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PARTICIPANT HANDBOOK

**J-1 Teacher Exchange
Program**

Welcome to Alliance Abroad Group!

We hope that your experience on the Teacher Program will be a wonderful one. This is a great chance for you to share your culture with Americans while learning about American teaching practices and the American way of life. We are here for you during your stay, so please stay in touch with us. Keep your mind and your heart open, and we are sure that this will be one of the best experiences of your life!

As an Exchange Visitor Program participant, you will enjoy a unique opportunity to experience American life and culture. As an ambassador of your country, you will help educate Americans you meet during your stay about your home country and culture.

Program Purpose: The Teacher Exchange Program seeks to provide you with knowledge and experience in a U.S. public or private school, with the goal of promoting the exchange of ideas between American and foreign teachers. This is accomplished by daily interaction with American students and teachers in a school where you can participate actively in cross-cultural activities with Americans. This program provides international teachers a unique opportunity to create a global community through shared knowledge and cultural differences.

This program seeks to give you a better understanding of American culture, society, and teaching practices at the primary and secondary level so that you can return home and share your increased knowledge with family, friends, and colleagues.

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Introduction to Alliance Abroad Group

The Alliance Abroad Group was founded in 1992 to provide unique educational travel programs to people around the world. Our company offers a variety of programs:

Programs in the United States:

All programs to the U.S. include placement and support throughout the program.

Work/Travel Program: short-term paid work programs for international students on their university holidays (J-1 visa).

Trainee/Intern Program: 6 – 18 month programs for students and recent graduates to train in their field of study or occupation (J-1 visa).

Teacher Program: 1 – 3 year program which place international teachers in teaching positions at the primary and secondary levels (J-1 visa).

Programs outside the United States:

Whether you want to work, teach, volunteer, intern, or study outside the U.S., we will show you how to do it like the locals do. Thorough, safe, and affordable, these programs offer the kind of unique insight into other cultures you won't find anywhere else. Programs include:

Teach Programs: China, Chile, Spain, Argentina, Peru, Ecuador

Welcome to Our Family!

Your Assigned AAG Staff Representative

One of the best reasons to travel to the U.S. for the Teacher Exchange Program through Alliance Abroad Group is our full service support. You are assigned an AAG Representative who can help you with:

- Arrival information: how to get to your school
- Teaching placement issues: questions that you cannot work out with your supervisor or fellow teachers
- Social Security questions
- Housing help
- Emergency assistance

You will be given the name and contact information of your AAG Representative before you arrive in the United States. Your AAG Representative will be in touch with your host school during your program, and you can call him/her when you need help or advice.

AAG Representatives are here to help and support you; please let them!

Before you make any change in your program (address change, teaching position or plan, etc.), it is critical that you talk to your AAG Representative first. Making a change in your situation without notifying AAG is a violation of program rules and may result in you being reported to the USCIS (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services) and the Department of State as being out of status. You may also be terminated from the program and asked to return to your home country.

My AAG Staff Representative: _____

Phone number: _____

Emergency number: 1.866.IM IN USA (1.866.464.6872)

Alliance Abroad Group Contact Information

Headquarters: Alliance Abroad Group

1221 South Mopac Expressway, Suite 100
Austin, Texas 78746
Tel: 512.457.8062 Fax: 413.460.3502
24 hour toll-free number: 1.866.6.ABROAD or 1.888.622.7623

Teacher Program Staff:

Laurie Moxley
Vice President

Tel: 1.866.622.7623 ext. 145 email: lmoxley@allianceabroad.com

Nichole Murphy
Business Development Manager

Teacher Program
Tel: 1.866.622.7623 ext. 162 email: nmurphy@allianceabroad.com

M.C. Phillips
J-1 Participant Support Executive Director

Alternate Responsible Officer
Tel: 512.914.9382 email: mphillips@allianceabroad.com

24 Hour EMERGENCY NUMBER: 1.866. IM IN USA or 1.866.464.6872

Call this number if you have a true emergency that cannot wait until business hours. You will be connected after business hours to someone who will take your information and find someone to help you. During work hours, you will reach our headquarters in Austin, Texas.

If you need help, always try to reach your AAG Representative first. If it is a true emergency, call **1.866.IM IN USA**.

When contacting AAG with problems, these are NOT emergencies:

- Loss of documents (Social Security card, etc.)



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- Loss of passport (Contact your home country's Consulate.)
- Housing concerns (overcrowding of housing, rent or deposit disputes, destruction of property, condition of housing)
- General information about teaching and housing
- Legal information and advice
- If you are a victim of theft or loss (lost valuables, luggage, etc.)
- Employer / employee concerns; U.S. payroll tax questions
- Need to return home (unless you are leaving that night with no advance notice)

These are true emergencies, and you should call AAG right away:

- You are arrested
- You are hospitalized with a serious injury
- You are the victim of a violent crime (call 911 first)
- Another participant needs urgent help

For these issues please contact your AAG Representative or, if unavailable, the Alliance Abroad Group headquarters (1.866.IM IN USA or 1.866.464.6872). During office hours (8:30 am - 5:30 pm CST), you will reach our staff. After hours, you will reach our answering service staff who can help you.

Other helpful contact information:

Office of Exchange Coordination

U.S. Department of State

PA/PL, Rm. 2206
2201 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20520
202 647-6575
Email: jvisas@state.gov

Workplace Protocol for Your



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Teaching Program

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American Schools

Depending upon where you come from, American schools may appear less formal than what you have experienced in your home country. Teachers in the United States have a variety of styles, but many tend to promote open exchange and discussion rather than learning by repetition. AAG will provide you with some articles on pedagogical methods and challenges prior to your program start date. In this handbook, we will address the interaction with your counterparts (other teachers) and supervisors.

Socializing on the job is casual between workers of different levels, and this is the American way of achieving a pleasant working environment. To understand how these informal relationships work, observe your supervisor and your American co-teachers to learn how to gauge your own on-the-job behavior while teaching.

Remember to:

- Be respectful and courteous to students, administrative workers, faculty (other teachers) and supervisors.
- Be on time each day (arrive 5-10 minutes early).
- Dress appropriately for the position you are in (look at what others are wearing).
- Smile!
- Focus on your teaching assignment during work hours.
- Attend to personal business on personal time.
- Practice American hygiene standards. In the U.S., body odor is considered very offensive. Please always use soap and deodorant.

If Problems Should Arise:

- Identify the source of the problem; know specifically what your concern is.
- Approach your immediate supervisor or another teacher in a calm and polite manner, and explain your area of concern. (This is culturally acceptable in the United States.)
- If the concern is not resolved to your satisfaction, please phone your AAG staff representative for assistance.

Injuries at the School



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In the event that you are ever hurt at your school, you MUST report this immediately to your supervisor. You may be entitled to Workers' Compensation Insurance to treat your injury, and if this is the case, the school's insurance would be responsible for paying your medical bills. Please call your AAG Representative if you are injured while at the school.

Salary

You might receive your paycheck once a week, once every two weeks, or even once a month. Your school should give you a statement with your check which will explain which taxes are being deducted from your check. As a J-1 exchange visitor and non-resident, you should not have Social Security (FICA/FUTU), Medicare, or Medicaid taxes deducted from your check. You will see deductions for federal, state, and local taxes, and possibly for housing, depending on your agreement with your host school.

You may not be able to receive your paycheck until you have received your Social Security number; however, you should be paid for all the time you have been teaching in the first paycheck after that number is received.

Drug Testing in the U.S.

It is within your school's legal right to request and require you to take a drug test before you begin your teaching position and also at anytime during your program. Testing positive is sufficient grounds for termination of both employment and your visa, in which case you would be asked to return to your home country.

Work outside the Teacher Program Prohibited

Teachers on the J-1 Program are not allowed to work at any additional jobs other than the authorized teaching program. Violation of this policy may be cause for program termination.

No Child Left Behind

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was made law in the United States in 2001, and its principles are extremely important to how teaching is conducted in schools (grades K-12) across the country. We strongly recommend that you spend some time familiarizing yourself with the approach and how it is applied. You will also want to discuss this in greater depth with your host school.

No Child Left Behind is based on four principles:

1. Stronger Accountability for Results

Under *No Child Left Behind*, states are working to close the achievement gap to make sure all students, including those who are disadvantaged, achieve academic proficiency. Annual state and school district report cards inform parents and communities about state and school progress. Schools that do not make progress must provide supplemental services, such as free tutoring or after-school assistance, take corrective actions, and, if still not making adequate yearly progress after five years, make dramatic changes to the way the school is run.

2. More Freedom for States and Communities

Under *No Child Left Behind*, states and school districts have unprecedented flexibility in how they use federal education funds. For example, it is possible for most school districts to transfer up to 50 percent of the federal formula grant funds they receive under the Improving Teacher Quality State Grants, Educational Technology, Innovative Programs, and Safe and Drug-Free Schools programs to any one of these programs, or to their Title I program, without separate approval. This allows districts to use funds for their particular needs, such as hiring new teachers, increasing teacher pay, and improving teacher training and professional development.

3. Proven Education Methods

No Child Left Behind puts emphasis on determining which educational programs and practices have been proven effective through rigorous scientific research. Federal funding is targeted to support these programs and teaching methods that work to improve student learning and achievement. In reading, for example, *No Child Left Behind* supports scientifically based instruction programs in the early grades under the Reading First Program and in preschool under the Early Reading First Program.

4. More Choices for Parents

Parents of children in low-performing schools have new options under *No Child Left Behind*. In schools that do not meet state standards for at least two consecutive years, parents may transfer their children to a better-performing public school, including a public charter school, within their district. The district must provide transportation, using Title I funds if necessary. Students from low-income families in schools that fail to meet state standards for at least three years are eligible to receive supplemental educational services, including tutoring, after-school services, and summer school. Also, students who attend a persistently dangerous school or are the victim of a violent crime while in their school have the option to attend a safe school within their district.

More information about NCLB can be found on the following websites:

The Department of Education's website and overview:

<http://www.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml?src=pb>

A comprehensive overview that shows many different points of view on this law:

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/schools/nochild/>

Program Rules and Regulations

Program Eligibility

To participate in the Teacher Exchange Program, you must:

1. meet the qualifications for teaching in primary or secondary schools in your country of nationality or legal residence;
2. satisfy the certification standards and requirements of the U.S. state in which you will teach;
3. be of good reputation and character;
4. seek to come to the United States for the purpose of full-time teaching at a primary or secondary accredited educational institution in the United States;
5. have a minimum of three years of teaching or related professional experience;
6. be capable and comfortable functioning in an English speaking environment (A TOEFL score of 550 or higher is recommended);
7. demonstrate an interest in and maturity for teaching in another country and culture.

Comment [n1]: Are points 2 & 6 the same thing?

Security Procedures - SEVIS

You signed Terms and Conditions relating to the Student Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS), which tracks all exchange visitors entering on an F, M, or J visa. This new system was implemented January 30, 2003, and will be strictly enforced. **It is very important that you understand these regulations.**

Failure to comply could put your status at risk, which will have serious consequences such as cancellation of your current visa and denial of any future visa applications for you or your family.

You must inform Alliance Abroad Group of your actual address (where you will live, not a PO Box or the host school address) within 7 days of arriving in order to maintain your visa in good standing. Please make sure that you fill out the form that we have on our website (http://www.allianceabroad.com/participants/participants_02.htm) to provide us with that information.

If you move at any time during your teacher program, you must inform Alliance Abroad Group of that move and where you will be living.

If you leave your teaching position without the permission of your school and your AAG Representative, you will be reported to the USCIS (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services) as 'out of status' on your program. Depending on the situation, your visa could be terminated, and you could be asked to return to your home country. **We will not be able to put you back in status, even if it is a misunderstanding.** So if you are not sure what to do, **CALL** your AAG Representative.

Comment [n2]: awkward

Two-Year Return Rule

The 'Two-Year Rule' is the common term used for a section of immigration law which requires that many exchange visitors return to their home country and be physically present there for at least two years after the conclusion of their exchange visit before they can be issued certain types of nonimmigrant visas, specifically [H-1](#), [L-1](#), [K-1](#) and immigrant visas. Most teachers will be subject to the two year return rule after completing their J-1 program.

Travel Documents

To participate in a J-1 teacher exchange program legally in the U.S., you will need to enter the country with the following documents, all with valid dates. All government forms in the U.S. are lettered and numbered in the lower left-hand corner for easy identification.

- DS-2019 form "Exchange Visitor Program, Certificate of Eligibility"
- Passport with J-1 visa stamp or sticker
- I-94 card (small white card that you receive on the airplane)

Travel Tip: Make two copies of your passport before you leave home. Keep all of your original documents with you (in your carry on luggage), and put the extra set in your checked luggage.

The DS-2019

Alliance Abroad Group can only issue a DS-2019 form after you have signed and returned all your paperwork, including any documentation required by the school. The DS-2019 form will be mailed to your agency in your home country. Your in-country agent will instruct you on how to fill out the DS-2019 form and advise you on visa application and other necessary documentation prior to applying for the J-1 visa at the U.S. Embassy or U.S. Consulate in your country.

The DS-2019 form is a very important document which you must keep throughout your program. It is a double-sided document: on the front you will find a bar code printed in black ink and is signed by the responsible officer; the back side has instructions. You must take the DS form to the U.S. Consulate, and make sure that the Immigration Officer returns the original document to you. It is very important that you keep this document safe. The DS-2019 is your authorization to teach in the United States for the specified dates that appear in Section 3.

Bringing Family Members with you on the Program

You are allowed to bring immediate family members with you on this program (spouse and dependent children) on a J-2 visa under certain circumstances. J-2 visa holders may apply to United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for permission to work in the United States but employment will not be authorized if this income is needed to support the J-1 principal visa holder. Income should only be used for recreational purposes while in the U.S. A typical teacher salary is enough for one person to live modestly. AAG will require that you bring additional savings to support the other family members, at least for the first year of the program. Children under the age of 18 will be permitted to attend American public schools free of charge.

Comment [n3]: awkward wording

The J-1 Visa

The DS-2019 form is a certification that you have an official sponsor to enter the U.S., but it is not a visa. The visa can only be authorized by a U.S. Consular Official at an Embassy or Consulate. Do not purchase your travel tickets before you have obtained your visa.

Visa requirements vary by country, and your local agency can assist you with specific requirements in your country. As security concerns in the U.S. have increased, it may be more difficult to obtain a visa. You will be required to have an interview, and you will need to prove to the Consular Official that you meet the requirements and have no intention of staying in the U.S. illegally.

You will need:

- Proof that you have a current bank account and that you will have enough money to cover your costs in the US (including any salary you may earn). We ask that you bring at least \$1,500 USD to begin your program.
- Proof that you have a home, apartment, or family members awaiting your return.
- Proof of any other commitments such as a job or other economic and personal ties that would require your return to your country. Consular officers often want to see bank accounts, evidence of family ties, and anything else that will prove that you intend to return to your home country at the end of your program.

The SEVIS Fee Receipt

The SEVIS system (Student Exchange Visitor Information System) was implemented in 2003 to track J-1 and F-1 visa holders during their time in the United States. You must pay a fee towards this system before your J-1 visa will be processed. In many cases, Alliance Abroad Group is paying this fee on your behalf, and the receipt (I-797) will be sent along with your DS-2019 form. Be sure to have this receipt with you when you go for the visa appointment.

I-94 Form

At the airline counter or in flight, you will receive an I-94 form, this is your arrival/departure record. This form is very important and should be kept inside your passport because you will need it for immigration, to apply for Social Security, and again when leaving the U.S. Make sure to make a photocopy of this form. Keep it with the copy of your passport in a safe place.

U.S. VISIT Program

VISIT stands for Visitor and Immigrant Status Indicator Technology, which is a biometric tracking system that tells U.S. immigration authorities when a non-US citizen leaves or enters the country. Participants will be required to follow the steps below and present their receipt before boarding the airplane.

At the airport, the machine looks like an ATM (automatic teller) and operates as follows:

- Step 1:** Insert your passport or visa as shown.
- Step 2:** Place your left index finger on the button.
- Step 3:** Place your right index finger on the button.
- Step 4:** Hold for a digital picture.
- Step 5:** Take your receipt from the machine.

I-9 Form: Employment Eligibility Form

Even though you are participating in a teacher exchange program, your host schools will ask you to fill out a form related to work authorization. This is a form that U.S. citizens must also fill out when they begin any job. Here are some helpful tips for you on how this form should be completed:

Section 1:

- * Write your host school's address.
- * Write your Social Security number if it has been issued.
- * Check the box "an alien authorized to work until (date on your DS-2019)".
- * For the "alien # or Admission #," enter the number from your I-94 card.

Section 2 (List B):

- * Write "valid passport from _____" (name of your country).
- * Write your passport number
- * Write your passport expiration date

Section 2 (List C):

- * Write "DS-2019 number _____" (The number is in the upper right corner of the DS-2019 form.)
- * Write "I-94 number _____".
- * Write the same date as you did in Section 1 concerning work authorization

W-4 Forms (for taxes)

Host Schools should ask you to complete a W-4 form, which will be used to determine how much tax will be withheld from your paychecks. We suggest the following steps when you are filling out the W-4. Your host company may advise you to use a different option depending on your actual situation when filling out the form.

- On line 3**, check only "single" marital status (regardless of marital status)
- On line 5**, claim only one withholding allowance
- On line 6**, write "Non-Resident Alien" or NRA above the dotted line.
- On line 7**, do NOT claim "Exempt" withholding status

Because your tax situation may change during the period you are in the U.S., we recommend that you check instructions for filling out a W-4 at <http://www.irs.gov/>. You are subject to all U.S. taxes (state and federal) with the exception of Medicare and Social Security taxes, so please follow the guidelines on the IRS website.

Important: The above rules must be followed to avoid over-taxation or having to pay tax to the U.S. government in the future. **Do not follow the instructions provided on the W-4 form, these instructions do not apply to "non-resident aliens," which means they do not apply to Teacher Exchange Program participants.**

Please note: *Tax information is subject to change. If you have any doubt, verify this information with the IRS or the U.S. Embassy in your home country (if tax service is available).*

Last 30 Days for Travel

You have 30 days after the end of your teaching program to travel in the United States. Your teaching must end no later than the end date on your DS-2019 form. After that date, you are not permitted to continue teaching, working at the school, or working anywhere else, and you have 30 days to travel or leave the country. You are not insured for this period unless you contact AAG and make arrangements to purchase the necessary coverage. **Please contact us at least one month in advance to make these arrangements.**

You will need to check with your school about their policy on vacations during the time of your teaching program. You may not be eligible for vacation, so the last 30 days after your program ends is a perfect time to explore the United States.

Program fees

All teachers pay a program fee which has been approved by the Alliance Abroad Group to a local home-country agent or directly to AAG. This fee includes the following services from AAG: DS-2019 form documentation, placement (unless you applied to the program with your own teaching placement), orientation after arrival, medical insurance, and support while you are in the USA. It may also include extra services offered by your home country agent. If you believe you have been charged a different fee than the information provided to you before you left your country, please report this to the Alliance Abroad Group Teacher Program staff immediately.

Insurance

As a participant in this program, you (and any dependents) are required to have health insurance. The Alliance Abroad Group has secured a comprehensive medical insurance policy for you through Bulstrad Life, part of the Vienna Insurance Group. This policy ensures that you will have access to necessary medical treatment during your program. You have limited health and accident insurance for injuries and/or illness. You are responsible for payment of insurance for yourself and your dependents (if applicable) for the duration of your program.

The cost for the insurance is subject to change, as insurance rates can vary greatly. Payment for the insurance is due with your program fee. Specific costs will be discussed

Please read the insurance policy book you were issued or visit our website (www.allianceabroad.com/participants/insurance.htm) to learn what is and is not covered, and to see what the limits of the coverage area are. If you did not receive an Insurance Policy brochure or flyer, please ask your AAG representative for one.

For all the services listed below, you will need pre-approval:

- Injury or illness medical coverage
- Medical evacuation/Repatriation
- Travel assistance
- Travel expenses of a close relative in the event of serious illness of the insured person.

Although your job may offer an insurance package, according to program regulations, you must be covered by insurance that meets U.S. Department of State requirements. Alliance Abroad Group's insurance plan through Bulstrad Life does meet these requirements.

Important note: This insurance does not cover preexisting conditions, including any illness that begins before your arrival in the United States. Routine medical check-ups along with dental and eye care are also not covered by this insurance. Please consult the AAG website for all details of coverage.

Pre-approval prior to treatment

If you need medical care, please call the toll-free number for the insurance company to get authorization for treatment and the names of approved medical providers in your area *prior* to going to a doctor or clinic for treatment. Medical expenses in the United States are extremely expensive, and it is in your best interest to go to a doctor who accepts this insurance plan.

Bulstrad works with an Assistance Company – CORIS – which will help you make doctor's appointments and will also direct you to participating providers (doctors, clinics and hospitals).

CORIS Assistance Company: 1-800-358-9105

In a medical emergency, you need to call as soon as possible after seeking treatment. If you need assistance in the case of an extreme emergency, you should contact the 24 hour assistance service at CORIS.

Always bring your insurance card, booklet and claim form with you! Go to the approved doctor or clinic, or your costs will be higher than just the \$50 deductible. If your condition is not an emergency, it is best to go to a walk-in clinic rather than the emergency room. The deductible (the amount you owe) for emergency room treatment is \$250 if you are not admitted and \$50 if you are admitted to the hospital. If the Doctor/Hospital does not recognize or will not accept this insurance, you should always ask them to call the insurance assistance company to see if something can be worked out. If they absolutely refuse to accept this insurance, you will need to pay the bills yourself and then use a claim form found at AAG's website to seek reimbursement.

Coverage Duration

Your insurance coverage begins upon arrival in the U.S. Coverage will begin the day before the start date on your DS-2019 form. Coverage will end when you return to your home country OR the day following the end date printed on your DS 2019 form, whichever comes first. If you choose to stay longer (30 days is allowed for travel), you will need to contact AAG to extend your coverage for an additional charge with one month notice. Please note that you are only covered for the period for which you have paid the premium.

Comment [n4]: Does coverage begin upon arrival or the day before the start date on the DS form?

Deductible

You will need to pay a deductible the first time a doctor treats you for each injury or illness. The deductible amount is your responsibility and should be paid at the time of service. The deductible for treatment at an emergency room for a non-emergency is \$250. The deductible for a doctor's office visit is \$50 for the first visit, and \$25 for any follow-on visits for the same illness/accident. You must pay this bill when you receive it. Failure to pay will result in a negative report to the authorities and can affect your ability to return to the U.S. in the future. Give the doctor or hospital your home address. Do not send medical bills to AAG.

Comment [n5]: Is the deductible applicable each "new" injury/illness or is it truly a one-time deductible?

Social Security Card

You will need to get a Social Security card in order to receive your pay, to apply for a driver's license, and often for identification. You should apply for one shortly after arrival in the U.S. The Social Security Administration (SSA) will not process your application until you have been validated in the SEVIS system. Validation happens when you arrive at your host school and check in through our website (http://www.allianceabroad.net/participants/Login_DS2019.aspx). You must check in within 7 days after your arrival. If we don't receive your check-in information, we cannot validate your status, and this means that your Social Security card process cannot move forward. The SSA recommends that you wait at least 10 days after arriving to the United States to apply for your card to be sure you are validated in SEVIS.

Your school or your AAG representative should be able to help you find your local Social Security office. If you have a card from a previous visit to the U.S., you do not need to apply again. The telephone book (in a special section for government listings) has the number and address of the nearest office in your area, or you can call toll-free: **1-800-772-1213**. You can also visit the SSA's website for more information or find the nearest office: <http://socialsecurity.gov>.

Once you apply, if there are no other conflicts with the requirements of the Social Security Administration and your status in SEVIS, you should receive your Social Security numbers/cards within a few weeks.

If the SSA cannot verify your status, they will mail a notice of explanation to you (at the address you have provided on the Social Security application). The letter will instruct you to contact AAG and ask that your SEVIS information be reviewed to ensure that it is accurate. Updates in SEVIS will be seen within 48 hours, and then you can re-apply for your Social Security number. If your Social Security card has not arrived after a few weeks, please check with AAG to be sure that you are validated in SEVIS.

The verification process required for you to get your card may take longer than in the past, and your school may not be able to pay you your salary until you have received this card (though you will be paid for all time you have been teaching). You should bring sufficient funds to cover you through this period, which could be at least one month.

Going to the Social Security Office

Once you have arrived in the U.S. and registered with SEIVS, you must go in person to the local Social Security office and bring the following documents with you (originals and one certified copy of each document on separate pages):

- Passport/ Visa
- Sponsor letter
- Teaching Offer Letter
- DS-2019
- I-94 form
- Birth Certificate or at least one official picture ID that is at least one year old. (If the passport and drivers license are both less than one year old, a birth certificate is required.)

Comment [n6]: Do they need to copy both their passport photo page and their visa page?

Comment [n7]: Does this need to be a certified or original copy?

The mailing address on the application should be the school's address, because the Social Security card will be mailed a few weeks later. You should ask the administrator for a Form SSA-5030 proving that you have applied for the card. Schools may use temporary numbers in their payroll system (zeros) if the actual number is not available before the first payroll. You should also notify your school that you will be expecting mail from the SSA to arrive at the school.

Comment [n8]: Are school's aware that teachers will receive mail at the school from the SSA?

If your school is not sure about how to report your salary before you have received your Social Security number, please ask them to go to the Social Security Administration's website at <http://www.ssa.gov/employer>.

Income Tax in the United States

All J-1 Exchange Visitors must pay all appropriate federal, state and local taxes. Taxes can be very complicated, and unless you do them correctly, you will not receive the maximum refund. You may also encounter problems with future trips to the United States if you do not file your taxes. Much of what is withheld from your paycheck can be refunded to you, provided you correctly file the necessary tax forms by April 15 for the previous year. As an exchange visitor (J-1 visa), you are currently exempt from Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid taxes. Be sure to keep your pay stubs and other paperwork from the program. You will need them at tax time. Check the Alliance Abroad website for further resources to help you with your taxes.

W-2 Form: Wage and Tax Statement

In January, your host school is required by law to provide you with a statement that lists the total amount of money you earned during the previous year and a total of taxes that you paid. This statement is called a W-2 form, and it is used to file your U.S. Federal tax return. You will need to let your school know where to send this document. If you do not receive your W-2 form by February, please contact your school's administration.

American Culture

Culture Shock

Some international participants may experience culture shock at some point during the program. Culture shock is described as "initial discomfort and disorientation when exposed to a new culture or lifestyle," and it usually begins 1-4 weeks after arrival and often lasts 1-4 weeks. It can last longer or come at other times such as holidays. It is important to recognize that these feelings are normal and will pass.

Common symptoms of culture shock include:

- Homesickness
- Feeling isolated and lonely
- Reluctance to speak English
- Reluctance to adjust to the new schedule, foods, lifestyles, dress, etc.
- Lack of motivation and energy
- Depression
- Crying and sleeping excessively

Culture shock is temporary and will pass. The more involved you become, the more quickly you will adapt and become comfortable in your new surroundings. Ideas that may help you feel better:

- Get involved as much as possible in your host school's activities and attend social functions, clubs, sports, cultural institutions such as museums, American music venues, etc.
- Find something from home that is comforting: a book in your own language, a favorite food from home, music from home, etc.
- Seek out new friends.

CULTURE SHOCK IS VERY NORMAL, BUT IT CAN BE VERY SERIOUS. IF YOU TRY THE ABOVE ADVICE AND IT DOES NOT SEEM TO BE HELPING, PLEASE CALL YOUR AAG REPRESENTATIVE.

Expenses in the U.S.

Program Fees and Additional Costs

You have been charged a program fee to participate in this program. This fee helps to cover our costs in seeking your employment and also matching you to the best school for your background. If you have been recruited through a local agency in your country, the agency will also have charged a fee in addition to the fee from Alliance Abroad Group. If you feel that the fee is unreasonable, please make sure to contact us so that we may investigate. In addition to the application and program fees you have paid, you will be expected cover the following costs:

Comment [n9]: awkward

- SEVIS Fee: \$180
- Visa Fees: varies by country
- Round-trip flight: \$800 - \$1200 (estimate)
- Housing Deposit: typically equivalent to first month's rent (around \$500)
- Some additional fees may be required for certification in the state in which you are teaching

In addition to these costs, you will also have start-up costs prior to receiving your first paycheck, and we recommend that to cover these additional costs (not including those named above), you need to bring at least \$1,500 USD. You will be asked for documentation to show that you have these funds prior to being accepted on the program.

If you have any questions about the costs you may face during the program, please ask your local agency or contact AAG directly. We don't want you to have any surprises!

Rent

Rent is approximately \$650 - \$850.00 USD per month for a 1 bedroom apartment, though this amount can vary greatly by location. It will be more in large cities. Added extras, such as washer/dryers, pool, sauna, etc., will increase the price. Locations of housing will also affect the cost. If you want to rent an apartment for less than one year, the rent is also generally higher. If you are hoping to control costs, you can often find an apartment share through the local [Craigslist.org](https://www.craigslist.org) listings.

Utilities

Utilities are generally not included in the rent. Electricity, gas, water, garbage, etc., are approximately \$60.00 USD per month. In the winter months, this amount may increase due to higher gas/oil usage. Additionally, constant use of air conditioning during the summer may make your bills be as much as \$100.00 USD per month. Basic cable (no movies) costs approximately \$60.00 per month. Internet service is usually around \$40 - \$50 per month.

Comment [n10]: Most utility company charge a deposit for first time users/accounts.

Phone

Basic telephone service is approximately \$35 USD per month. You are typically charged a connection fee for hooking up the phone line in your residence. Cell (mobile) phone service costs approximately \$30 - \$55 USD per month for a basic package. If you cannot sign up for a longer contract, you may have to pay a higher rate. Many teachers choose to get a mobile phone only, and there are 'pay as you go' packages available everywhere. INTERNATIONAL phone calls are extra and cost more per minute than local calls, and will vary depending upon your country.

Food

Food is approximately \$250.00 USD per month, with organic fruit and vegetables being more expensive. Fast food is approximately \$4.00 - \$6.00 dollars and up for a sandwich, fries and coke. It is always cheaper to cook at home than to eat out every meal. Look for store-brands or generic brands too, as they are always less expensive!

Laundry Service

Laundry service is usually \$1.00 USD per load to wash and \$1.00 to dry a load of clothes. Laundry soap costs approximately \$4.00 USD per bottle or box.

Taxi

Taxi cabs cost approximately \$2.50 USD and up for the first mile then \$0.25 USD per ½ mile. While driving or in a cab, you may drive on toll roads. The tolls to drive on these roads range from \$0.25 USD and up to \$2.00 USD. These rates can vary greatly by location, and may fluctuate with the price of gas.

Comment [n11]: awkward

Leisure

Movies cost approximately \$10.00 USD, but matinees are a lower price if you go before 6 p.m. in most cases. Prices for clubs will also vary by location and city.

Money Matters

Banking and Automatic Teller Machine (ATM) Cards:

Most U.S. bank accounts provide bankcards that can be used at 24-hour automated teller machines (ATMs). Your bank may charge a fee of \$1 - \$2 per withdrawal for using an ATM machine of another bank where you do not have an account.

Currency

The basic unit of currency in the U.S. is the dollar (\$1). Be careful, as all bills are green in color and can look alike. Many places do not want to accept currency higher than \$20, so it is best to get smaller bills from a bank.

Credit Cards

It is a good idea to have a credit card available for emergency situations (including dental problems, theft, fire, etc.). Credit cards are accepted at most places and they are much safer than carrying cash as they can be replaced easily if lost or stolen.

Housing

Housing arrangements are different for each teaching position. It is very important to know what to expect with housing, as it can be very expensive and hard to find in some geographic areas.

Alliance Abroad Group offers assistance to provide you with housing leads or ideas for temporary housing, but we cannot make arrangements for you. Landlords often don't like to rent to international visitors because they do not have a credit history in this country, so this may make it more difficult to rent an apartment.

Comment [n12]: Awkward

Some schools will either offer housing or will help arrange housing. That information will be included on the teaching job offer form. Be sure to note whether a deposit is required and if it needs to be paid in advance.

If your school does not find housing for you, apartments can be found directly through advertisements, through word-of-mouth, or through apartment brokers. An apartment broker may charge you or the landlord a fee, depending on the locality. Make sure there is no misunderstanding about who pays the fee.

AAG will provide you with some temporary housing leads, but it is your responsibility to make arrangements for a place to stay upon arrival. If you arrive without a place to stay, you may end up paying high rates for a hotel. Please ensure that this does not happen, as it starts your program out badly for you and for your host school.

Comment [n13]: Awkward wording

An excellent resource for finding apartments or shared houses in locations all across the United States is <http://www.craigslist.org>. Go to the location where you will be living and look for rental opportunities. People will advertise for roommates, which is a great way to find affordable rentals.

What to Look For in an Apartment

When looking for an apartment, pay attention to many of the minor factors (other than neighborhood, size of rooms, price) that will affect your enjoyment of the apartment. Are things falling apart? Is a paint job needed and will the landlord pay for it? Do the windows work properly? Are there laundry facilities in the building? What about security? Do you feel safe? Are pest control and extermination services provided on a regular basis? Is there a regular superintendent or building staff to take care of repairs? Are the mailboxes secure?

What Is Included?

Most apartments in the United States will include a stove, refrigerator, and sink in the kitchen; a toilet, bathtub or shower, and sink in the bathroom; at least one lock on the apartment door; and a private mailbox. In addition, many, but not all, apartments will have air conditioners, dishwashers, and waste disposal devices in the kitchen. An outdoor parking space or indoor garage space may be included in the rent or offered at an extra charge. In some apartments electricity or gas service is included in the rent. Telephone service is never included. You might want to find a furnished apartment, which will usually cost a bit more as well.

Being Accepted as a Tenant

Most landlords will require you to fill out an application and show some credit and employment history, which as an international teacher, you probably will not have. Landlords protect themselves by taking security deposits from tenants, and this will certainly be true for you. You will have to deposit the equivalent of one or two months' rent (in addition to the monthly rent you will have to pay) which the landlord will be entitled to keep if you damage the apartment or do not pay rent. When you give the landlord a security deposit, make sure to check the local law, and ask if it is refundable. Make sure you have everything in writing!

Landlords and Problems

The landlord will be responsible for most of the building maintenance. You will be responsible for keeping your apartment in reasonably good condition. If you damage the apartment beyond ordinary "wear and tear" the landlord might be justified in keeping your security deposit after you move out.

If you do not pay your rent by the date it is due, the landlord may remove you from the apartment by going to court and getting an eviction order. This can be a lengthy process. If you have a legitimate grievance with the landlord, you might be entitled to withhold rent, but you will have to follow certain rules depending on your area; you **cannot** simply stop paying your rent. If you cannot afford a lawyer to help you, many local government agencies can give you free assistance.

Comment [n14]: Awkward wording

Utilities

The term “utilities” refers to basic electric and natural gas, water, public service, and cable television service to apartments and homes. A public utility company is a business organization performing a public service and is subject to special government regulation.

Utilities may be included in your monthly rent. If you rent an apartment, some or all of these services might be included in the rent: gas, water, trash and electricity. Some homes and apartments, of course, are all electric, and do not use any gas.

Paperwork: Utility companies will want basic information about you, your credit, and your employment. They may require a security deposit to assure payment of bills, because as an international teacher, you will not have a credit history in the U.S.

Comment [n15]: Awkward : first time users also have to pay a deposit in most cities

Customer Service: All utilities will have customer service telephone numbers you can call to set up new service. The utility company representative will give you a date their installer can come to your home to connect the service, but they will rarely give you an exact time that they will arrive. Make sure to be home in order to avoid delays in service.

Utility Bills: Once utility service is connected, pay your bills on time to avoid late charges and to maintain good credit.

Public Services

Public Libraries

All of the materials in this section on resources are available in public libraries. Should you have any trouble finding or using any of the materials in the library, please ask a librarian to help you. Most libraries have consumer information collections, books on getting the most value for your dollar, and free consumer-oriented publications and pamphlets. The public library is your best source for information on practically everything. Visit your local library to familiarize yourself with the facilities. If they offer an orientation lecture, attend one as soon as possible.

Hours of Operation

Stores may vary in their hours of operation. During the week, most stores open between 8:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m. and stay open until 5:00 p.m. or 6:00 p.m. Depending on local laws, some stores might not be open on Sunday, or might only be open for part of the day. American stores never follow the practice common in other parts of the world of closing for lunch.

Some retailers will remain open until 9:00 or 10:00 p.m. several days per week, and many discount stores remain open late every day. It is common in shopping malls for all stores to remain open late several times a week or every weekday. Supermarkets usually remain open until 9:00 p.m. and convenience stores and some restaurants often operate on a 24-hour-a-day basis. Note, however, that most banks close anywhere from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., and most offices close at 5:00 p.m.

The Post Office

The U.S. Postal Service is run by the Federal Government. Post Offices are located in most towns and neighborhoods and are usually open from 8:00 or 9:00 a.m. until 5:00 or 6:00 p.m. weekdays, and until noon or 1:00 p.m. on Saturdays. Some large city post offices have a section that never closes where you can buy stamps and deposit mail 24-hours-a-day. The postal service delivers mail to homes and business six days a week. No business is conducted and no mail delivered on official national holidays and Sundays.

International Packages

If you are sending an important item out of the country, the best strategy is to wrap or package it, label it very clearly, then ask the post office clerk how you should send it. The clerk will weigh the package and tell you the cost of each shipping option.

Telephone Services

Telephone numbers in the United States are ten digits long. The first three digits are the area code. In written or printed telephone numbers, area codes are often placed within parentheses like this: (212) 555-1234. Each area code will serve a few million people. This might be an entire state or just part of a large city like New York or Los Angeles. If you are dialing a number in the same area code as the telephone you are using, you may not have to use the area code. If you are dialing a number in another area code, you might have to dial the number "1" or another numeral before you can dial the number. Check with the local telephone company or a knowledgeable local resident to see if you need to dial the area code first.

Long Distance Services

There are many long distance service carriers in the U.S., Such as AT&T, Sprint, Verizon, and MCI. These long distance companies offer special plans for saving money on long distance or international calls. You can find these calling plans advertised on television, radio, the internet, and your local newspaper.

Choice of Long Distance

When you get a phone installed with the local telephone company, they will ask you which long distance company you will want to use. The local company will put the long distance company's charges on your bill. You can pick the long distance company whose TV or radio commercial you like best, or ask someone who already has the service. The major long distance companies have toll-free "800" numbers which you can dial to get basic information. Even if you have enrolled for a particular long distance company, you can still use any of a number of discount long-distance companies that require you to enter series of digits every time you call.

Phone Cards and Credit Card Calling

Phone cards and credit card calling are available for long distance calling, especially if you are away from home. You apply for a phone card through your local phone company, a long distance company, or through your credit card. With one of these cards you'll be able to make a long distance call from a telephone booth--often a special credit card booth--without having to carry or deposit money. You will have to dial a long string of numbers to activate this service, and sometimes it can cost twice as much as calling from a regular telephone. If you are at someone else's home, and you need to make a long distance call, it is courteous to use a phone card if you have one. You can purchase calling cards at convenience stores.

Personal Hygiene

In the United States, cleanliness is an important part of the culture. Americans have elevated personal hygiene and cleanliness to an obsession. While you are in this country, it is important to follow the personal hygiene practices common to the culture.

- Take a shower or bath every day.
- Use an underarm deodorant or anti-perspirant.
- Practice good dental hygiene by brushing your teeth twice a day.
- Do your laundry frequently so your clothes and uniforms are clean.

Smoking

Americans are not very tolerant of smoking, so it is very important to be careful about smoking around others until you are sure of their views. Most public places are non-smoking environments, and nearly all buildings are non-smoking. Schools are certainly non-smoking environments, and there may not even be nearby smoking options for you. If you smoke, it is important that you always do it in designated smoking areas. When with co-workers, friends, customers or others, ask if you may smoke around them.

Illegal Conduct to Avoid

While you are in the U.S.A, you are subject to U.S. laws. Your best defense against legal trouble is to educate yourself about the laws of the United States and follow them. If you unknowingly break a law, your ignorance cannot be used as a legal defense. You are obliged to take responsibility for any crimes or violations that you commit. Alliance Abroad Group can verify your J-1 status and can advise you on a course of action, but there are limits to the help we can offer. Program participants have the same rights as a U.S. citizen if accused of a crime. Being arrested is grounds for immediate termination from the AAG Teacher Exchange program.

Below are a few illegal acts that you must be aware of:

- Underage drinking of alcoholic beverages (The legal drinking age in the U.S. is 21)
- Drinking alcohol in public places
- Purchasing alcohol for anyone under 21
- Driving after drinking – this is a VERY serious matter!
- Illegal drug use and/or possession
- Disturbing the peace
- Threatening another person or touching another person in any undesired way
- Disorderly conduct (talking back to the police)
- Property damage
- Having a sexual relationship of any kind with someone under the age of 18
- Theft of goods or anything that is not yours

If You Are Arrested

First and foremost, always treat police officers with respect. A bad attitude will certainly change a bad situation into a nightmare. You have a right to an attorney (lawyer); if you cannot afford one, the court may appoint (provide) one for you. Ask your attorney for professional advice. Alliance Abroad Group cannot give you legal advice, pay any fines, or provide you with an attorney.

Safety

The United States is considered one of the world's safest countries. Despite September 11 and other terrorist threats, there are few countries that are safer. However, you have to do your part to keep yourself safe. Wherever you are – on the street, at work, or waiting for a bus – stay alert and be aware of your surroundings. Show that you are calm, confident, and know where you are going. Trust your instincts. If something or someone makes you uneasy, avoid the person or leave.

On Foot

- Whenever possible, walk with a friend.
- Stick to well-lit and well-traveled streets. Avoid shortcuts through wooded areas, parking lots, or alleys.
- If you think someone is following you, switch direction or cross the street. Walk toward an open store, restaurant, or well-lit house. If you're scared, yell for help. If you have to work late, make sure there are others in the building, and ask someone (a colleague or security guard) to walk you to your car or transit stop.

On Buses and Subways

- Use well-lit, busy stops. Stay alert! Don't sleep or daydream.
- If someone harasses you, don't be embarrassed. Loudly say "Leave me alone!" If that doesn't work, use the emergency device.
- Watch those who exit with you. If you feel uneasy, walk to a place where there are other people.

If Someone Tries to Rob You

- Don't resist.
- Give up your property; don't give up your life.
- Report the crime to the police. Try to describe the attacker accurately. Your actions can help prevent others from becoming victims.

Trouble Spots

- **Stairwells and out-of-the-way corridors:** don't use the stairs alone. Talk to the building manager about improving poorly lit corridors and stairways.
- **Elevators:** don't get into elevators with people who look out of place or behave in a strange or threatening manner. If you find yourself in an elevator with someone who makes you nervous, get off as soon as possible.
- **Restrooms:** attackers can hide in stalls and corners. Make sure restrooms are locked and only employees have keys. Be extra cautious when using restrooms that are isolated or poorly lit.
- **After hours:** don't work late alone. Create a buddy system for walking to parking lots or public transportation or ask security to escort you. Use caution in bars and clubs; do not trust strangers.

Emergency Situations

In an emergency situation, dial 9-1-1 for the police or other emergency service. Answer all questions clearly and carefully. Follow all emergency directions.

Call 911 in case of:

- Death or medical emergencies
- Fire
- If you are a victim of a violent crime.
- If something is stolen from your car or room, call the non-emergency police number found in any local phonebook.

Taking a Trip

Taking a Trip Home or Outside the US Borders

Some participants decide to take a trip outside the U.S. during their program and re-enter the U.S. to complete the program. If you plan to do so and your school allows you to, please be sure to follow these steps to ensure you don't have any trouble returning:

- Check the expiration date on your DS-2019. If your DS-2019 has expired, or will expire before you planned return to the U.S. you will be able to leave the U.S. but cannot return on this program.
- Check the expiration date on your J-1 visa. If your J-1 visa expired, or will expire before your planned return to the U.S., you will be able to leave the country but will not be able to return on this program.
- Check your J-1 visa to make sure you are eligible for multiple entries. This will be indicated by the letter "M" under the word "entries" on your J-1 visa.
- If your J-1 visa does not have an "M" to indicate multiple entries you can leave the U.S. but cannot reenter the U.S. with the same visa.
- Send your original DS-2019 form by registered mail service to AAG Teacher program staff with an explanation letter about your travel and the responsible officer will authorize the trip by signing on the DS-2019 form and sending it back to you. AAG needs **at least 2 weeks** for this process. Please make sure you send a self-addressed, stamped envelope.
- Check with the embassy or consulate for the country you are planning to visit to see if you need to obtain a visa before entering that country.

Visiting Canada or Mexico

Some participants have had difficulty with re-entry after visiting Canada and Mexico. Please consider if this trip is really worthwhile. Call the nearest Canadian or Mexican consulate in the United States to find out if you need a visa for entry. Visa requirements change and are not the same for all foreigners. You should follow the procedures outlined above. Tell the border official that you will be re-entering the United States within a few days, and show your valid passport, DS-2019 form, and I-94 card.

Travel Opportunities

If you camp or stay in hostels, catch buses, and self-cater, you could feasibly explore the United States on around \$50 USD a day. Staying in motels and eating at modest cafes will mean you'll hit the \$100 USD mark, and enjoying the convenience of a rental car will push your daily budget up to \$150 USD.

Major credit cards (Visa, MasterCard, Discovery/Novus, American Express) are widely accepted; and you will find it difficult to perform certain transactions (such as renting a car or reserving tickets over the phone) without one. Depending on the sophistication of your home banking network, you should also be able to access your bank account using U.S. ATMs.

Tipping is expected in restaurants and better hotels. The going rate in restaurants is 15%-20% of the bill; never tip in a fast-food or self service environment. Taxi drivers, bartenders and hairdressers depend on similar-sized gratuities. Sales taxes vary from state to state but are typically 5-8%, though some states have no sales taxes at all. Top-end accommodation also often attracts a bed tax, which can be as high as 15%. It's worth checking whether quoted prices for lodging include all relevant taxes.

Lodging

- Budget: \$30 - \$40 USD
- Mid-range: \$40 - \$100 USD
- Top-end: \$100 USD and upwards

Meals

- Budget: \$3 - \$5 USD
- Mid-range: \$5 - \$20 USD
- Top-end: \$20 USD and upwards

Bus

The least expensive mode of travel around the United States is with Greyhound, the largest bus company in the U.S. Call their toll-free number (1-800-231-2222) or visit their website (<http://www.greyhound.com>).

Train

Amtrak is the national railroad and has a pass for 15 or 30 days. Contact Amtrak at 1-800-872-7245 or visit their website: <http://www.amtrak.com>.

Website of Interest for Travel Planning

<http://www.tourstates.com>

Useful Links

Look for the state that you are going to!

www.touralabama.org
www.state.ak.us
www.state.az.us
www.state.ar.us
www.state.ca.us
www.state.co.us
www.state.ct.us
www.delaware.gov
www.dep.state.fl.us
www.state.ga.us
www.state.hi.us
www.state.id.us
www.state.il.us
www.state.in.us
www.state.ia.us
www.state.in.us
www.tourky.com
www.state.la.us
www.state.me.us
www.mdisfun.org
www.massvacation.com
www.michigantravel.org
www.exploreminnesota.com
www.state.ms.us
www.missouritourism.org
www.discoveringmontana.com
www.visitnebraska.org
www.travelnevada.com
www.visitnh.gov
www.state.nj.us
www.newmexico.org
www.iloveny.state.ny.us
www.visitnc.com
www.ndtourism.com
www.ohiotourism.com
www.otrd.state.ok.us
www.traveloregon.com
www.state.pa.us
www.visitrhodeisland.com
www.state.sc.us
www.travelsd.com
www.tourism.state.tn.us
www.state.tx.us
www.utah.gov
www.travel-vermont.com
www.state.va.us
www.tourism.wa.gov
www.state.wv.us
www.travelwisconsin.com
www.state.wy.us
www.district-of-columbia.com
www.firstgov.com
www.unitedstates-on-line.com
www.uschamber.com
www.state.gov
www.usinfo.state.gov
www.whitehouse.gov
www.usa-by-rail.com
www.lonelyplanet.com
www.usatourist.com
www.budgettravel.com
www.travel50.com
www.usatourism.com
www.citysearch.com
www.wellsfargo.com
www.usps.com
www.us-immigration.org
www.bankofamerica.com
www.att.com
www.usembassy.state.gov
www.dictionary.com
www.yellowpages.com

Off to Your Adventure!

The Alliance Abroad Group is committed to providing you with a satisfying experience from the time you arrive until the day you return home. It is important that you keep an open mind to new experiences and different cultural norms. Americans are very open, so please don't hesitate to ask people to explain things to you or to express your concerns. You will have difficult days and wonderful days, but we believe that the overall time you spend in the U.S. will be one of the most positive times of your life. If we can make the program better, please let us know. Our programs are only as good as the people who make them, so the rest is up to you!

Good luck!



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