



teach exchange usa

A RESOURCE FOR CENET PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS



Important Contact Information

Welcome to your BridgeUSA Program! We hope you enjoy exploring the different aspects of American culture, as well as sharing your culture, during your time in the United States! As your sponsor organization, Cenet is here to provide assistance and support throughout your program. We look forward to hearing about your experiences.

Cenet

Help Line

1-866-512-3638 (free within the U.S.)

1-573-335-7111 (outside the U.S.)

Mail

Cenet

Teacher Program

338 Broadway Street, Suite 620

Cape Girardeau, Missouri 63701

USA

Email

teacher@cenet.org

Website

www.cenet.org

OTHER RESOURCES

United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)

1-800-375-5283

www.uscis.gov

United States Department of State Help Line

1-866-283-9090

jvisas@state.gov

Bureau of Educational & Cultural Affairs

1-844-300-1824

exchanges.state.gov

Social Security Administration

1-800-772-1213

www.ssa.gov

Internal Revenue Service (IRS)

1-800-829-1040

www.irs.gov

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Welcome to Cenet's Teacher Program!

We hope this will be a great adventure and an excellent learning and cultural exchange experience that you will always remember.

Cenet, also known as Cultural Exchange Network, located in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, is a non-profit organization dedicated to cultural and international exchange. Cenet administers the BridgeUSA Intern, Trainee, Summer Work Travel, Camp Counselor, Research Scholar, Teacher, Professor, and Specialist programs for international participants, as well as operates The Magellan Exchange, a non-profit university consortium offering student and faculty exchanges both within the United States and abroad.

Our mission is to inspire future global leaders, fostering a more prosperous and compassionate world through international education and cultural exploration.

Teacher Program

Cenet's Teacher Program is a BridgeUSA program that is authorized by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. This program offers you the opportunity to come to the United States to participate in a structured cultural exchange program as a full-time teacher in an accredited K–12 school. Throughout your program, you will receive ongoing support, guidance, and evaluation from your Host School/District and your school supervisors. Cenet, as your U.S. Department of State-designated sponsor organization, will monitor your program and serve as a resource and liaison between you and your Host School/District, as needed. Participants are also encouraged to explore the United States and engage in meaningful cultural exchange experiences both inside and outside of the classroom during their program.

The purpose of the J-1 Teacher Exchange Program is to promote cultural understanding, professional growth, and the exchange of educational practices between the United States and other countries. Through your participation, you will share your culture, perspectives, and teaching practices with U.S. students and communities while gaining valuable experience in the American education system. At the end of your program, you will return home with expanded professional expertise, improved cross-cultural understanding, and strengthened global perspectives that will benefit your future career and community. The program also enriches U.S. schools and communities by fostering international understanding and exposing students and educators to diverse cultural and educational perspectives.

CENET SERVICES

Cenet strives to provide all that is needed to make your program successful. Your program fee includes:

- Determination of application procedures, requirements, and documents
- Coordination with host schools/districts regarding potential teaching placements
- Review and approval of all required program documentation and eligibility materials
- Final review and acceptance into the J-1 Teacher Program
- Pre-arrival orientation materials and program guidance
- Issuance of DS-2019 Form and supporting documents
- SEVIS record maintenance and required recordkeeping
- U.S. Department of State reporting and regulatory compliance oversight
- Government liaison, as needed
- Consular guidance and support, as needed
- Health insurance enrollment with a Cenet-approved provider (for the first 90 days while on program) and additional health insurance guidance
- Ongoing monitoring and support through the program experience
- Liaison between you and your host school/district, as needed
- 24-hour emergency support while in the U.S.

PROGRAM DURATION

Your authorization is limited to the period indicated on your DS-2019. J-1 Teacher participants may be approved for programs of up to three years.

Eligible participants may be approved for an additional two years, for a maximum total program duration of five years, subject to approval of the U.S. Department of State and Cenet.

HOME-COUNTRY PHYSICAL PRESENCE REQUIREMENT

Be aware that exchange visitors from certain countries with certain skills must maintain a residency in their home country for at least two years at the conclusion of their programs to qualify for specific types of visas. Please see Section 212(e) of the Immigration and Nationality Act. In addition, all teachers who do not qualify for a Subsequent program must reside outside the U.S. for at least 2 years before being eligible for further programs. (22 CFR § 62.22 (n)(2). 2010).

Rules, Regulations and Expectations

Remain in Lawful, Non-Immigrant Visa Status

The Exchange Visitor status is strictly regulated by the U.S. State Department. As a BridgeUSA Program sponsor, Cenet is obligated to enforce these rules. Cenet is committed to ensuring that participants are aware of these very specific regulations and that they agree to abide by them. While Cenet wishes all program participants a wonderful experience in the United States, Cenet must reject the application or terminate the program of participants who do not follow the rules. If you have questions about any of the rules, please contact Cenet.

The rules and expectations are summarized below.

- Meet all eligibility criteria of the program.
- Maintain sufficient financial resources to support yourself and any dependents during your program.
- Maintain adequate health insurance that meets U.S. Department of State requirements for the duration of your program.
- Complete all required arrival check-in procedures upon arrival into the United States.
- Keep Cenet informed of your current home address, telephone number, email address and host school/district contact information. You must update Cenet within 72 hours if any of this information should change.
- Maintain regular communication with Cenet and respond promptly to all sponsor outreach, including monthly check-ins and compliance requests.
- Ensure you have reliable and regular internet access throughout your program participation.
- Report any issues or concerns you may have during your program. Cenet will communicate with you, but it is your responsibility to self-report any questions, concerns, or difficulties throughout the program.
- Participate in and document at least two cross-cultural activities per academic year in accordance with Department of State requirements.
- Represent your country and Cenet with dignity and professionalism.
- Obtain travel validation and authorization from Cenet before you travel outside the U.S. during your program.
- Teach only at the approved host school/district and site(s) listed and authorized on your DS-2019 by Cenet.
- Attend all orientation and evaluation sessions organized by Cenet, your home country agency, or your host school/district.
- Know and abide by all host company, Cenet, landlord and government rules, policies, and regulations.
- Follow all policies, procedures, and professional standards established by your host school/district, Cenet, local housing providers. Follow all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations.
- Understand that participants are responsible for their own personal transportation, housing arrangements (unless otherwise arranged), social activities, and daily living needs.

- Communicate concerns first with your school supervisor when appropriate. If issues cannot be resolved, participants must contact Cenet immediately. Changes/transfers in host school/district placement are only permitted with prior written approval from Cenet and the U.S. Department of State, when appropriate.
- Use the 30-day grace period for travel and leisure only.
- Return to your home country at the conclusion of your exchange visitor program in accordance with the cultural exchange purpose of the J-1 Visa.
- Demonstrate the maturity, adaptability, and professionalism necessary to successfully participate in a cultural exchange program.
- Understand that the program is not a way to obtain a permanent job in the U.S. or a way to immigrate.
- Follow any health and safety policies issued by your home country's government, the U.S. federal government, the state and local government where you will be residing, your host school/district, your landlord, and Cenet.

Failure to abide by any of the rules listed above and in the information provided by Cenet may result in dismissal from the program and early return to your home country.

Your DS-2019 Form and Program Documents

You will come to the U.S. in Exchange Visitor Visa status (J-1 Visa). Upon acceptance to the program and after being hired by a host school/district, you will be sent a DS-2019. This form is a "Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor (J-1) Status." It officially identifies Cultural Exchange Network (Cenet) as your program sponsor, describes the purpose of your program, and lists the exact dates you are permitted to participate. It also indicates your authorized host school/district. The form is signed by Cenet. You will use this document to apply for the Exchange Visitor J-1 Visa.

Cenet also provides you with other important documents, which you will be able to download from your online Cenet portal. This includes an emergency identification card, insurance information, a description of insurance coverage (for the first 90 days while on program), and a program sponsor letter.

Applying for Your Exchange Visitor (J-1) Visa

The Exchange Visitor (J-1) Visa is issued by a U.S. Embassy or Consulate and allows you to temporarily enter the United States to participate in the BridgeUSA J-1 Teacher Program. Visa application procedures may vary slightly by country and consulate location; however, most applicants will be required to attend an in-person visa interview. Participants should review the instructions provided by the U.S. Embassy or Consulate in their country and follow guidance provided by Cenet and/or your Cenet-representative agency, if applicable.

Please note that visa issuance is determined solely by the U.S. Department of State through the U.S. Embassy or Consulate. Cenet cannot guarantee visa approval.

Applicants are generally responsible for paying:

- The SEVIS I-901 fee
- The DS-160 visa application fee
- Any additional local processing fees required by the U.S. Embassy or Consulate

Participants should carefully review all application materials before attending their interview.

SEVIS: A U.S. Government database which is used to track such things as your visa application, program progress, and arrival in and departure from the U.S. Cenet also utilizes this database to record terminations, no-shows, or any other unusual activity in your program.

The U.S. Embassy or Consulate may require the following standard documents:

- Form DS-2019 issued by Cenet
- Valid passport (must generally be valid for at least six months beyond the end date of your program)
- DS-160 Online Nonimmigrant Visa Application confirmation page
- Visa application fee payment receipt
- SEVIS I-901 fee payment confirmation
- Any additional documents requested by the U.S. Embassy or Consulate

Participants are also encouraged to bring:

- Copies of educational credentials and teaching qualifications
- Employment verification or letters of reference
- Evidence of ties to their home country and intent to return following completion of the program
- Host school/district offer letter or placement information
- Any additional supporting documents recommended by Cenet or the U.S. Embassy or Consulate

Preparing for Your Trip to the U.S.

SOCIAL MEDIA & YOUR ONLINE PRESENCE

Keep in mind that host employers, colleagues and other stakeholders often review social media profiles, so it's important to ensure your online presence reflects professionalism. While personal content is natural, consider whether your posts, comments, and interactions align with the image you want to present. Avoiding inappropriate content and highlighting achievements can help shape opportunities. In addition, visa officers will likely review your social media so you will need to ensure your privacy settings are “public” prior to your visa interview.

TRAVEL PREPARATIONS

Before you leave home you should research the area in which you will be living as well as plan your transportation from the airport to your host and/or housing. Some host schools/districts will not meet you at the airport, so you will need to arrange transportation from the airport to your housing. Confirm your housing's check-in requirements before booking travel. Refer to Appendix G for a list of helpful resources.

RESEARCHING YOUR NEW COMMUNITY

Before beginning your program, thoroughly research the community in which you will be living. This should include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Housing options
- Transportation options
- Cost of living
- Climate
- Atmosphere, rural/urban
- Local attractions, nightlife, points of interest, shopping, etc.
- Local events calendar
- Travel opportunities outside of the host community

This community is where you will be spending the majority of your time in the United States so be sure that you have a solid understanding of everything available to you in this location prior to accepting the employment offer.

TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS

Make sure that you enter your travel information to your final destination in the 'Flights' section of your Cenet portal. In addition, remember to contact your host school before you leave home and provide them a detailed description of your travel plans.

HOUSING

Housing arrangements must be made before you leave your home country. In many cases, participants will make

temporary housing arrangements (e.g., a hotel where one can pay by the week) and then look for longer-term arrangements once they arrive. **Please use caution online as some websites may present false leads or scams.**

Some hosts provide housing or housing assistance as part of the program package. Others do not. Be sure you understand the arrangements with your host before you leave home. If your host school/district provides housing, it may be shared with others. You will be responsible for paying your rent by a certain date each month (or each week). The cost and location of your housing is your responsibility, even if the terms differ from those quoted to you before your arrival. You are solely responsible for ensuring your rent is paid.

In the U.S., rental agreements typically cover a fixed term, and rent is usually not prorated for early move-outs or partial months. You are responsible for the full rental period, regardless of when you move in or out.

It is also customary in the U.S. to pay a security deposit (typically equivalent to one month's rent) when you move into rental housing. A security deposit is an amount of money that tenants pay to the landlord to cover any damages that they may cause to the property. At the end of the lease, if there is no damage and the housing is clean, the money will generally be returned to the tenant. If there is damage or the housing is dirty, then the tenant may not receive the money back or may receive only a portion. In some cases, a cleaning fee is deducted from the deposit. The terms of the deposit should be included in the housing lease.

You are neither guaranteed a roommate during your stay, nor guaranteed a private room. You are expected to care for your housing in a responsible manner and to keep your rooms clean. Trash should be put in the proper receptacles and dishes should be cleaned immediately. You must not damage the accommodation or the furnishings or remove items from the accommodations. Any damages/incidents or problems (e.g., water leak) at your apartment should be reported to your landlord immediately. You are expected to keep noise at a minimum and to abide by any quiet hour rules. Drunkenness will not be tolerated.

Although signing a lease may be optional, it is strongly recommended that you sign one that includes the terms and conditions of the leasing agreement. It is also recommended that you obtain receipts for your rent payments. This is for both your protection and the landlord's. You should retain a copy of your signed lease so that you can reference it throughout your stay, if needed. Refer to Appendix A for more information about housing and housing considerations. Please refer to Appendix G for a list of helpful websites for short-term accommodation.

BRINGING ENOUGH MONEY

As a participant, you are responsible for your roundtrip air ticket, food, lodging, U.S. travel, and personal expenses throughout the duration of your program.

Ensure you have access to at least \$3,500 in arrival/emergency funds. This money will enable you to pay your expenses until your first paycheck is received. Consider that you must pay for such things as transportation, meals, your first month's rent, and a housing deposit. You may also need these funds in case of a personal, national or international crisis. Cenet recommends that you bring a credit card, preferably a VISA or MasterCard, as well as a debit/ATM card with you.

COPY YOUR DOCUMENTS

Make two copies of your passport and J-1 Visa. Leave one copy at home with a family member. Pack the other copy in your luggage in a separate location from the originals. If you lose your originals, these copies can aid you in replacing them. You should also save a copy on your phone; this can be very helpful in case of emergencies.

PACKING

Check baggage allowances in advance, as this varies by airline. Remember, you will have to carry everything you pack until you reach your housing. Pack as lightly as possible to still be comfortable during your stay.

PACKING CHECKLIST

Use this checklist when packing your carry-on bag:

- Passport with J-1 Visa
- DS-2019

- Signed Job Offer from your host school/district
- Health insurance information
- Program sponsor letter from Cenet (download this from your Cenet online portal)
- At least \$3,500 in arrival funds (cash or access to the funds)
- A credit card and an ATM/bank card
- International driver's license, if you have one
- Any necessary clothing/personal items in case your checked luggage is lost or delayed
- Any valuables
- Prescription medications in the original prescription containers
- Phone charger and plug adapter
- Detailed travel plans from the U.S. airport to the school or your housing

Your Arrival in the U.S.

U.S. IMMIGRATION

When you enter the U.S., you will be required to show your:

- DS-2019
- Passport with a valid J-1 Visa
- Host school/district offer letter

You may be asked questions about the purpose of your visit, the length of your stay, and your U.S. destination. Be courteous and respectful to the immigration officials and answer their questions clearly. If all is in order, an immigration official will validate your DS-2019. Your DS-2019 Form and J-1 Visa are VERY important. **DO NOT LOSE THEM.**

In addition, you will be asked to complete a Customs Declaration Form for entry in the United States.

U.S. CUSTOMS

After you collect your luggage, you will proceed through U.S. Customs. Make sure all your prescription medications are in the original containers. You will not be allowed to bring in any plants, animals, or perishable foods (e.g., cheese, fruits). You cannot legally possess alcoholic beverages unless you are at least 21 years old. You will only be allowed to bring in a limited number of cigarettes or other tobacco products.

CONNECTING FLIGHTS

If you are connecting onto another flight in the U.S. and you have a boarding pass for that flight, proceed to the information screens to determine your departure gate. Airport staff will be available if you have any questions.

I-94 ADMISSION RECORD

Your I-94 admission record will be created electronically in the U.S. Customs and Border Protection systems. This admissions number, as well as answers to frequently asked questions, can be retrieved at:

<https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94/#/home>.

You will need to enter the following information to retrieve your I-94 number:

- First name
- Last name
- Birthdate
- Passport number
- Passport country of issuance

Your I-94 will show the last day you are allowed to legally remain in the U.S. on this particular program. The abbreviation "D/S" may be used instead of a date. This means "Duration of Status" and indicates that you are allowed to stay until the end date on your DS-2019, plus the optional grace period. (See [Your Departure from the U.S.](#) for more information on the grace period.)

YOUR FIRST FEW DAYS

You may need to stay in a hotel or a hostel for a few days upon arrival. Make arrangements for this possibility in advance. Refer to Appendix G for a list of useful websites. Often the first few days or weeks are quite hectic and disorganized for everyone, including your host school. Be prepared to be flexible during this initial period.

Notifying Cenet of Your Arrival

Notify Cenet within 72 hours of your arrival in the United States. This arrival notification allows Cenet to activate your temporary health insurance as well as to inform the Social Security Administration and the U.S. State Department of your entrance to the country.

This is very important. If Cenet does not hear from you within 10 days of your arrival in the U.S., Cenet is required to report you as a "No-Show" in SEVIS, which has negative effects on your current and future visa status.

To notify Cenet of your arrival and to activate your SEVIS record:

- Login to your Cenet portal at <https://cenetone.org>
- Click "I'm Here!" to provide your arrival date and housing address. Please be specific and include your apartment number or room number!

Staying in Contact with Cenet

The U.S. State Department requires Cenet to monitor your location and activity throughout your program. Cenet must always know your living address, telephone number, and place of employment. Your program will be terminated in the SEVIS system if you do not follow the rules.

To participate in Cenet's BridgeUSA Program, you must ensure you have access to the internet at least twice per week; this is your responsibility. You must maintain contact with Cenet throughout your stay in the U.S.

- **Notify Cenet of your arrival.**
- **Check your email.** Check the email address you provided to Cenet on your application at least twice per week. Cenet will send you important messages and reminders via email. Respond to Cenet messages as soon as possible or by the deadline in the email, if applicable. You may also want to add Cenet to your address book to avoid missing important emails. If you change your email address, you must notify Cenet.
- **From your Cenet portal, notify Cenet immediately of any:**
 - Changes to your contact information
 - Changes in your living arrangements
- **Notify Cenet of any personal or professional issues that require assistance.** Please remember that Cenet cannot assist you if we are unaware of your issues or concerns.
- **Report all other issues** (e.g., serious health concerns, international travel plans, legal infractions, disciplinary notices from your host and/or landlord).
- **Notify Cenet of your departure arrangements** and provide your home country agency (if applicable) a copy of your airplane boarding pass once you have returned home.

If you do not have internet access at your housing or host school, it is your responsibility to obtain internet access in order to communicate with Cenet. You may have to visit a café or public library.

Note: If you call Cenet, be prepared to provide your full name and DS-2019 number (located in the upper right corner of your DS-2019). If you leave a message, speak clearly and slowly. Leave a phone number where your call can be returned.

CHECK-IN REQUIREMENT

You will receive emails from Cenet throughout your program asking you to check-in at least monthly. This only takes a moment to complete!

Please note that it is your responsibility to ensure that you maintain contact with Cenet, even if you do not see the email reminders. Failure to maintain at least monthly communication with Cenet may result in the termination of your program.

COMMUNICATING YOUR PARTICIPATION IN CULTURAL EVENTS

The primary purpose of this program is to offer you the opportunity to increase your knowledge and understanding of the U.S. by combining cultural and work experiences. As your sponsor organization, Cenet encourages you to explore your surroundings and participate in local events and activities, such as:

- Attend a party
- Go shopping
- Attend a festival or parade
- Go to a farmer's market
- Attend a sporting event
- Visit a museum, university, or historical monument/site
- Take a class (English, cooking, fitness, etc.)
- Have dinner with American friends
- Attend a concert or performance
- Visit a park or experience the outdoors (camping, hiking, swimming, etc.)
- Travel to another city or state
- Volunteer at a charity event, food bank, or other charitable activity

There are many other activities that you can do based on your own preferences and interests. Please remember that cultural activities include big events such as attending festivals as well as smaller events such as dinner with friends. Throughout your program, we will ask you to share your experiences with us. Please make sure you keep Cenet informed of your participation. Please see Appendix G for a list of helpful websites to find fun events.

Applying for Your Social Security Card

You must apply for a Social Security Number, unless you have participated in a previous program and already have one. It is necessary if you are receiving a paycheck or if you apply for a driver's license, and often for identification. There is no fee for this card.

Cenet recommends that you wait 5 business days after you have notified Cenet of your arrival in the U.S. before applying for the card. Cenet has to activate your record in the SEVIS system, and then it may take up to 5 business days for your information to be available to the Social Security office in SEVIS. You may need to book an appointment at the local Social Security Office. Failure to apply for your Social Security Number in a timely manner may result in negative consequences.

Take the following documentation to the Social Security Office when you apply for your card:

- DS-2019
- I-94 (see [Your Arrival in the U.S.](#))
- Passport (valid for at least six months beyond your program's end)
- Program sponsor letter from Cenet (available in your Cenet portal)

Some host schools/districts assist participants in applying for this card, but others do not. It is essential that you discuss this with your host before you arrive in the U.S. If your host school/district does not assist you, make plans for finding the nearest Social Security Office on your own. Refer to Appendix G for the Social Security Administration website.

Once you apply for the card, it may take several weeks for it to be issued. There is nothing Cenet or your host can do to speed the process. You may teach while the card and number are pending. If your host school/district has a question about this, ask them to contact Cenet.

Reporting to Your Host School/District

Once you have signed and accepted a job offer with a particular school/district and presented that offer to Cenet for issuance of your DS-2019, you are committed to that site. Your J-1 Visa is issued specifically for participation at the host school/district stated on your DS-2019. You must report to this host school/district upon arrival in the U.S. This is the position and host that was vetted/approved before your arrival, and the position and host school/district that was presented to the U.S. Consulate during your visa interview. Failure to report may result in the termination of your program.

Remember to take the following documents with you on your first day:

- DS-2019
- Passport with J-1 Visa
- Social Security card or number (if you already have it)

YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

Once you accept a teaching position with a U.S. host school/district, you are expected to honor that commitment and remain in the approved placement throughout your program unless otherwise authorized by Cenet. Before accepting a position, ensure that you fully understand the expectations, responsibilities, certification requirements, grade level, subject area, and school environment associated with the role. Participants are expected to arrive prepared, professional, and ready to actively contribute to the classroom and school community. While participating in the program, teachers should maintain appropriate professional conduct both inside and outside of the workplace and serve as positive cultural ambassadors for their home country and the BridgeUSA Program. Participants are encouraged to enjoy their time in the United States responsibly while maintaining compliance with all program rules, school policies, and applicable laws and regulations. Refer to Appendices C-F for information that will help you prepare for living in the American culture.

You should know and abide by all of your host school/district rules, policies, and regulations. Some host schools/districts may have certain dress codes that you will be expected to follow. Bring required items with you or be prepared to buy them upon arrival. Some schools/districts also have rules about jewelry, body piercing, tattoos, and hair. Inquire directly with your host about dress and appearance before you arrive in the U.S.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM YOUR PROGRAM

As a participant in the BridgeUSA J-1 Teacher Program, you can expect to serve as a full-time teacher in an accredited U.S. K–12 school while participating in a meaningful, cultural exchange experience. Throughout your program, you will learn about U.S. educational practices, school culture, instructional methods, and community engagement while actively contributing your own cultural background and professional experience to your host school/district.

Your teaching assignment, responsibilities, grade level, subject area, and school placement details will be outlined in your official offer materials and reflected in your DS-2019. Participants are expected to fulfill the duties of their teaching position while maintaining compliance with all school, district, sponsor, and U.S. Department of State requirements.

You may work closely with school administrators, supervisors, mentors, and colleagues who will support your transition into the U.S. educational environment and provide guidance throughout your program. Cenet will also monitor your program progress through regular communication, monthly check-ins, evaluations, and ongoing sponsor support.

Teachers should expect to actively participate in all aspects of school life, including instructional planning, classroom teaching, professional development, staff collaboration, and cultural exchange activities. Participants are expected to maintain professionalism, demonstrate flexibility and adaptability, and engage positively with students, colleagues, families, and the broader community.

I-9

When you complete the I-9 you will need to show your DS-2019 and your passport with your J-1 Visa. Be sure to check the box “an alien authorized to work until” and enter the program end date listed on your DS-2019. Use your I-94 card number on the line requesting the Alien # or Admission #.

W-4

Every employee receiving wages in the U.S. is required to complete a W-4. You are subject to all federal, state and local income taxes. This form determines how much tax should be withheld from your paycheck.

Because of the restrictions on a nonresident alien’s filing status, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) has very specific recommendations on how to complete this form; these instructions differ from the instructions printed on the actual form. All nonresident aliens (including J-1 Visa holders) should complete the form using the following instructions:

- Select “Single or Married filing separately” in Step 1(c)
- Do not complete the Step 2 section
- Step 3 and Step 4 are generally not completed (if you do, write “NRA” on the space below Step 4(c))

For instructions, refer to Chapter 8 of the IRS Publication 519 “U.S. Tax Guide for Aliens” at: www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p519.pdf

Paying Your Taxes

SOCIAL SECURITY AND MEDICARE TAXES (FICA)

Do not pay. Social Security and Medicare taxes (called “FICA”) are automatically withheld from the paychecks of all U.S. citizens and permanent residents. Because you are in nonimmigrant status, these taxes should NOT be withheld from your paycheck. Some U.S. companies are not aware of these special regulations. If your host school/district has questions, ask them to contact Cenet or direct them to chapter 8 of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Publication 519 “U.S. Tax Guide for Aliens” for proof of these exemptions. Refer to Appendix G for this publication’s website.

FEDERAL UNEMPLOYMENT TAX

Do not pay. Exchange visitors are not eligible for federal unemployment benefits; therefore, you are not required to pay federal unemployment tax. You should consult your state tax office to determine if you must pay state unemployment tax.

INCOME TAX

Pay. Everyone who receives a paycheck in the United States is subject to taxation. The government automatically withholds a percentage of your wages for federal income tax.

FILING YOUR INCOME TAXES

In January, your host school/district will send you an official statement (called a W-2 Form) documenting your earnings and the amount of tax that was withheld during the previous year. They cannot provide that information before January. Before you leave the U.S., make sure your host school/district has explained how they will provide your W-2 Form to you. You may need to log into a website to get this, or they may mail it to you, so please ensure they have an accurate mailing address at home for you.

By April 15, you must file an income tax form. Your company does not supply this form. If you have already returned to your home country, you can obtain this form and the relevant instructions from the U.S. Embassy or Consulate in your country, or you can print the form from the Internal Revenue Service website. Refer to Appendix G for a list of useful websites.

If not enough money was withheld, you are required to pay the balance. In many states, there is a state income tax in addition to the federal income tax. The same general information concerning withholding and payment applies. (Note: The rules pertaining to income taxes are subject to change and should be verified by consulting the tax instruction booklet for that year.)

Sample W-4

Form W-4 Department of the Treasury Internal Revenue Service	Employee's Withholding Certificate Complete Form W-4 so that your employer can withhold the correct federal income tax from your pay. Give Form W-4 to your employer. Your withholding is subject to review by the IRS.	OMB No. 1545-0074 <div style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold; text-align: center;">2025</div>
Step 1:	(a) First name and middle initial _____ Last name _____ Address _____ City or town, state, and ZIP code _____	(b) Social security number _____ Does your name match the name on your social security card? If not, to ensure you get credit for your earnings, contact SSA at 800-772-1213 or go to www.ssa.gov .
Enter Personal Information	(c) <input type="checkbox"/> Single or Married filing separately <input type="checkbox"/> Married filing jointly or Qualifying surviving spouse <input type="checkbox"/> Head of household (Check only if you're unmarried and pay more than half the costs of keeping up a home for yourself and a qualifying individual.)	
<p>TIP: Consider using the estimator at www.irs.gov/W4App to determine the most accurate withholding for the rest of the year if: you are completing this form after the beginning of the year; expect to work only part of the year; or have changes during the year in your marital status, number of jobs for you (and/or your spouse if married filing jointly), dependents, other income (not from jobs), deductions, or credits. Have your most recent pay stub(s) from this year available when using the estimator. At the beginning of next year, use the estimator again to recheck your withholding.</p> <p>Complete Steps 2-4 ONLY if they apply to you or the wife, skip to Step 5. See page 2 for more information on each step, who can claim exemption from withholding, and when to use the estimator at www.irs.gov/W4App.</p>		
Step 2:	Complete this step if you (1) hold more than one job at a time, or (2) are married filing jointly and your spouse also works. The correct amount of withholding depends on income earned from all of these jobs. Do any one of the following: (a) Use the estimator at www.irs.gov/W4App for the most accurate withholding for this step (and Steps 3-4). If you or your spouse have self-employment income, use this option; or (b) Use the Multiple Jobs Worksheet on page 3 and enter the result in Step 4(c) below; or (c) If there are only two jobs total, you may check this box. Do the same on Form W-4 for the other job. This option is generally more accurate than (b) if pay at the lower paying job is more than half of the pay at the higher paying job. Otherwise, (b) is more accurate <input type="checkbox"/>	
Multiple Jobs or Spouse Works		
<p>Complete Steps 3-4(b) on Form W-4 for only ONE of these jobs. Leave those steps blank for the other jobs. (Your withholding will be most accurate if you complete Steps 3-4(b) on the Form W-4 for the highest paying job.)</p>		
Step 3:	If your total income will be \$200,000 or less (\$400,000 or less if married filing jointly): Multiply the number of qualifying children under age 17 by \$2,000 \$ _____ Multiply the number of other dependents by \$500 \$ _____ Add the amounts above for qualifying children and other dependents. You may add to this the amount of any other credits. Enter the total here	3 \$ _____
Claim Dependent and Other Credits		
Step 4 (optional):	(a) Other income (not from jobs). If you want tax withheld for other income you expect this year that won't have withholding, enter the amount of other income here. This may include interest, dividends, and retirement income	4(a) \$ _____
Other Adjustments	(b) Deductions. If you expect to claim deductions other than the standard deduction and want to reduce your withholding, use the Deductions Worksheet on page 3 and enter the result here	4(b) \$ _____
	(c) Extra withholding. Enter any additional tax you want withheld each pay period . .	4(c) \$ _____
Step 5:	Under penalties of perjury, I declare that this certificate, to the best of my knowledge and belief, is true, correct, and complete.	
Sign Here	_____ Employee's signature (This form is not valid unless you sign it.)	_____ Date
Employers Only	Employer's name and address _____	First date of employment _____ Employer identification number (EIN) _____
For Privacy Act and Paperwork Reduction Act Notice, see page 3. Cat. No. 10220Q Form W-4 (2025)		

Your Employment in the U.S.

AUTHORIZATION

You are authorized to participate only during the dates stated on your DS-2019. If you enter the country a few days early or stay for the optional grace period, you may not be employed during these periods.

WAGES AND FINANCIAL PLANNING

As a participant in the BridgeUSA J-1 Teacher Program, you will receive compensation directly from your host school or district. J-1 Teachers are generally paid according to the same salary schedules and compensation structures as similarly qualified U.S. teachers in the school or district.

Teacher salaries and benefits vary depending on the state, school district, years of experience, educational background, subject area, and local cost of living. Before accepting a teaching position, it is important to carefully review and understand your employment offer, including:

- Salary and pay schedule
- Expected work hours and responsibilities
- Benefits and insurance options
- Payroll deductions and taxes
- Housing and transportation costs
- Any additional employment terms established by the host school/district

Participants should not assume they will have substantial disposable income while participating in the program. Living expenses in the United States can vary significantly depending on the city or region in which you are placed.

All Cenet participants are strongly encouraged to create a personal budget before arriving in the United States. Your budget should consider:

- Monthly housing costs
- Utilities and internet
- Food and groceries
- Transportation
- Insurance costs
- Cell phone expenses
- Taxes and payroll deductions
- Personal and emergency expenses

While Cenet may provide general estimates of common living expenses, participants are responsible for managing their own finances and planning appropriately based on their salary and local cost of living. Please refer to the applicable budgeting resources and cost estimates provided by Cenet prior to arrival, as well as to your own research.

PAYCHECKS

You will most likely not receive your first paycheck until one or two weeks after your program has begun, or possibly even longer. Be prepared to support yourself financially until you receive your first paycheck.

You will be given a pay stub along with your paycheck that details the number of hours you worked, the amount of taxes withheld, and the total amount you received. Keep this stub for your records.

FINAL PAYCHECK

Make arrangements for your final paycheck well in advance of your departure from the U.S. Some participants remain employed up to a few days before they leave, only to learn that they cannot receive their final paycheck before they go. You might consider opening a U.S. bank account that includes an ATM/bank card and request that your final paycheck be deposited directly into your account. You can then use the card to access the funds from any cooperating cash machine in your home country. Discuss this issue with your host school and your local bank before it becomes a problem.

SECOND JOBS & CHANGES IN PLACEMENT

J-1 Teachers are only authorized to work in the teaching position and at the host school/district approved by Cenet and listed on their DS-2019. Participants may not accept outside employment, engage in unauthorized work, or hold a second job while participating in the program.

Any changes to your teaching assignment, school location, subject area, grade level, or host school/district must be reviewed and approved by Cenet before the change occurs. Participants may not transfer to another school or district without prior sponsor authorization.

Unauthorized employment or changes in placement may result in a violation of your J-1 program status and could lead to program termination.

CONCERNS WITH YOUR HOST SCHOOL/DISTRICT

In rare cases, issues or conflicts between you and your host school/district may occur. If this happens, talk with your supervisor first. Outline the issue and your concerns and try to come to a resolution. Do not yell, threaten or be untruthful. Regardless of your cultural background, Cenet will not support these tactics. Speak in a calm, professional manner when discussing the issue.

If conflict persists, contact Cenet for advice and assistance. Cenet will intervene as much as possible to solve the issue. However, if it is due to your misbehavior or poor work habits, Cenet will not assist in finding a new placement and you may be required to return home. This includes such things as poor performance, poor attitude, excessive tardiness, or repeated absences.

In some situations, Cenet may assist in finding a new placement; however, Cenet is ultimately not responsible for keeping you employed or finding a new position for you. You may be required to return home if a new position is not found.

Under NO circumstances may you leave your host school/district without Cenet's permission. As your sponsor organization, Cenet is responsible for monitoring your program and knowing where you are. Leaving your host school/district without permission could put your program status and safety at risk.

OTHER CONCERNS

The following concerns must be reported to Cenet:

- Disciplinary warnings
- Health concerns, surgeries, or any serious medical conditions
- Escalated interpersonal disputes
- Legal issues
- Problems or concerns regarding your housing/landlord
- International travel during your program
- Any other issues that require advice or assistance

Using Your Health Insurance

All participants are required by law to maintain continuous health insurance that meets U.S. Department of State minimum standards for the entire duration of their program. These standards include:

- Medical benefits
- Medical evacuation
- Repatriation of remains

Cenet arranges primary health insurance coverage for the first three months of the program. After the initial three-month period, participants may transition to their host school's health insurance plan, if available. Participants who switch to host school insurance must provide Cenet with documentation demonstrating that the coverage meets U.S. Department of State requirements.

Regardless of the primary insurance used, Cenet arranges supplemental coverage for the full program duration to ensure compliance with federal requirements for repatriation of remains and medical evacuation.

Participants are responsible for ensuring their health insurance remains active throughout their program without

interruption. Failure to maintain compliant insurance coverage, or to provide required documentation to Cenet, may result in program termination.

EMERGENCY

If you become seriously ill or are injured and you require emergency medical care, go to the nearest hospital emergency room. You will be asked to show your insurance card. Inform Cenet of your situation as soon as possible.

NON-EMERGENCY

In order to save money, follow this advice:

- Seek medical attention, if necessary; however, time, rest, and over the counter medicines may be sufficient in certain situations.
- If you need medical care (but it is not a TRUE emergency), go to a doctor's office or to a walk-in medical clinic. It will cost you much less than at the hospital. You will be asked to show your insurance card.
- Do NOT go to the hospital emergency room unless it is a TRUE emergency. Emergency rooms are very expensive, and you will probably have a long wait. In addition, there will be an extra fee imposed by the insurance provider if you visit an emergency room but are not admitted to the hospital.

LOCATE A DOCTOR, MEDICAL CLINIC, OR HOSPITAL

To locate a doctor or hospital in your area, please refer to the instructions available in the Resources section of your Cenet portal.

Emergencies

911

Dial "911" from any telephone if you need emergency ambulance, police, or fire department assistance. The operator that answers the phone will contact the appropriate emergency service.

ARREST

If you are arrested, call a local contact (friend or host school) and then call Cenet as soon as possible.

Legal issues must be reported to Cenet. It is important that you share honest information with Cenet so that we can provide support and assistance. Failure to share truthful information with Cenet could lead to negative consequences.

Handling Your Money

There are several ways to handle your money while you are in the U.S. Please remember that it is extremely unsafe to keep large amounts of cash in your housing. Plan to open a bank account as soon as possible after your arrival.

BANKING

Banks vary in the services they offer, so you should do some research and ask American colleagues and friends for a suggestion. Some offer free checking accounts, while others charge a monthly fee. Some require a minimum balance, while others do not.

Many banks offer ATM/debit cards that can be used like checks or cash at most stores and restaurants. Many of these cards are sponsored by VISA or MasterCard and can be used anywhere credit cards are accepted. You can also use the card for cash withdrawals from cash machines 24 hours a day. This can be convenient, especially when you are traveling. However, it is important to remember that this is not a credit card. The money will be withdrawn directly from your bank account when you use the ATM card. Often there will be service charges for cash machine withdrawals. Keep careful records of how much you have spent. Remember to deduct any service charges from your records as well.

Choose a bank that has branches all over the country instead of a local bank. National chains will offer more services when you are traveling, and you will find more cash machines that do not charge a fee. You also might be able to deposit your final paycheck in this account and access the money from your home country using the ATM card.

CURRENCY EXCHANGE

Foreign currency cannot be immediately exchanged in smaller cities. Usually, the bank must send the currency to a larger city for processing, then wait for the equivalent U.S. currency to be returned. That process will take 7-10 days.

CREDIT CARDS

Credit cards can be used to pay for a number of things, including meals and groceries at some markets. It is important that you pay the full bill each month since the interest rate on the unpaid balance is very high. A credit card is very difficult to obtain after you arrive in the U.S. Most companies are reluctant to issue one to any person in nonimmigrant status.

Communication

TELEPHONES

U.S. telephone numbers have 10 digits. The first three digits are called the “area code.” This signifies the area of the country that you are calling. The next three digits are called the “prefix.” This signifies the local area that you are calling. The last four digits signify the individual you are trying to call. These digits will be unique in conjunction with the prefix. If you are calling outside your local area, dial “1 + the area code,” then the rest of the number. If you are calling in your local area, you do not need to dial “1 + the area code.”

MOBILE PHONES

You should check with your mobile phone provider to see what is available in your contract before you leave your home country. It may be easier to leave your phone at home and purchase an inexpensive phone in the U.S.

You may also wish to purchase a U.S. SIM or e-SIM card for your phone. SIM cards can be purchased at any phone carrier physical location, electronics stores such as Best Buy; e-SIM cards can also be purchased online. Once you pick out the plan you want, the activation process is fairly simple and should only take a few minutes. Cenet recommends testing your new SIM card/phone service prior to leaving the store so you can ensure that it has been activated properly.

CALLING HOME

If you wish to place a call to your home country, dial “011,” then the country code for your country, then the telephone number. Be cautious, as long distance telephone calls can be expensive. Other options include WhatsApp, Zoom or other free online voice/video calling applications and services.

MAIL

Visit the United States Postal Service (USPS) website or your local post office to find the current rates. Refer to Appendix G for the USPS website.

SHIPPING

There are a variety of shipping companies that will send packages worldwide. Two of the most common are FedEx and UPS. Refer to Appendix G for these companies’ contact information.

EMAIL

If your host school or housing unit does not provide you with internet access, try a local café or public library. Remember, you are responsible for checking your email at least twice weekly and for replying to all Cenet messages. Cenet uses monitoring and updates to keep a line of communication open with our participants. We rely on participants to self-report any issues as well as to share their cultural activities and positive experiences.

Transportation

If your host provides transportation, there is probably a weekly or monthly charge for this service. If your host school does not provide transportation, they will expect you to find your own, even if your housing is not nearby. This can be a problem in many U.S. cities where public transportation is not available. Be sure you understand the arrangements

before you leave home and make plans accordingly. Transportation should be accounted for in the monthly budget you create for your program. Refer to Appendix H for a monthly budget template.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Larger U.S. cities generally have a bus system and a rail system for inexpensive, convenient travel within that metropolitan area. All other areas of the U.S. typically do not. For information about the city where you are staying, visit the city's official website. You can also contact the area Chamber of Commerce. Maps and public transportation schedules are generally available at major stations.

AUTOMOBILES

Smaller U.S. cities usually do not have public transportation, so many people feel they need to buy a car. Some participants buy a used car and then sell it near the end of their stay. Refer to Appendix G for a list of useful websites and refer to Appendix B for the answers to some frequently asked questions about automobiles and automobile insurance.

BICYCLES

Some companies offer bicycles for rent. Ask your supervisor if your host school has rental bicycles. If not, contact a bicycle shop or second-hand (used goods) store in the local area.

Safety

TRAFFIC & BIKE SAFETY

Every year there are participants who are injured or even killed, often as a result of avoidable accidents. Be mindful that traffic and biking rules may differ from your country.

If you use a bicycle during your program, it is important that you know the rules of the road. Bicycles are considered vehicles, and you are expected to follow the same rules as other vehicles. **Cenet requires you to wear a helmet and carry identification at all times. If you need guidance to purchase a helmet, reflectors, or other bicycle safety items, please contact Cenet for assistance.** Please see Appendix F for a list of helpful websites for bicycle safety.

When riding in a car, always wear your seatbelt. When driving a car, always follow the posted speed limits and all other traffic laws. Never drive a car while under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Never ride with a driver who is under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

WATER SAFETY

If you enjoy swimming, make sure that you take appropriate precautions. Do not swim alone or at night. Be aware of water depth, underwater hazards, water quality, and moving water. Be aware if there is a lifeguard present. If swimming in open water (e.g., ocean), be mindful of weather conditions and currents. Never swim while under the influence of drugs or alcohol. If you are on a boat, kayak or other water vessel, always wear a lifejacket.

NATURAL DISASTERS

You should be prepared in case an evacuation or other protocol is needed due to a natural disaster. Always follow host school guidelines for handling anything that might occur while at school.

Floods

Flooding is an overflowing of water onto land that is normally dry. Floods can happen during heavy rains, when ocean waves come on shore, when snow melts quickly, or when dams or levees break. Damaging flooding may happen with only a few inches of water. Floods can occur within minutes or over a long period, and may last days, weeks, or longer. Floods are the most common and widespread of all weather-related natural disasters in the U.S.

Flash floods are the most dangerous kind of floods because they combine the destructive power of a flood with incredible speed. Flash floods occur when heavy rainfall exceeds the ability of the ground to absorb it. They also occur when water fills normally dry creeks or streams or enough water accumulates for streams to top their banks,

causing rapid rises of water in a short amount of time. They can happen within minutes of the causative rainfall, limiting the time available to warn and protect the public.

Find more information on how to stay safe before, during, and after floods at <https://www.ready.gov/floods>.

Hurricanes

Hurricanes, known generically as tropical cyclones, are low-pressure systems with organized thunderstorm activity that form over tropical or subtropical waters. Hurricanes, tropical storms, and tropical depressions pose a variety of threats to people and property. Water hazards — storm surge and inland flooding — have historically been the leading causes of death during hurricanes. Hurricanes can also bring strong winds, tornadoes, rough surf, and rip currents. The time to prepare for a hurricane is before hurricane season begins: June 1 in the Atlantic and Central Pacific and May 15 in the Eastern Pacific.

Find more information on how to prepare for a hurricane at <https://www.noaa.gov/hurricane-prep>.

Tornados

A tornado is a narrow, violently rotating column of air that extends from a thunderstorm to the ground. Because wind is invisible, it is hard to see a tornado unless it forms a condensation funnel made up of water droplets, dust and debris. The safest place to be is in an underground shelter, basement or safe room.

Find more information on how to handle a tornado at <http://www.redcross.org/prepare/disaster/tornado>.

Earthquakes

An earthquake – also called a quake, tremor, or temblor – is the shaking of the Earth's surface resulting from a sudden release of energy in the lithosphere that creates seismic waves. Earthquakes can range in intensity, from those so weak they cannot be felt, to those violent enough to propel objects and people into the air, damage critical infrastructure, and cause destruction across entire cities. Should you encounter an earthquake, drop to the ground, take cover under a sturdy table or other piece of furniture (or in a doorway), and hold on until the shaking stops.

Find more information on how to handle an earthquake at <http://earthquake.usgs.gov/learn/preparedness.php>.

Wildfires

A wildfire is an uncontrolled fire that burns in wildland vegetation, often in rural areas. Wildfires can burn in forests, grasslands, savannas, and other ecosystems. Droughts and dry conditions throughout various times of the year increase the risk for wildfires.

Find more information on preparing for a wildfire at <https://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/types-of-emergencies/wildfire.html>.

Legal Matters

AVOIDING TROUBLE

You are responsible for knowing and obeying all federal, state, and local laws while you are visiting the U.S. You are not exempt from any laws on the basis of ignorance. You could be subject to fines, jail, or deportation if you violate the law. Also, do not assume that something is legal just because your U.S. friends are doing it. You can be considered guilty by association if you are with someone who is doing something illegal.

Trouble with the law may result in your dismissal from the program and early return to your home country. Cenet is not responsible for posting bail for participants who are arrested or for any expenses incurred as a result of your illegal activity.

THEFT

Theft refers to the removal of someone's personal property without that person's consent. If you find any items that do not belong to you while you are at work, you should take them to your supervisor immediately and inform them of the situation. Even if it appears as though a visitor or another employee has discarded the item, you should not keep it.

SHOPLIFTING

Shoplifting is the act of knowingly taking goods from an establishment in which they are displayed for sale, without paying for them. Shoplifting is considered a form of theft and is subject to prosecution.

PHYSICAL ALTERCATIONS

Physical altercations or fighting will not be tolerated by Cenet. Physically striking another participant, coworker, or person may result in loss of employment, dismissal from the program, and/or criminal charges.

DRUGS

Drugs (or controlled substances) are illegal in the U.S. without a prescription from a doctor. If you have a prescription from a doctor, you are allowed to use the drug only as indicated on the prescription. You are not allowed to give the drug to another person or to use the drug in any way other than as prescribed. It is illegal to purchase a controlled substance, to be in possession of a controlled substance, or to be with anyone illegally in possession of a controlled substance.

ALCOHOL AND MARIJUANA

The legal age for drinking alcohol in the U.S. is 21 years old. If you attempt to purchase alcoholic beverages you will be asked to show some form of identification with a photo and date of birth to prove that you are at least 21 years old. It is illegal to purchase alcohol for someone who is underage.

Some U.S. towns or counties may enact stricter laws pertaining to alcohol than the nationwide laws. Some counties are known as “dry counties” meaning that alcohol is expressly forbidden. Many places prohibit consumption of alcohol in public places (e.g., on the street, in the park, in a parking lot). Some areas permit purchasing or drinking alcoholic beverages only during specific times. Research or inquire when you arrive about the laws pertaining to alcohol in your area of the U.S.

Laws regarding marijuana consumption vary depending on the area in which you live in the U.S.

ALCOHOL AND DRIVING

Due to the numerous traffic accidents involving alcohol (and other drugs), there are strict laws in the U.S. concerning consumption of alcoholic beverages and driving a vehicle. You are forbidden to drink alcohol and then drive any motorized vehicle at any time. There are laws against “Driving While Intoxicated” (DWI) and “Driving Under the Influence” (DUI). These laws are strictly enforced. If you will be drinking alcohol and you need to go somewhere, call a taxi. Alternatively, appoint a “designated driver” when you go out drinking in a group. The designated driver agrees not to consume any alcoholic beverages so that he or she can safely and legally drive the vehicle for the others in the group.

Please be advised that consular officers are required to prudentially revoke (i.e., without making a determination that the individual is inadmissible) non-immigrant visas of individuals arrested for, or convicted of, driving under the influence or driving while intoxicated, or similar arrests/convictions, that occurred within the previous 5 years, as detailed in 9 FAM 403.11-3(A). If an exchange visitor is in the United States, the revocation of the visa does not override the J-1 status granted by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) at the time of his/her entry or his/her ability to stay in the United States (except in extremely rare instances). However, if the individual departs the U.S. during his/her program, the visa is no longer valid for future travel to the United States. Therefore, after the individual's departure from the United States, sponsors are required to terminate his/her program status in SEVIS.

SEX

Laws concerning sexual relations can vary widely from country to country. In the U.S., it is considered “rape” to force another person to have sexual relations with you and is a serious offense. Both persons involved must agree to the sexual act. If either person says “no” to sexual relations at any time, all sexual advances must immediately stop. Even if a person has agreed to have sexual relations with you, he or she can choose to stop the sexual activity at any time. If you force the other person to continue, you are guilty of rape.

It is illegal to have sexual relations with anyone under the age of 18. Anyone not yet 18 years old is considered a “minor” and still under the legal supervision of a parent or guardian. Sexual relations with a minor is called “statutory rape” even if the minor consents to the act. Penalties for violating this law can vary throughout the U.S.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Sexual harassment is bullying or coercion of a sexual nature and can involve the making of unwanted sexual advances or obscene remarks. In the United States, it can be unlawful to harass another person in a sexual nature. Additionally, while not illegal, certain behaviors are unacceptable and may violate Cenet and host school policies. Sexual harassment may take different forms:

- Verbal sexual harassment includes innuendos, suggestive comments, sexual propositions, lewd remarks, and threats. This includes repeated, unwelcome requests for dates.
- Nonverbal sexual harassment includes leering and suggestive or insulting sounds (e.g., whistling, catcalling). It can also include the content of emails, text messages, social media posts, or other forms of communication that is offensive and graphic in nature.
- Physical sexual harassment includes unwelcome physical contact (e.g., touching, tickling, pinching, fondling).

Remember to always treat your supervisors, co-workers, roommates, and friends in a respectful and courteous manner. Cenet has a zero-tolerance policy toward sexual harassment. Contact Cenet immediately if you feel as though you have been harassed at your workplace.

HITCHHIKING

Standing on the side of the road and motioning to a stranger for a free ride is known as hitchhiking. It is dangerous, and in some places illegal, to hitchhike or to offer rides to hitchhikers.

LEGAL STATUS CONCERNS

If anyone takes your passport or other personal documentation or threatens to cancel your visa and deport you, please report this to Cenet immediately.

YOUR RIGHTS

If you are arrested, contact Cenet as soon as possible: 1-866-512-3638. You have the following rights:

- You have the right to remain silent. You do not have to answer any questions, make any statements, or offer a confession if you do not desire. You cannot be forced to provide evidence against yourself.
- You have the right to be free from “unreasonable searches and seizures.” This means that the police need a warrant to conduct a search unless there is an emergency situation. Do not interfere with the police if they insist on conducting a search without a warrant, but be sure to tell your attorney.
- You have the right to an attorney. If you desire legal representation you have a right to request an attorney. If you cannot afford an attorney, the court will appoint an attorney to represent you.
- You have the right to a fair trial.
- You are presumed innocent until proven guilty. It is the burden of the prosecution to prove your guilt beyond a reasonable doubt in court.

Replacing Lost Documents

DS-2019 Form

- Contact Cenet

Passport

- Contact the nearest consulate of your home country

Social Security Card

- Contact the Social Security Administration

Refer to Appendix G for a list of useful contact information.

Miscellaneous

ELECTRICITY

The U.S. electrical system uses 110 volts, 60 hertz (cycles). If you are bringing appliances from home, they probably will not work in U.S. outlets. You can purchase a converter and a plug adapter to make your appliance function in the U.S. However, sometimes these converters do not work well. You might need to purchase inexpensive electrical appliances to use during your stay in the U.S.

TYPICAL PRICES OF COMMON ITEMS

The following prices are approximations only. Prices can vary greatly among areas of the country and between brand names and generic. As a reminder, you must do research and create a budget based on your wage, weekly hours, and cost of living in the specific community in which you will be living.

Rent, one bedroom apartment (per month)	700 – \$1,200
Transportation to and from work (per month)	\$50 – \$250
Burger, fries, and a drink at a fast food restaurant	\$5 – \$10
Blanket	\$15 – \$40
Pair of jeans	\$30 – \$60
Athletic shoes	\$40 – \$150
Shirt	\$20 – \$50
Movie admission	\$7 – \$13
Gasoline (per gallon)	\$3 – \$5

Remember, most cities and states levy a sales tax, which is typically added onto the stated price of the item when it is purchased.

TIPPING

The standard amount to tip a waitperson in the U.S. is between 15% and 20%. This is not required, but it is considered rude not to leave a tip. Wait staff generally earn less per hour than other American workers, and they depend on tips to help earn a living. It is common practice to tip less than the standard amount only if you were unhappy with the service or to tip more than the standard amount if you thought your waitperson did an exceptional job.

Program Concerns

Cenet anticipates that your program experience will be positive. However, should you have concerns that you are unable to resolve yourself, please contact Cenet. In order to best assist you, you will be required to submit your concern by email. You may be asked to supply additional information or documents. Cenet will investigate your concern and will respond to you as soon as possible. Remember, Cenet cannot assist you if you do not report your issues or concerns.

Refund Policy

If you cannot participate due to circumstances BEYOND YOUR CONTROL (such as being unable to secure a visa), fees are refunded with the exception of the non-refundable portion of your application fee, the SEVIS fee (if paid by Cenet), the placement fee (if secured by Cenet), and any applicable wire fees. There is a non-refundable application fee, even if your application is cancelled or rejected. If you choose not to participate after all arrangements are made and the host school is expecting you, you are not entitled to any refund.

Leaving the U.S. & Returning During Your Program – Travel Validation

J-1 Teachers may travel outside of the United States during their program; however, all international travel should be carefully planned and coordinated with both your host school/district and Cenet. Teachers should avoid scheduling travel that interferes with their professional responsibilities, contractual obligations, or school calendar requirements. Before traveling internationally, participants must obtain a travel validation signature on their DS-2019 from Cenet. Failure to obtain a valid travel signature may result in delays or difficulties when attempting to re-enter the United States.

Please note that a travel validation does not guarantee readmission to the United States. Final admission decisions are made by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) at the port of entry.

Participants are responsible for researching and complying with the visa and entry requirements of any country they plan to visit. Cenet is not responsible for denied entry to another country or delays caused by failure to meet international travel requirements.

DETERMINING ELIGIBILITY FOR RE-ENTRY

Before making international travel plans, you should verify the following:

- **Form DS-2019 Validity**
Review the end date on your DS-2019. Your DS-2019 must remain valid through your planned return date to the United States. Participants generally may not depart and re-enter the United States during the 30-day grace period following their program end date.
- **Travel Validation Signature**
Ensure your DS-2019 has been signed for travel by an authorized Cenet representative. Contact Cenet well in advance of your travel dates to request travel validation.
- **Passport Validity**
Your passport should remain valid for at least six months beyond your anticipated return date to the United States unless exempt under a country-specific agreement.
- **Employment Verification (if applicable)**
If travel occurs during the academic year or while school is in session, Cenet may request a letter from your host school/district confirming your continued employment and approved absence.

BEFORE YOU TRAVEL

Prior to departing the United States, participants should pack:

- Your valid passport with valid J-1 Visa
- Your original DS-2019 with a current travel validation signature
- Your host school/district contact information
- Cenet contact information
- A letter from the host school/district confirming employment and travel permission, if requested by Cenet

If you have questions regarding international travel, please contact Cenet before making travel arrangements. We strongly recommend requesting travel validation at least two to four weeks prior to your planned departure date.

Your Departure from the U.S.

If there is no earlier date indicated on your I-94, you are allowed a 30-day grace period after your program end date for the purposes of travel and departure. You can neither be employed during this grace period, nor travel outside the U.S. and then return. You must depart the U.S. by the end of the grace period.

Remember that life at home has continued as usual since you left. You will not necessarily find things just as you left them. Be prepared for another adjustment period as you return to your old life.

As your stay in the U.S. comes to an end, you will likely be very busy with last minute details. Do not forget to attend to the following issues:

- Make arrangements to receive your final paycheck and W-2,
- Reconfirm your travel arrangements, and
- If you intend to stay for the optional grace period, contact Cenet to arrange for an additional month of insurance coverage.

BridgeUSA Alumni Network

Alumni networks allow you to share experiences, engage in cultural dialogue, and connect within a like-minded global community. To learn more about alumni opportunities, please email alumni@cenet.org.

A Final Note

This program is not for everyone. There will be challenges. However, the challenges you will face represent an opportunity for lifetime learning and personal growth. Having a positive attitude and embracing these challenges as an opportunity will help you get the most out of this cultural exchange and professional experience.

Preparation is the key to your success. Cenet hopes this material is helpful to you during your program in the United States. In addition to developing personally and professionally, you will have the opportunity to learn more about the American culture, language, and customs and to share your own. Remember to keep an open mind, ask questions when necessary, and have a good time.

We wish you the best in the coming months and welcome you to the United States!



APPENDICES

Though Cenet strives to keep the information in this book up-to-date, Cenet is not responsible for changes to the information contained in these appendices as examples.

You may also search online for additional information regarding maps, accommodation, transportation, government offices, and more.

APPENDIX A: HOUSING

At a minimum, be aware of the following housing issues:

- Apartments vary greatly in quality, size, price, and what is included in the price. You may be asked to sign a lease. Before you sign anything, carefully inspect the apartment, know what is included in the price, and completely understand the terms of the lease. You should also research the area and ask local colleagues for advice; always put safety first.
- You will be asked to pay a damage deposit along with the first month's rent; the deposit is usually one month's rent. This deposit will usually be returned to you when you move out only if the landlord feels that you have met the terms of the lease and have left the apartment exactly as it was when you arrived.
- Often short-term leases (less than one year) cost more per month than longer-term leases. It is likely that you will be paying more for your apartment than your American neighbors. This is because they have agreed to stay in the apartment for a year or more.
- Some apartments are unfurnished. Rental of furnishings is an additional cost and is your responsibility.
- Utilities (e.g., water, gas, electricity) may or may not be included in your rent. Be sure you check this.
- You are responsible for knowing and abiding by the rules of your apartment complex.

Discuss your housing carefully with your host company or landlord. Understand the lease or housing agreement before you sign it. Be very clear on the following items:

- Landlord's name, address, and phone number
- Address and description of apartment
- Amount of monthly rent and how it should be paid
- Exact date rent payments are due
- Penalties for late rent
- Provisions for increasing the rent during the term of the lease
- Length of the lease
- Penalties for moving out before the lease expires
- Who pays for utilities (e.g., water, electric, gas)?
- Does the landlord have insurance on the property and will you need renter's insurance?
- How can you get repairs done and who will make them?
- Is the housing shared and, if so, how many per bedroom and who are your roommates?
- Are there limitations on parties, noise, and other activities?
- Are you allowed to have overnight guests?
- Does the landlord provide pest (bug) control?

APPENDIX B: TRANSPORTATION

Answers to some commonly asked questions about automobile transportation are provided below.

Can I just rent a car for a few days whenever I want to travel?

Yes, but you must be at least 21 years old and have a valid driver's license and credit card. Agencies vary in types of cars available and in price, so check several companies. Be sure to ask about base cost, mileage rates, insurance, and deposits.

What kind of driver's license do I need?

Anyone driving a car must have a valid driver's license. Regulations vary from state to state. Please consult your local License Bureau for the rules in your region.

Where do I find a good used car?

Used cars are sold at new car dealerships, used car lots, and from private individuals. Many cars are listed in the online or print classified advertisements of newspapers under "Autos for Sale."

What do I need to be aware of when I look for a used car?

An inexpensive car in poor condition can become very expensive because of repair bills. When you look for a car, take a knowledgeable person with you. DO NOT purchase anything before you have a mechanic check the car thoroughly. When you buy, be certain to receive the title to the car. DO NOT, UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES, ACCEPT A CAR WITHOUT THE TITLE.

What is vehicle registration?

Vehicles (e.g., cars, trucks, vans, motorcycles) must be registered with the state, and there is a registration fee. The fee will depend upon the make, model, and year of the vehicle. In most cases, you must have the vehicle's title, a state inspection receipt, and proof of paid (or waived) taxes in order to register.

If I own a car, do I have to have insurance coverage?

It is the law in most states that every car be covered by at least liability insurance.

An uninsured driver who causes an accident can be heavily sued by the other driver. Also, the uninsured driver will lose his/her driver's license. Proof of insurance must be carried in the car at all times.

What kinds of insurance are there and what do they cover?

- **Liability:** pays for injuries or damages to someone else if your car hits another person or the property of another person. It does not cover injury to yourself or your property.
- **Uninsured Motorist:** pays for your injuries and car damages if you are in an accident with an uninsured motorist.
- **Personal Injury Protection:** pays for your personal injuries if you are in an accident.
- **Collision:** pays for damages to your car from an accident.
- **Comprehensive:** pays for damage to your car through theft, fire, storm damage, or hitting an animal.

All types of insurance have a "deductible," an amount you must pay before the insurance provider will pay anything.

If you choose to share a car with others, please note that the insurance may only cover one designated driver. Therefore, if you switch drivers and are involved in an accident, the new driver may not be covered by the insurance. Make sure you understand who is covered by insurance.

APPENDIX C: ADAPTING TO THE CULTURE

You will be living in a culture that is different from yours. You may have thought there would be little to adapt to, but there are differences in attitudes, standards, expectations, and reactions in terms of accommodations, food, time, space, language, and much more. You chose to travel abroad to appreciate and understand the culture; otherwise, you would have chosen to remain at home. You will have a wonderful time if you are flexible and appreciate what you see and experience on its own terms and not demand your own. Remember, you are the one responsible for adapting to the new culture—the host country will not change for you.

CULTURE SHOCK

Culture shock is frequently experienced by people both traveling and living abroad. People are creatures of habit, and living in another country results in a loss of those cues that guide daily actions and decisions. Regardless of your tolerance, broad-mindedness, and empathy for the new culture, the loss of familiar cues will result in some degree of frustration. Recognizing any irritation as a symptom of culture shock will enable you to deal more effectively with the situation. Acknowledge the irritation and ask yourself why this aspect of the culture annoys you but seems perfectly natural and agreeable to the citizens of the host country. Your success in changing the negative aspects of culture shock to the positive side of challenge greatly depends on your developing a new set of attitudes before and during your stay. Check yourself periodically on the following guidelines to assess your progress:

- Maintain an attitude of curiosity and an eagerness to learn.
- Acquire a sense of adventure.
- Be quick to observe and slow to judge.
- Do not be afraid to be corrected but learn to accept “corrections” graciously and learn from your mistakes.
- Be generous and sincere in showing appreciation.
- Be adaptable.
- Maintain a sense of humor, especially about yourself.
- Go to learn, not to teach.
- Show sincere consideration for others.
- Be cooperative and willing to compromise.
- Enjoy yourself.

THE INTERCULTURAL ADJUSTMENT CYCLE

As you move from one society to another and begin to deal with the cultural differences you see, there are some specific stages you will encounter. It would be amazing if everyone could leave home and go abroad for a period of time without feeling some anxiety. Naturally, the severity and length of adjustment and the number of adjustment phases that you will go through depends upon the length of time that you are away from home and the support you are given. Nevertheless, you can be fairly certain that you will feel many of the emotions outlined in the intercultural adjustment cycle. Anticipate having these experiences:

- **Application Anxiety:** While waiting to go abroad, you may experience anxiety over your ability to handle this new opportunity. During this time, you may anticipate cultural differences but probably have only a superficial awareness of potential adjustment problems.
- **Selection/Arrival Fascination:** When the plans are definite that you will indeed be going abroad, you will probably experience a tremendous amount of elation. This excitement will probably continue (except for just before departure, when anxiety may arise again) until sometime after you arrive in the foreign country. During this period, expectations are high and pre-departure proceedings, as well as the arrival introductions, are overwhelming and blissful in their newness. Especially when you arrive, you will tend to be the focus of attention and activity. You will be shown respect and concern that you probably seldom receive at home.
- **Initial Culture Shock:** The initial fascination will sooner or later fade, and you may go into a decline, which is sometimes called culture shock. You may notice changes in sleeping habits, disorientation about how to work with and relate to others, and a lot of mental fatigue from listening to a foreign language all day.
- **Surface Adjustment:** After this initial “down,” which usually does not last more than a few days, you will settle into the situation.

- **Mental Isolation:** Next, the novelty may wear off completely and frustration may increase with a pervasive sense of isolation.
- **Integration/Acceptance:** Finally, you will be at ease and able to more carefully examine the new society. You will begin to understand the differences and find ways to deal with them. You will enjoy yourself, fit in, and have fun with the people around you.
- **Return Anxiety:** As you think about going home, you may begin feeling the same anxieties you felt during the first stage.
- **Shock/Reintegration:** Once you are home, the contrast between old and new may come as a shock. Just like you were the center of attention in another country for a short period, you will be the center again. That will soon fade as you find that few people are as interested in the details of your experience as you think they should be. After a short while, you will adjust to being one of the crowd again.

The end result is a shift in perspective and a better understanding of yourself and your own cultural heritage.

(Adapted from *Bring Home the World* by Stephen H. Rhinesmith)

APPENDIX D: SOME COMMON AMERICAN TRAITS

You may have spent time around Americans or seen “American culture” in movies and television, but it is still helpful to be reminded of some commonalities in the American culture:

- **Equality:** Americans work better when they are in an atmosphere in which all are considered equal and things are “fair.” While equality includes the equal right to seek the “good life,” it does not guarantee equality of talent or ability.
- **Confrontation:** Discussing issues or ideas openly with other people is considered not only proper but often a responsibility as well. Americans may bring up issues which are sensitive or embarrassing to others. In addition, Americans, particularly in a business situation, do not spend the time on polite social talk that many other nationalities do. They often go right to the point of the discussion.
- **Informality and Formality:** In most cases Americans avoid elaborate social rituals. Most of the time, they tend to treat everyone in a similar way with little concern for titles or status.
- **Competition:** Because Americans tend to value achievement and equality, they often compete with each other. You will find both friendly and not-so-friendly competition everywhere. Although this behavior is natural for Americans, it may seem quite overbearing to others.
- **Cooperation:** Although Americans are competitive, they also engage in cooperative behavior. Though cooperation often comes from liking and wishing to help others, it may also be a way to help the entire group accomplish its task. While this may appear opportunistic, the goal is to get things done and to learn in the process so that in the future the individual may achieve a goal on his own.
- **Time and Promptness:** Time is very important in American society, and it is essential that you be on time for work, appointments, meetings, or social engagements. If you cannot keep an appointment, or are going to be late, it is extremely important for you to call and explain. In most situations, the time you are asked to be someplace is exactly the time you are expected to be there.
- **Conversation:** For most Americans silence is uncomfortable. Small talk and superficial conversations are usually preferable to quiet. People will commonly talk about the weather, sports, parties, food, clothing, anything. Americans tend to stand no less than eighteen inches apart while talking; standing too close will make them uncomfortable.
- **Invitations:** You should reply to an invitation by telephone or email. An invitation should not be accepted unless you have every intention of going. It is acceptable to refuse an invitation by explaining that you have other plans or no free time. If the plans must be changed after they are made because of illness or another unavoidable problem, inform your host as soon as possible before the event.
- **Cultural Diversity:** You should realize that the United States is not a homogenous society but rather a diverse one, rich in a multitude of cultures. You will have the opportunity to meet people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, each with unique traditions, behaviors, customs, and dialects.

APPENDIX E: SOME COMMON AMERICAN EXPRESSIONS

The informal language that Americans use on a daily basis can often cause confusion and miscommunication. Native English speakers tend to use the language creatively in such a way that non-native speakers can have a difficult time understanding them. In fact, Americans from different areas of the country can often have a difficult time understanding one another.

The most important thing to remember is that it is perfectly acceptable to ASK someone what they meant. Do not just nod and pretend to understand, particularly at your host company. Americans use expressions so often that they do not even realize they are doing it. However, if politely asked, most Americans are happy to explain.

Below are a few expressions that you might hear in everyday conversation:

Bring something up / Bring up something: Mention something

Crack someone up: Make someone laugh

Cut it out: Stop it

Drop the ball: Fail at something

Funny business / Monkey business: Silliness; horseplay

Get it together: Organize yourself; prepare yourself mentally Get the message / Get the picture?: Do you understand?

Get with it: Hurry; busy yourself

Go Dutch / Dutch treat: Split the cost of something; each buys his/her own

Go with the flow: Accept things as they are; be the same as everyone else Goof off / Goof around: Waste time I beg your pardon: Excuse me.

I owe you one: Thank you. I owe you a favor.

Keep your cool: Remain calm and in control

Keep your head on straight: Think clearly; remain calm and collected

Knuckle down: Be serious and busy yourself

No big deal / No biggie: Not difficult; not a problem

Play it by ear: Wait and see what develops before making a decision

Same difference: The same; no difference at all

See you later / See ya / Later: Goodbye

Stick around: Remain nearby; stay here

Take a load off: Sit; relax; be comfortable

Take a shot (or a whack) at something: Try something

Take it easy: Relax; be gentle; also: goodbye

Throw a fit: Have a display of bad temper

Touch base: Briefly make or renew contact with someone

Up and at 'em: Awake and be ready for the day ahead

Use your head: Think

APPENDIX F: SOME COMMON AMERICAN GESTURES

Expressions are not the only thing that can cause misunderstanding and confusion. Here are some common U.S. gestures that can create communication gaps:

Thumbs up: Good job

Thumbs down: Bad

Thumb and forefinger create a circle with other fingers up: Okay; affirmation

Head nod (up and down): Yes

Head shake (side to side): No

Palm out with fingers up: Stop

Shoulder shrug: I do not know

Hand wave away from self: Never mind; forget it, it was nothing

Cup hand behind ear: Speak louder; I cannot hear you; what did you say?

Shoulder pat: Well done!

Palm slap (high-five): Congratulations; shared victory

APPENDIX G: REFERENCE INFORMATION

CENET

www.cenet.org

1 (866) 512-3638

CITY INFORMATION

www.citysearch.com

EMBASSIES

www.embassy.org

USCIS

www.uscis.gov

1 (800) 375-5283

IRS

www.irs.gov

1 (800) 829-1040

Publication 519

www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p519.pdf

Form 1040 NR

<https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/f1040nr.pdf>

I-94

<https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94/#/home>

SOCIAL SECURITY

<https://www.ssa.gov/locator/>

1 (800) 772-1213

Office locator

<https://secure.ssa.gov/ICON/main.jsp>

ACCOMMODATION

www.airbnb.com

www.hiusa.org

www.hostels.com

www.studentuniverse.com

LOCAL EVENTS & CULTURAL INFORMATION

www.meetup.com

www.livingsocial.com

www.lifeintheUSA.com

MAPS AND DIRECTIONS

maps.google.com

MASTERCARD – ATM LOCATOR

<https://www.mastercard.us/en-us/personal/get-support/find-nearest-atm.html>

MENTAL HEALTH

Disaster Distress Helpline

1 (800) 985-5990

National Sexual Assault Online Hotline

<https://rainn.org/>

1 (800) 656-4673

Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>

1 (800) 662-4357

Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

<https://988lifeline.org/>

988

The Trevor Project

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/get-help/>

1 (866) 488-7386

SAFETY

Bicycle Safety

www.nhtsa.gov/road-safety/bicyclists

Polaris Project

<https://polarisproject.org/>

Rights & Protections

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/temporary-workers.html>

SHIPPING

U.S. Postal Service

www.usps.com

FedEx

www.fedex.com

UPS

www.ups.com

TRANSPORTATION

BUSES, TRAINS, TAXIS, AND AIRPLANES

Greyhound

www.greyhound.com

Amtrak

www.amtrak.com

Lyft

www.lyft.com

Uber

www.uber.com

Airplane Tickets

www.travelocity.com

www.priceline.com

www.kayak.com

AUTOMOBILES (INSURANCE)

Allstate

www.allstate.com

GEICO

www.geico.com

Progressive

www.progressive.com

State Farm

www.statefarm.com

AUTOMOBILES (RENT)

AVIS

www.avis.com

Dollar Car

www.dollar.com

Enterprise

www.enterprise.com

Hertz

www.hertz.com

National Car

www.nationalcar.com

Thrifty

www.thrifty.com

VISA – ATM LOCATOR

<https://www.visa.com/atmlocator/>

APPENDIX H: PARTICIPANT MONTHLY BUDGET TEMPLATE

Your Stipend/Wage May Not Be Enough to Cover All Expenses

INCOME

Average Income Per Month (based on your job offer), less taxes: _____

EXPENSES

Housing: _____

Transportation: _____

Food: _____

WIFI/International Phone Plan: _____

Activities/Entertainment: _____

Miscellaneous: _____

TOTAL EXPENSES: _____

REMAINING FUNDS (INCOME MINUS EXPENSES): _____