are intended to extend training in your field at your current host organization. Extensions to train with a new host will not be approved.

Program Completion

It's important to make sure your program ends on a positive note. You will receive an email from ICLS within the last 30 days of your program with advice on how to complete your program in good standing.

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Final Evaluations

Ensure that all evaluations, midpoint and final for both host and participant, have been submitted.

- Intern/Trainee's Evaluation Form: <https://form.jotform.com/70363391284154>
- Host's Evaluation Form: <https://form.jotform.com/63403927456965>

If you complete your program successfully and submit all required evaluations, you may request a *Certificate of Completion* from ICLS. This certificate will be issued electronically.

30 Day Grace Period

Upon successful completion of the program, Interns and Trainees will have an additional 30-day grace period to prepare for their departure from the US. During the grace period, you are not permitted to work or study. The Trainee/Intern must leave the country within those 30 days. **Failure to exit the US within the 30-day grace period will jeopardize the ability to return to the United States on any US visa.**

ICLS does not recommend attempting to exit and then re-enter the US during their 30-Day grace period as your visa will most likely be expired and your status will not be ACTIVE in SEVIS. Customs and Border Control reserve the right to deny re-entry.

The 30-day grace period is reserved for those who complete their program successfully. If the program is shortened, terminated, or ends problematically, the intern/trainee is not entitled to the 30-day grace period and is expected to leave as soon as possible, ideally within 1 week.

Shortening a Program and Program Termination

Voluntary Shortening of a Program: Sometimes Interns/Trainees must shorten their program to end early and go home. The reasons may vary – a medical or family emergency, a job offer at home, homesickness/culture shock, or simply completing the program objectives early. Shortening a program is not a negative mark on your visa or travel record. However, in order to shorten your program and end it in good standing, you must do the following:

- Contact ICLS and host company
- Complete all required evaluations
- Complete an End Early Request form
- Provide a copy of your flight itinerary home with proof of purchase
- Return home within 2 weeks

Involuntary Shortening of a Program: Sometimes a program must be shortened, even if the Intern/Trainee does not agree. Examples include, but are not limited to: medical issues; mental health issues; changes in health or financial circumstances; internship termination/firing; unprofessional behavior; host not being able to train per program regulations; etc. ICLS reserves the right to shorten a program at any time with no refund. Shortening a program for one of these reasons is not a negative mark on your visa or travel record. However, in order to shorten your program and end it in good standing, you must do the following:

- Contact ICLS and host company
- Complete all required evaluations
- Complete an End Early Request form
- Provide a copy of your flight itinerary home with proof of purchase
- Return home within 1 week

Failure to follow ICLS instructions for shortening a program may result in program termination.

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Program Termination: If a Trainee/Intern violates any of the rules and regulations set in place by ICLS (the Sponsor) or, by the US Department of State, ICLS will submit an incident report to the US Department of State and terminate the Intern/Trainee's program in SEIVS. The Trainee/Intern must:

- Complete all required evaluations
- Leave the US as soon as possible, within 3 days
- Provide a copy of their flight itinerary to ICLS

NOTE: Trainees/Interns who voluntarily end their program early may not be eligible for the 30-day grace period. Terminated participants are never guaranteed their 30-day grace period.

Change in Visa Status

The purpose of the J-1 visa is cultural exchange. J-1 visa programs are not meant to be pathway to residency or status changes to other visa categories in the US. J-1 visa participants are expected to return to their home country to share their skills, knowledge, and experience, which is what was agreed upon when the J-1 visa was granted at the US Embassy. ICLS is not responsible for expired DS-2019 Form if a Trainee/Intern seeks to change their status (visa category) while in the US, nor is ICLS inclined to write letters in support of status changes. As a J-1 visa sponsor, ICLS affirms that participants should follow J-1 visa terms and exit the US after the program is completed.

Life in the United States

This section will provide you with tips and resources related to US culture, common practices, and important information to help ensure a fun, safe experience in the United States.

Emergencies

Life Threatening Emergencies:

Call 911. 911 will connect you with the Fire Department, Police Department, and Hospital Emergency Services. The following are some examples of life-threatening emergencies:

- Injuries to the head, back or neck; severe eye injury
- Person not breathing
- Difficulty breathing, shortness of breath
- Wheezing, facial swelling due to an allergic reaction
- Near drowning
- Person unconscious, semi-conscious or unusually confused
- Uncontrolled bleeding
- Coughing or vomiting blood
- Chest pain or pressure that lasts more than 3-5 minutes
- Poisoning, drug overdose
- First-time seizure, multiple seizures, or seizure lasting more than 5 minutes
- Fracture with bone deformity and/or bone exposure
- Person with sudden or persistent severe pain
- Personal safety in danger (ex. Someone following or stalking you)
- Fire

After contacting 911 and once it is appropriate, please call or email ICLS to inform us of any emergencies or medical care received. We want to make sure you're okay, we'll need to file an incident report, and we'll give you important follow-up steps for health insurance coverage.

Program-Related Emergencies:

The International Center for Language Studies (ICLS)

Hours: Monday – Friday, 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM EST

Phone: 202-639-8800

Main Email: internships@icls.edu

Ricki Schwab, Program Coordinator

rschwab@icls.edu / 202-839-5524

Jessica Hines, Director

jhines@icls.edu / 202-991-6010

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For program-related emergencies outside of regular business hours, call the ICLS emergency customer service line: 202-964-7242

Culture Shock

Culture Shock

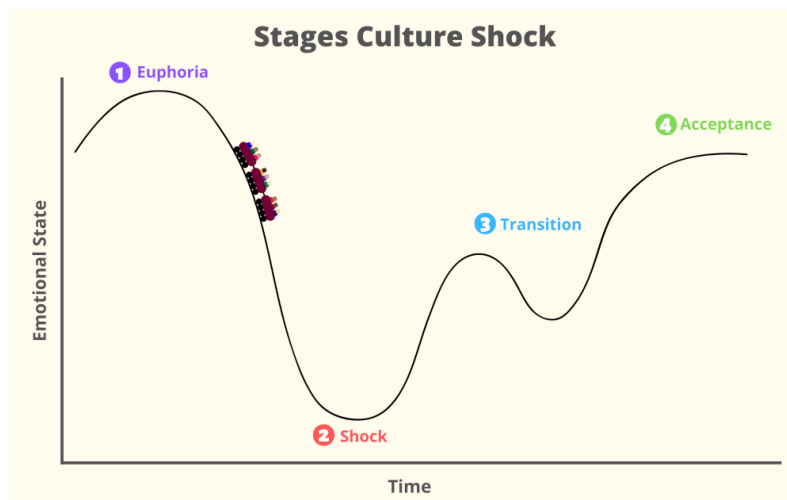
Culture shock is common when adjusting to a new culture. While every person is different and may experience different degrees of culture shock, remember that it is temporary. Culture shock may include homesickness, feeling alone, missing friends or family, reluctance to speak English or dissatisfaction with the new culture. In extreme cases, culture shock may manifest itself as a lack of energy and motivation or even depression.

Dealing with Culture Shock

While culture shock is normal, it is not pleasant. Overcoming culture shock is easier when you become involved in your new surroundings and begin to feel connected to the new culture.

- As a Trainee/Intern, you will have built-in connections to U.S. culture. Take part in company activities and try to socialize with your coworkers. Look for other social events in your community. Getting involved in your local community can help you feel more connected to the people around you.
- Find comfort in the familiar by maintaining ties with your culture. Look for cuisine, clubs, or activities related to your native culture or language.

NOTE: Culture shock may seem trivial, but it can lead to increased feelings of depression and isolation. If you are struggling with culture shock, please reach out to your Program Coordinator, who will work with you to find resources in your city that may help.



US Culture & Customs

Culture in the United States

It is never easy to define the culture of an entire country. Long recognized as a “melting pot,” the United States is a large country with more than 330 million citizens with diverse sets of opinions, beliefs, customs, and norms. However, as in every culture, there are patterns of cultural values and expected behavior.

Greeting: When meeting an American for the first time in a professional setting, it is best to offer a firm handshake in greeting. Make sure to smile and make eye contact. Handshakes may remain the standard greeting for colleagues and acquaintances. It is less common among friends or in informal settings. Most Americans do not kiss each other when greeting or taking leave of each other. Hugs may be more common among friends and acceptable

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among some circles, but feel free to decline a hug if you are not comfortable. Likewise, be sure others are comfortable with a hug beforehand as well.

Language: There is great diversity in US accents, primarily between “the South” and “the North.” There are also Midwestern accents, Minnesota/Wisconsin accents, Boston accents, New York accents, and Louisianan accents, among others. These differences may even extend to some basic vocabulary and phrases. You will be able to adjust to these differences as you become accustomed to your new environment. Don’t worry if you have a hard time understanding someone’s accent, it happens even to Americans! For a fun video about American English accents, check this out: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H1KP4ztKK0A&ab_channel=WIREd

Climate: Remember that the United States is a vast country with significant differences in geography and climate. Before you arrive, make sure to familiarize yourself with the climate of the city and region where you will be living. There can be extreme changes in weather depending on the season, so make sure that you bring everything that you will need for the length of your stay.

American Core Values

Although there are differences in values and not every American you meet will hold all these beliefs, there are some “core” values that many Americans share and that almost all will recognize.

Individualism: Americans place primary value on the individual over the group. Each person is expected to have his/her own opinions and feelings and to be able to express them. This also means the individual is responsible for his/her own successes and failures. As a result, there are perhaps greater “boundaries” in terms of what assistance a friend or acquaintance will expect or offer.

Equality: The notion that “all people are created equal” is a strongly held belief. Americans believe it is important to provide equal opportunities for all regardless of gender, race, religion, age, or disability.

Competition: Americans regard competition as “healthy” and as something that brings out the best in people and rewards merit. While there has been some shift toward inclusiveness and appreciation for the effort rather than ability, many Americans believe that both winning and losing teach valuable life skills.

Value of Time: Americans greatly value time. As a result, Americans (particularly in the workplace) will always expect you to be on time or early and do not tolerate excuses. If you are going to be late or cannot keep an appointment, let the other person know as soon as possible. Explain why you cannot be there as scheduled and be apologetic.

Being Direct and Honest: Americans prefer honesty over “saving face.” This is true even in the case of bad news. Lying or providing information in an indirect manner usually results in a worse reaction than simply giving bad news. Remember this and be direct. At the same time, Americans do not like being corrected in front of others. Only correct someone publicly if it involves essential or urgent information.

Privacy: Privacy is another important concept for Americans, particularly in modern times. Americans are uncomfortable sharing “personal” information about money, religion, politics, and so forth. Additionally, many Americans do not like to “be told what to do,” and do not welcome unsolicited advice.

Personal Space and Touch: This depends on the individual, but Americans typically like to maintain an arm’s length physical distance and prefer to stand facing each other at a 45-degree angle. Keep physical contact to a minimum unless you know the other person well enough to be aware of his/her personal space.

Cleanliness: The typical American considers good personal hygiene to be essential. Body odor is unacceptable, especially in the workplace. A daily shower is common, and workers should always have clean hair and wear deodorant. It is also uncommon for clothes (except for men’s suits) to be worn on consecutive days. When in doubt, observe the people around you, and do not be afraid to ask a friendly coworker for advice.

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Eye Contact: Americans will expect you to make eye contact with them and will often negatively interpret a lack of eye contact as dishonesty, submissiveness or distraction. This will create a bad impression or will make people uncomfortable. However, do not stare. While eye contact is important, you should occasionally look away. Ask an American for advice if you are unsure about what is socially acceptable.

Federal Holidays

There are several federal holidays. Most calendars will have these (and a few other celebrations) noted. Remember that government offices and many private businesses will be closed during many of these federal holidays.

- New Year's Day – January 1
- Martin Luther King Day – The third Monday in January
- Presidents' Day – The third Monday in February
- Memorial Day – The last Monday in May
- Juneteeth – June 19
- Independence Day – July 4
- Labor Day – The first Monday in September
- Columbus Day – The second Monday in October
- Veterans Day – The second Monday in November
- Thanksgiving Day – the fourth Thursday in November
- Christmas Day – December 25

Other Holidays and Celebrations

While there are only ten federal holidays, there are other holidays commonly celebrated. Rarely, will offices be closed on these days, but Americans will engage in various forms of celebrations — for example, Valentine's Day (February 14), Mother's Day (May) and Father's Day (June), Easter (March or April), St. Patrick's Day (March 17), and Halloween (October 31). Most Americans will also celebrate "Black Friday" (day after Thanksgiving), Christmas Eve (December 24th) and New Year's Eve (December 31st). It is likely that an office will be closed in observance of these holidays.

US Laws & Safety

You are subject to US laws while you are in the United States. This means that you must know and obey the law.

If arrested, you are entitled to the same rights as a US citizen. You have the right to remain silent and the right to legal representation. If you cannot afford to hire a lawyer, the court will appoint one for you and your lawyer will advise you and defend your legal interests in court. ICLS can confirm your J-1 status but cannot provide you with legal advice, a lawyer, or any financial support toward your defense. Being arrested is grounds for immediate termination from the ICLS Intern and Trainee Program. If you are arrested, you must contact ICLS immediately and maintain communication.

Certain laws are called **federal laws** – the laws that are enforced throughout the whole country. Other laws are **state laws** – the laws that vary slightly by state. It is important to understand both the federal and state laws in which the participant is training. Below are some important examples.

- **Alcohol:** The legal drinking age in the United States is 21 years old. A person under 21 cannot order, buy, or drink any alcoholic beverage. Anyone 21 or older must show identification to purchase or consume alcohol. It is illegal for a person to buy or distribute alcohol to anyone younger than 21 years old. Alcohol should not be consumed in public places, and in many states, it is illegal to have an open

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container of alcohol in public. Public intoxication is illegal. Driving while drinking alcohol or while under the influence of alcohol is illegal and has severe consequences in the United States.

- **Illegal Drugs:** The use, possession, or distribution of illegal drugs is a criminal offense. Some drugs, like marijuana, may be considered legal in one state, illegal in the next state, and illegal to the federal government.
- **Personal Behavior:** Any of the actions below may lead to an arrest and/or prosecution. Avoid the following behaviors and use common sense:
 - Disturbing the peace (particularly by being too loud or belligerent)
 - Disorderly conduct
 - Threatening or touching/harming another person in an unwanted way
 - Damaging property or trespassing on private property
 - Stealing or taking anything without permission, including shoplifting
 - Any sexual contact with a minor (someone younger than 18 years old)
 - Any unwanted sexual contact with a person who does not explicitly give consent (for more information on sexual consent, watch this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fGoWLS4-kU>)

Safety

The United States is a safe country but you should always use common sense. Be aware of your surroundings and the people around you. Do not appear lost or unsure of yourself. Project an appearance of confidence, certainty and purpose. If you are exploring a new place, do it in daylight or have a friend come with you. If you are meeting up with someone new, meet in a public place. If you are uncomfortable with a person or feel that something “isn’t right,” it is better to listen to your instincts and remove yourself from the situation. Do not worry about seeming rude.

On Foot

In America, people generally go home early and stay there. As a result, streets are often empty, and many Americans do not feel comfortable walking late at night, particularly on city streets.

- It is better not to walk alone. Walk with at least one other person when possible.
- Try not to walk on empty or deserted streets. Do not walk through isolated places such as alleys, wooded areas, or parking lots. This is true even when you are not by yourself.
- If you think you are being followed and are worried about your personal safety, cross the street or change direction. Go toward a lighted area and do not hesitate to enter an open store or restaurant. Yell for help if you are afraid. Do not worry about embarrassing yourself. Your safety is more important.

Be Safe on Public Transportation

- Use well-lit stops or stations that many passengers use.
- Do not close your eyes or fall asleep while riding or waiting for public transportation. Maintain control of your belongings so that nobody can grab them. Always be aware of your surroundings.
- If a person is making you uncomfortable or bothering you, move to another area near other passengers or the driver. Do not worry about hurting somebody’s feelings or being embarrassed. If you feel threatened, yell for help or use the emergency device.
- If someone does try to rob you: remain calm, listen to what the person is demanding, do not argue or fight back, and give up your property (it is not worth your life). After you are sure that the robber has left, contact the police. You can dial 911 (the emergency telephone number), or you can go to the nearest police station. Try to describe a person and explain what happened as carefully and thoroughly as possible.

Please notify ICLS and the host organization if you are experiencing or have experienced an unsafe situation.

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Hospitals & Healthcare in the US

Healthcare is expensive in the US, which is why it is so important to maintain active health insurance coverage for the entire duration of the program and international travel days. Even with insurance, you will need to pay when you receive medical care.

If You Need Emergency Medical Care

You should only go to the emergency room of the nearest hospital if you absolutely cannot wait. If you are not admitted to stay in the hospital, you may incur large medical bills. Hospital stays will also result in large medical bills. **If it is a life-threatening emergency, dial 911.**

Clinics & Urgent Cares

Clinics and urgent care facilities are helpful when you are ill or have an injury that is not life-threatening. Be sure to utilize your insurance resources to locate a medical provider that your insurance considers “in-network.”

Pharmacies

There are local pharmacies, but also national chains (such as CVS, Rite-Aid, and Walgreens, among others) where you can pick up prescribed medications. In addition to prescription medicine, you can also get over-the-counter anti-inflammatory, anti-allergy, fever, and pain reducing medicine such as Tylenol, Advil, Benadryl, etc.

Housing

You are responsible for securing your own housing, but ICLS can lend support if requested. It is strongly recommended you find housing options before you arrive in the US. Hotels are usually available, but they can be expensive. Be very careful about reserving housing from 3rd parties or private landlords before you see the property in person. There are housing scams where a scammer from Facebook Marketplace, Craigslist, etc. shows a fake apartment via videochat and then requires a deposit. If you decide to pay any money before seeing the property, make sure you're dealing with a reputable company or rental agency.

ICLS recommends the following ways to procure housing:

- Sites dedicated to short/long term student housing, such as <https://4stay.com/>
- Online sites such as www.justlikehome.com, www.apartmentguide.com, www.ishdc.org, www.airbnb.com, or www.apartments.com
- Call a local real estate agency.
- You can also speak with your host company and supervisor for suggestions. They live and work in the area and are often a great resource.
- Reach out to interns or trainees in the United States who are completing their programs soon or who need roommates.

Finding an Apartment

You must first consider your budget, safety, and location when selecting an apartment. As you will only be living in the US temporarily, you may want to consider renting a furnished apartment. However, these are usually more expensive. Additionally, you should pay careful attention to the actual condition of the apartment. Make sure that everything (including the lock, windows, plumbing, heating and cooling system) is working and in acceptable condition. If something needs to be repaired or changed, point it out. Make sure that the landlord will pay to fix any such problems before you take the apartment.

The most basic American apartment will have a cooking area with refrigerator, stove and sink and at least one bathroom with toilet and bathtub and, or shower, but more amenities are common. Remember that rent may or may not include utilities (electricity, water, and so forth), and you should clarify this. You will be responsible for your telephone costs. You may also have a washer and dryer included in your apartment or general laundry room. Not all buildings have such facilities, so consider how important this is to you. You will also have a private mailbox. Your rent may include parking, or you may be able to rent a parking space for an extra fee.

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Being Accepted as a Tenant

After you find an apartment that suits your needs, the property owner (landlord) must decide whether to approve you as a tenant. This usually involves filling out an application that will ask for your housing, credit and employment histories. International interns, as students or recent graduates, may have difficulty providing this information.

Upon acceptance as a tenant, you must provide a security deposit (usually equal to one or two months' rent). The landlord will be able to keep this deposit if you do not pay your rent, or if you damage the apartment. Confirm that this deposit is refundable. Also, make sure that you understand the terms of your lease and that everything you were promised was put in writing.

Landlords and Problems

You will be responsible for basic housekeeping and keeping your apartment in a livable condition. While ordinary "wear and tear" is acceptable, you may lose your security deposit when you move out if you damage your apartment or do not clean it when your lease is up. Otherwise, the landlord is responsible for the general maintenance of the building and your apartment. Be sure to read everything thoroughly before signing. Leases are legally binding and are usually expensive to break.

Do not forget to pay your rent on time every month. If you are consistently late with the rent or do not pay it, the landlord may have you evicted. Also, do not stop paying your rent because of a problem with your landlord without first consulting an attorney. Obey the terms of your lease. Failure to do so could create unnecessary problems for you. If you are having housing, reach out to your landlord for help. If you are unable to get help, let ICLS know.

Utilities

Utilities include electricity/gas, water, and heating/air conditioning systems. Your rent may cover some or all of these services. Make sure you understand which of these services are included! The lease will detail how many of the utilities are covered by your rent payment.

You will be able to contact the necessary utility companies by calling their customer service numbers. Because the utility company is a business, each company will also ask that you fill out forms including your credit and employment history. Once again, you may have trouble providing an adequate history, and the utility company may request a deposit or proof that you can pay your bills. The company will provide you with an appointment to install the service on a particular day. The time may not be specific, and you will have to wait at home until the installer arrives.

Always pay your bills on time to avoid late fees and penalties, or, in extreme cases, the discontinuation of services. This is also an excellent way to build your credit history.

Cell Phone Service, Cable, and Internet

The country code for the United States is "+1." You may have to dial this number when making long distance or toll-free phone numbers. Otherwise, phone numbers consist of ten digits. The first three numbers (often placed in parentheses) indicate the area code, which serves all or part of a city or state. You will have to dial the area code to complete calls.

Obtaining a US phone (or local) number is required for your records in SEVIS so that we and others can come in contact with you. You can either get a "pay-as-you-go phone," which allows you to only pay for the services you use or buy an American SIM card or eSIM to put in your international phone. Both options are available at cell phone companies. <https://j1simcards.com/> is a great resource.

Cable, Internet and Cellphones

AT&T, Verizon, T-Mobile, and Sprint are the most popular American cell phone companies. These companies also offer "bundles" of cell phone service with cable and WIFI (internet). Buying a bundle or package is usually cheaper

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than buying each separate. Cable is becoming much less common in the United States as many people prefer streaming services. Remember to pay your bill on time to avoid penalties.

Transportation

Public Transportation

Many cities have buses, trains, subways or “the metro,” trolleys, or streetcars. Anyone can ride these vehicles for a small fee. In some places, you can buy a card good for several trips on subways or buses. You can also pay for each trip separately. Pay-per-use bicycles and motorized scooters are also very common and a popular mode of transportation.

Driver’s License

It is illegal to drive a car in the United States without a driver’s license. Be sure to check with the department in charge of issuing driver’s licenses in your state, commonly called the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), the Department of Transportation, or the Secretary of State. You can find further information [here](#).

Buying a Car

Owning a car can be convenient. In the US, you must also pay for car insurance, registering your vehicle and licenses. Traffic and parking can make driving difficult in some cities. Think of the costs and benefits before you decide to buy a car.

Taxis and Ride-Sharing Apps

Most US cities have a taxi system, especially in airports. Ride-sharing apps Uber and Lyft are very popular. Always be cautious, safe, and be aware of your surroundings.

Money & Banking

Banks

Banks are usually open Monday through Friday, and many are open Saturday morning. They are closed on Sundays and federal holidays. ATMs are typically open 24 hours a day. Some US banks are regional meaning they are common in one part of the country, but not in another. Other banks are considered national meaning that they have locations throughout the US. Select a bank that can provide the services that fit your schedule, preferences, and habits and be sure to find out what maintenance fees would apply to the accounts (if any). You may also consider a US bank that can easily transfer money with the bank in your home country and take care of currency exchanges.

Opening an Account

Banks require specific information before opening an account for you. You will probably be asked to provide photo identification (passport), some personal information, mailing address, and money as a minimum deposit. Banks also will usually request Social Security Number (SSN) to report earnings to the federal tax authority – the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). Some banks do not require international students and exchange visitors to obtain an SSN to open an account.

Credit Cards

Most Americans have and use credit cards frequently. You should have at least one to pay for emergencies if not for everyday purchases. Many hotels and car rentals require a credit card to use their services.

OTHER COMMON EXPENSES

WIFI

Many places offer free wifi, so it might not be necessary to purchase it yourself. Be sure to check for free wifi first!

Food

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Your food budget will depend on your dietary and spending habits. Cooking your own food is less expensive than going out to eat. Find a grocery store near where you will live and go onto their website to get an idea of how much food will cost you.

Tipping Culture

In the US waiters/waitresses often don't get paid the full minimum wage. Instead, they get the majority of their money through tipping. It is customary and expected to tip your waiter/waitresses at a sit-down restaurant. Generally, it is normal to tip 20% of the bill. It is also customary to tip a bartender (usually \$1 per drink). Americans will also tip people doing them a service such as taxicab drivers, valet parking attendants, hairdressers/barbers, etc. If you are unsure when or how much to tip, it is okay to ask an American friend or colleague for advice. You may see a prompt to add a tip when you order food at a counter rather than in a sit-down restaurant. Tipping in this scenario is not required, but is appreciated.

Leisure

Be sure to consider entertainment expenses when you are planning your budget. You should not come to the US simply to train – we want you to have some fun outside of your training too!

Public Resources

Post Offices & USPS

At the Post Office, you can pick up or send packages and letters, buy stamps or other shipping materials as well as find some useful forms. Mail is also delivered to all residences and businesses Monday-Saturday, except federal holidays. You can also buy a P.O. Box at the post office where your mail will be delivered. Post office stores' hours vary by location.

Public Libraries

The public library is still an invaluable source of information. In addition to borrowing books and other materials, you can use the library as a research tool and as a source for some community-related information on events and volunteering.

City and County Websites

Learn what county (not country!) you will live in. Cities and counties provide valuable information on their official websites. You may find information about local events and activities. You may also provide important information related to emergency preparedness and evacuation orders. This is especially important for people who will be training near any of the US coasts and/or may be susceptible to hurricanes, tornados, floods, fires, or other extreme weather.

Additional Information

Links to Important Workplace and Safety Information

For important workplace rights and safety information, please visit ICLS' Knowledge Base here:

<https://learning.icls.edu/knowledge/j1-workplace-rights-and-protections>

- Non-Immigrant Rights Pamphlet
- Sexual Harassment & Retaliation Information
- Protecting Personal Information
- Human Trafficking Information
- Social Security Information for Non-Citizens
- DOS Exchange Program Brochure
- Employee Rights
- DOL Fact Sheet #71

Participant Orientation Handbook

Version: 04.2025

Prohibited Unskilled Occupations List

The [following occupations](#) are considered unskilled, and as per State Department regulations (Appendix E to Part 62; 22 CFR (c) (1)) Interns and Trainees cannot perform these occupations while completing their exchange program:

Assemblers	Attendants, Parking Lot
Automobile Service Station Attendants	Bartenders
Attendant (Personal Service)	Attendant (Recreation Service)
Attendant (Amusement)	Ushers, Recreation, and Amusement
Basic Accounting and Bookkeepers	Caretakers
Cashiers	Charworkers and Cleaners
Cleaners, Hotel, and Motel	Chauffeurs and Taxicab Drivers
Clerks, Hotel, Restaurant	Clerks, General
Clerks and Checkers, Grocery Stores	Clerk Typist
Cooks, Short Order	Counter and Fountain Workers
Dining Room Attendants	Electric Truck Operators
Elevator Operators	Floor workers
Groundskeepers	Guards
Helpers, any industry	Material Handlers
Hotel Cleaners	Nurses' Aides and Orderlies
Household Domestic Service Workers	Packers, Markers, Bottlers, and Related
Hotel Housekeepers, Room Service, Guest Service	Laborers, Farm
Janitors	Laborers, Mine
Key Punch Operators	Loopers and Toppers
Kitchen Workers	Porters
Laborers, Common	Receptionists
Sales Clerks, General	Sailors and Deck Hands
Sewing Machine Operators & Hemstitchers	Streetcar and Bus Conductors
Stock Room and Warehouse Workers	Telephone Operators
Truck, Yacht Drivers	Yard Workers
Typist, Lesser Skilled	Restaurant Cleaners, Kitchen Workers, Food/Beverage Delivery, Valley Parking, Hostess
Spa Massage/Nail Technician	