



United States Department of State

*Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs
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www.state.gov

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Dear Colleagues,

As I look back at these last three years as Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Office of Private Sector Exchange, I see many things to celebrate. In the summer of 2014, we launched a new outreach plan to showcase the many ways in which the J-1 Exchange Visitor Program (EVP) fulfills its mission as a valuable cultural exchange program and tool to advance public diplomacy and foreign policy objectives. Through a blog that we lovingly term “Route J-1”, we have promoted countless personal stories of our exchange visitors, their hosts, sponsors and their hosting communities. If you haven’t checked it out, please do so at j1visa.state.gov/routej1. We hope to have examples of all of our programs included there soon. If you have an exemplary participant, host or cultural program that you would like us to feature, we welcome you to send it to the relevant program analyst in the Office of Designation. It is vitally important and in our best interest to share program successes with the broader public.

We received two very important external validations this year for our collective efforts to ensure high quality exchange programs through the EVP. In January, the Government Accountability Office acknowledged the Department’s efforts to strengthen the Summer Work Travel program, and noted sponsor efforts in this regard (<http://www.gao.gov/assets/670/668453.pdf>). While directing us to take some further steps, the report commended our actions and direction. Second, in July of this year, a White House report reaffirmed the State Department’s comprehensive approach to ensure a rich cultural experience through the EVP (https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/final_vis_a_modernization_report1.pdf). The report also highlighted the positive effects of Route J-1 in promoting and documenting the value of exchange programs for the exchange visitors, and the American communities hosting them. Both of these reports are widely read by policy-makers and engaged public stakeholders. Congratulations to all of you for your daily efforts to ensure that our joint mission is met.

I hope sponsors continue to feel the impact of our goal for effective outreach and communication. Throughout 2014 and so far in 2015, ECA staff visited all NAFSA regional and national conferences, held sponsor meetings in the Secondary School, Au Pair, Intern and Trainee categories, and I have personally visited

programs all over the country. Moving forward, we will work with sponsors to gain recommendations for programmatic and regulatory changes across categories. In 2016, we intend to begin our focus on Academic and Government programs and will appreciate sponsor participation in those efforts. The promulgation of Subpart A was a big effort in 2014. We greatly appreciate the high number of thoughtful sponsor comments in response to the publication. We know it takes time to comment, but it is essential. We have read every recommendation and take each one seriously. It is our hope to republish the current final rule taking the comments into account before the end of 2015.

On a related note, 2015 is a special year for the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. It marks the 75th anniversary of State Department sponsored exchange programs, which began with what is now the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) in 1940. The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs is building on this incredible milestone in public diplomacy by highlighting the impact and importance of people-to-people exchanges throughout the year and by asking for our community to define how exchange programs are impacting their lives. We invite you to visit our dedicated website: <http://exchanges.state.gov/files/75th/index.html>. You will most definitely be inspired.

Earlier this year, we also commemorated the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and used this opportunity to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in international exchanges. The United States has long been a leader in the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities and disability rights is a core part of our foreign policy missions. The State Department is committed to the inclusion of disabled people in our exchange programs, to ensure that they have the opportunity to learn from each other, and to learn from our experiences here in the United States. Including people with disabilities is a high priority for Secretary of State John Kerry— in fact, as a senator, he was one of the original sponsors of the ADA.

The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs has gained considerable expertise in this area of inclusion. The Bureau awards funds annually to Mobility International USA to administer the National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange (NCDE). The Clearinghouse promotes opportunities for persons with disabilities to participate in international exchange programs and provides exchange organizations and other entities with technical advice on ways to increase the number of persons with disabilities participating in their exchange programs.

I invite you to visit the following resources for more details:

- NCDE website (www.miusa.org/ncde) for further information regarding NCDE materials and services.
- Department of Justice website (<http://www.ada.gov/>) for comprehensive information about the ADA, including historical documents and videos.
- ECA is producing its own brief video highlighting the history of disability-inclusive exchanges that will be available in early July. ECA will also deliver a special 25-day social media campaign, beginning July 1 and culminating on July 26, the ADA anniversary. Look for more information here: (<http://exchanges.state.gov>).

It is critical that our exchange programs reach the world's vulnerable populations, seeking to provide new avenues for them to invest in their own communities and to connect with the U.S. It is important to note that the ADA not only applies to Americans but to exchange participants from other countries as well. These participants with disabilities have a right to reasonable accommodations while on their exchange in the United States.

At the Department of State, we know that we cannot rely on our diplomatic relationships with governments alone. The people-to-people relationships built directly between U.S. citizens and extraordinary exchange visitors advance our goals of peace and security around the world. In 2014, through the J-1 EVP, around 300,000 exchange visitors arrived in the United States to cultivate lasting relationships with their new American friends, families, peers and colleagues. We would not witness this scale of relationship-building without sponsor cooperation, creativity, and steadfast dedication to the success and health of the J-1 EVP and its participants.

I am privileged to play a small part in the EVP, and I look forward to continuing our collective efforts to bring forward the best programs possible. As we move ahead in 2015, I am eager to see what new heights we can achieve.

Sincerely,



Robin J. Lerner

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