



# 2016 SUMMER WORK TRAVEL MONITORING REPORT

# Executive Summary

The Summer Work Travel (SWT) program is a category of the J-1 visa Exchange Visitor Program (EVP) that provides foreign college/university students the opportunity to engage with Americans, experience United States culture, and travel the country while working in seasonal or temporary jobs during their official academic summer breaks. U.S. sponsor organizations (sponsors) are designated by the Department of State to administer the program. For the past five years, the Office of Private Sector Exchange (ECA/EC) has organized field site reviews to increase sponsor oversight and monitor the SWT program. This report describes findings from interviews conducted by Department staff (monitors) with exchange visitors and host employers in the winter, spring, and summer of 2016. This report also includes findings from exchange visitors in the Camp Counselor category of the EVP, conducted as part of an on-going Camp Counselor category review. In 2016, monitors interviewed 1,582 exchange visitors and 362 host placements while visiting 446 Sites of Activity across 25 states.

## Overall Findings

On a broad level, 97% of all SWT exchange visitors interviewed reported being happy or somewhat happy with their program experience. Nearly 90% reported being happy or somewhat happy with their sponsor. Over 90% reported having the chance to practice English in their workplaces, and 87% were happy with their housing. Only 83% of exchange visitors reported having participated in cultural activities outside of work; however, exchange visitors may not have considered all their activities when answering if they participated in “cultural activities.” during the program.

## Specific Season Findings

*Winter:* More participants said they participated in cultural activities and were happy with their housing,

possibly due to the higher rate of employer-arranged housing and cultural activities. Many worked for larger employers (i.e., ski resorts, inns/hotels) that provided shuttles. The lower rate of happiness with sponsors may have resulted from greater role of the sponsors’ recruiting agencies in winter placements. The most common issue was low hours resulting from lack of snow. Although, some host employers tried to provide the minimum hours promised by moving them to other positions, or putting a hold on rent deductions until they could increase hours again.

*Spring:* Only a few countries have spring season program dates, so exchange visitors had no problems receiving enough hours in the spring as employers begin ramping up for the summer. More exchange visitors in the spring reported having opportunities to practice English, and many

Question	Winter	Spring	Summer	2016 Average
Happy/Somewhat Happy with Program Experience	96.9%	97.2%	97.2%	<b>97.1%</b>
Happy/Somewhat Happy with Sponsor	78.9%	93.2%	95.1%	<b>89.1%</b>
Participated in Cultural Activities	96.9%	64.8%	87.3%	<b>83.0%</b>
Practiced English in Workplace	89.8%	97.2%	90.9%	<b>92.6%</b>
Happy with Housing	89.8%	90.3%	81.3%	<b>87.1%</b>

(particularly from the Philippines) said that they received good work experience for careers in the hospitality industry. However, monitors also observed that host employers provided fewer cultural activity options for spring season exchange visitors than for those in the summer.

*Summer:* The data showed more employer-arranged housing, transportation, and cultural activities. Pre-arranged housing for exchange visitors increased 12% from 2015, and a 25% increase in the number of exchange visitors who reported taking a shuttle or carpooling to work. These increases reduced exchange visitor difficulties in finding suitable housing and the risk to exchange visitors biking or walking on busy roads. Data also indicated high levels of sponsor-employer communication. Seventy percent of employers communicated with the sponsor at least monthly, and 74% found the sponsors helpful. Nearly half of host employers (49%) said the sponsor had visited them at some point.

### **Camp environment**

A higher rate of the 168 Camp Counselor exchange visitors said they are happy with their experience (95%) than the 85% of all SWT exchange visitors who responded likewise. Nearly all Camp Counselors (95%) said they participated in cultural activities. The 86 SWT program exchange visitors placed at camps also showed a slightly higher rate of program satisfaction (87%) than SWT exchange visitors generally, though they also had issues with the extended on-duty time waiting to prep the next meal while working in camp kitchens. Camp directors reported lower rates of direct communication with sponsors than employers in the SWT program.

### **Remaining Challenges**

A number of program aspects continue to impact program effectiveness. Despite many of the positive trends, exchange visitor interviews in the summer also showed that:

- 20% had problems with transportation.
- 15% were not happy with their housing.
- 9% received fewer hours than those on their job agreements.
- 8% had problems with their Social Security cards.
- 5% had problems with getting paid.
- 5% worked unreported second jobs.

Additionally, OPA noted a lack of interaction with Americans among exchange visitors working as housekeepers, and staffing agency placements that may not meet the regulatory requirements.

### **Conclusions**

The field site review findings show continued progress in meeting the SWT and Camp Counselor objectives, providing the majority of exchange visitors with a positive cultural experience. More host employers take active roles in locating housing, providing transportation, and arranging cultural activities. Communities continue to provide exchange visitors orientations, cultural activities, and solutions to transportation and housing challenges. Sponsors should engage more with host employers and the community. Building direct, communicative relationships with exchange visitors, host employers and the community will enable sponsors to be more efficient and enhance the SWT program's effectiveness as a public diplomacy tool.



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## INTRODUCTION

The Office of Private Sector Exchange (ECA/EC) conducts field site reviews each year to assess the state of the J-1 visa Summer Work Travel (SWT) category of the Exchange Visitor Program (EVP). Coordinated by the Office of Private Sector Exchange Administration (OPA), Department staff visit the host placements (i.e., the host employers) of exchange visitors participating in the SWT program to interview them about their experience as part of monitoring the U.S.-designated sponsor organizations' (sponsors') administration of the SWT program.

This report includes findings from monitoring conducted in the winter, spring, and summer of 2016 to provide a full year observations on the SWT program. Additionally, this report includes observations from interviews with Camp Counselor program exchange visitors. As with last year, OPA conducted field site reviews of exchange visitors participating in the Camp Counselor category at camp placements. Interviews with Camp Counselor exchange visitors assisted with the on-going Camp Counselor category review conducted by the Office of Policy and Program Support (Policy) within ECA/EC.

OPA continues to see improvements in the SWT program, as sponsors have worked with their partner agencies abroad and host employers in the United States to enhance the program experience for exchange visitors. Department staff conducting monitoring (monitors) reported that many host employers throughout the country are increasing becoming more involved in arranging housing, transportation, and cultural activities for the exchange visitors placed within their organizations. Greater sponsor and host employer involvement in these facets of the program has done much to enhance the cultural experience of the SWT program.

### *History of Monitoring*

ECA/EC began conducting monitoring in 2012. OPA took over coordination of SWT monitoring upon its creation in 2013. Each summer and winter, OPA organizes teams of ECA/EC staff to conduct monitoring trips. During the summer OPA coordinates with offices under the Undersecretary for Management (M) who also conduct monitoring on ECA/EC's behalf. In 2015, OPA boosted the number of exchange visitor interviews by recruiting 12 staff from other offices within the ECA Bureau.

Given the enormous coverage in past years, this year ECA/EC conducted more targeted monitoring (see the Methodology section). ECA/EC staff, joined again by a cadre of volunteer monitors from other offices in the ECA Bureau, did not require the same level of support from M family resources. This year OPA requested only the assistance of the Diplomats-in-Residence, who conducted monitoring in areas around Boston, Massachusetts; Atlanta, Georgia; Chicago, Illinois; and Dallas and Galveston, Texas.

Last year, ECA and M monitors interviewed 3,289 total exchange visitors, of whom 2,732 were in the SWT program and 557 were in the Camp Counselor program and comprised 2.9% and 2.6% respectively of each program's total participants in 2015.<sup>1</sup> This year, ECA monitors and the Diplomats-in-Residence interviewed fewer exchange visitors, at 1,582, of whom 1,414 were in the SWT program and 168 were in the Camp Counselor program.<sup>2</sup> These numbers amounted to 1.4% and 0.7% of each program, respectively, but still provided a great deal of significant data<sup>3</sup> and complaints to address with sponsors.

Since 2013, OPA has conducted monitoring during the winter months (January and February) to capture feedback from those exchange visitors from the southern hemisphere here for our winter season. As the winter comprises generally 10-11% of annual SWT program exchange visitors, OPA only organized teams of ECA/EC staff to conduct winter monitoring. For the first time, this year OPA conducted interviews from March through May in conjunction with attending community meetings on the SWT program, to gather feedback from the approximately 5% of exchange visitors here in the spring season.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Selecting Locations*

The selection of monitoring locations in the past was often driven by large assemblies of exchange visitors and known issues, previously raised to the Department's attention. For summer 2016, OPA attempted a more data-driven approach to the selection of locations for monitoring. OPA utilized data collected from Kentucky Consular Center (KCC)<sup>4</sup> host employer alerts, complaints and incident reports previously submitted to the Department, and interviews from past field site reviews during the summers of 2014 and 2015.

OPA entered this data onto a map with the current year's summer season counts of exchange visitors by city, and identified locations that needed to be visited where the data aroused concerns. OPA identified clusters of placements that:

- 1) Presented a higher risk to exchange visitors' health, safety, and welfare based on complaints and incidents in previous years;
- 2) Showed the potential to bring notoriety and disrepute to the program;
- 3) Raised questions about the value of the cultural experience for exchange visitors; and
- 4) For various reasons, demonstrated signs of inadequate administration of the program by sponsors.

However, in many locations where OPA had learned of issues, the issues had been raised by past summer field site reviews and already addressed by the sponsors. Some of these locations also had more active community groups assisting exchange visitors and increased sponsor engagement. Therefore, the majority of monitoring teams visited clusters of placements where there had been no prior field site visits by Department staff. Visiting new ground also allowed OPA to shift its focus to any potential underlying issues beyond the high-density areas that previously received attention during past monitoring trips.

Once OPA determined the locations, OPA instructed the monitoring teams to prioritize host employers where available data indicated:

- Diverse sponsor representation;
- Varied position titles, or uncommon position titles;
- High numbers of exchange visitors;
- Prior concerns from complaints, incident reports, KCC alerts, and/or field site reviews, and
- Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) reporting issues.

Once monitoring teams arrived in the field, they conducted as many field site reviews as time allowed.

### ***Conducting Field Site Reviews***

A field site review refers to Department staff visiting a job site to interview exchange visitors in person. Monitors may also interview host employer managers, supervisors, or Human Resources staff who arrange exchange visitors' employment and monitor their work. Monitors used standard interview questionnaires for both the exchange visitor and host employer interviews. OPA trained all monitors on the standard operating procedures (SOPs) for conducting a field site review, including: introducing themselves to the host employer, conducting the interview, watching for specific issues, reporting complaints, and providing the interview data back to OPA.

The questionnaires included a mix of standard choice questions for quantitative statistical analysis purposes (i.e., yes/no responses, multiple choice checkboxes) as well as open-ended questions to gather qualitative data. As with every year, OPA tweaked the questionnaires based on lessons learned from the prior year to better gather applicable data. The biggest change was the addition of a "somewhat" response option to the yes/no questions asking whether the exchange visitor was happy with the program experience and the sponsor. This change makes a comparison with past year's data inexact, but allows for a better gauge of the exchange visitors' feelings about their experience and sponsor while on the SWT program. OPA also added a question asking whether the exchange visitor felt the sponsor has been responsive to his/her needs.

### ***Visiting Camps***

For Camp Counselor program exchange visitors, OPA and Policy developed a separate interview questionnaire. This questionnaire expanded upon the supplemental section included in last year's exchange visitor interview questionnaire. The host placement interview questionnaire continued to contain a supplemental section for camps.

### ***Monitoring in Winter and Spring***

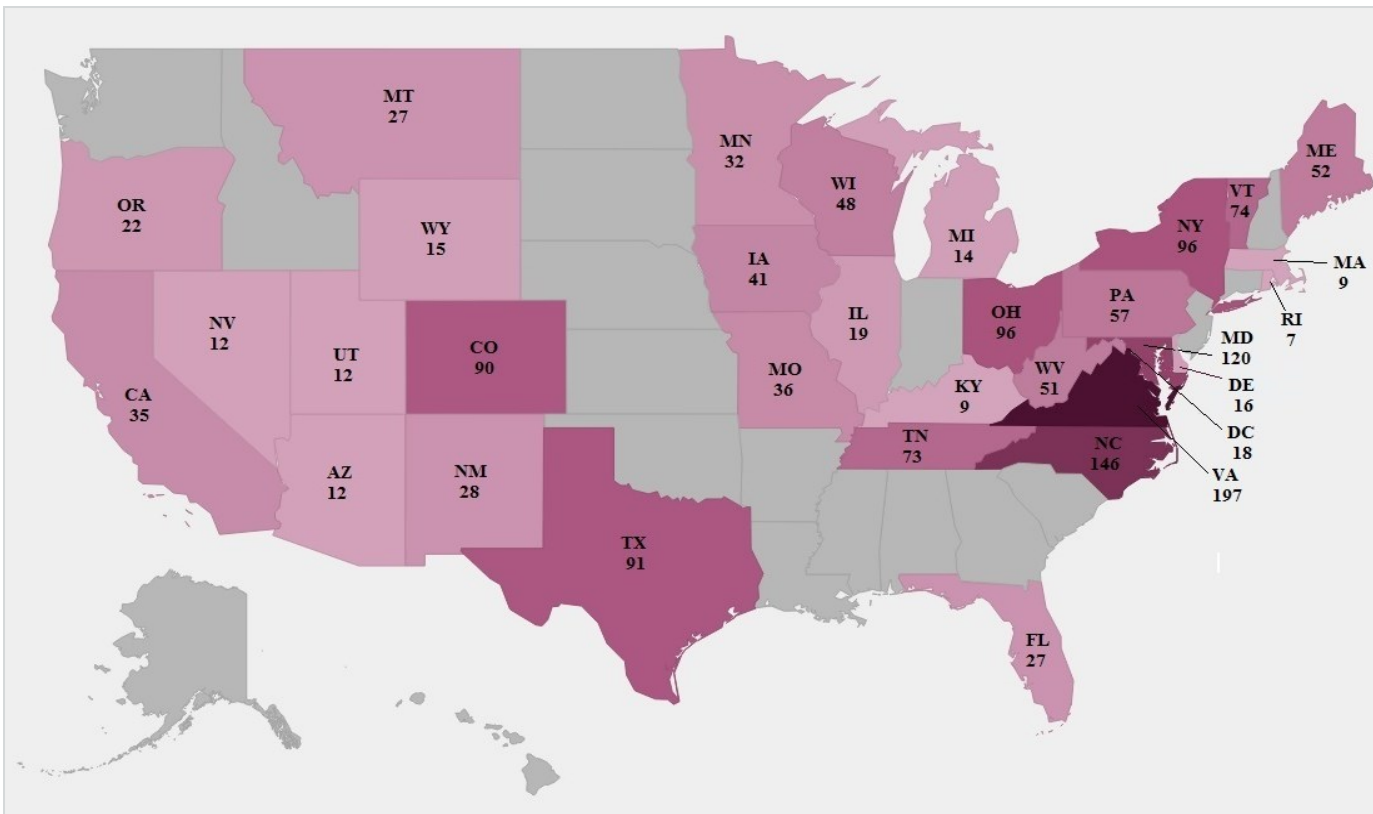
The winter and spring seasons field site reviews conducted from February through May still used the same interview questionnaires as those used during summer monitoring in 2015. The first use of the 2016 revised interview questionnaires began in June 2016.

## **OVERVIEW**

In 2016, monitors interviewed 1,582 exchange visitors and interviewed 362 host placements while visiting 446 Sites of Activity. Table 1 shows a breakdown by winter, spring, and summer seasons. See Map 1 below for a number of interviews by state in 2016.



**Map 1: Exchange Visitor Interviews by State**



**Table 1: Monitoring by Season**

	Winter	Spring	Summer
SWT Exchange Visitor Interviews	128	176	1,110
Camp Counselor Exchange Visitor Interviews	N/A	N/A	168
Host Placement Interviews	21	58	294
States Visited	4	9	25
Cities Visited	17	18	78
Total Sites of Activity Visited	25	28	406

Table 2 presents a set of certain opinion questions on aspects asked of exchange visitors that serve as an overall assessment as to whether the program meets the broader goals of the SWT program. On a broad level, 97% of exchange visitors reported being happy or somewhat happy with their program experience, and nearly 90% reported being happy or somewhat happy with their sponsor. Over 90% reported having the chance to practice English in their workplaces, and 87%

were happy with their housing. More exchange visitors should report having participated in cultural activities outside of work; only 83% report having done so.

**Table 2: Overall Results for Basic Opinion Questions by Season**

Question	Winter	Spring	Summer	2016 Average
Happy/Somewhat Happy with Program Experience <sup>5</sup>	96.9%	97.2%	97.2%	<b>97.1%</b>
Happy/Somewhat Happy with Sponsor <sup>6</sup>	78.9%	93.2%	95.1%	<b>89.1%</b>
Participated in Cultural Activities	96.9%	64.8%	87.3%	<b>83.0%</b>
Practiced English in Work-place	89.8%	97.2%	90.9%	<b>92.6%</b>
Happy with Housing	89.8%	90.3%	81.3%	<b>87.1%</b>

The remainder of the report will address the findings from 2016 monitoring for each of the primary elements of the SWT program. Winter and spring season findings will be described separately, as will findings from interviews with Camp Counselor program exchange visitors as compared with the SWT program.

## WINTER/SPRING SEASON FIELD SITE REVIEWS

### Winter Season

Monitors visited New Mexico, New York, Tennessee, and Vermont in February and March 2016, and interviewed a total of 128 exchange visitors and 21 host employers. Monitors primarily visited locations with ski resorts, inns, hotels, and also a few businesses not primarily based on winter activities (fast food restaurants, an amusement park) in major winter destinations. This was the first winter that the Department conducted extensive field site reviews in Vermont, having focused on other northeastern states during winter monitoring in past years.

Since the interview questions were modified for the summer, this report could not provide all-season findings except for only a few cases (such as the graphs for program fees and housing costs). Aside from the discussion below, the findings from the winter and spring seasons closely match those for the summer season as described throughout the majority of this report.

#### *Winter Highlights*

The majority of winter season exchange visitors' housing was pre-arranged, of which 86.5% was arranged by host employers. The rate of winter season exchange visitors happy with their housing

(115 of 128, or 89.8%) was higher than the rate reported during the summer (890 of 1,094, or 81.4%). However, weekly housing costs were higher than summer by \$20 on average.

Of the host employers interviewed (16 of 21, or 76.2%) offered arranged housing. Large ski resorts provided arranged housing for all or most of their incoming SWT exchange visitors in the winter. The majority of the exchange visitors lived in houses (46 of 128, or 35.9%). Monitors noted a wide divide in the amount of rent exchange visitors paid. Four of the interviewed exchange visitors said they shared a 10 bedroom house, with 19 roommates, each paying \$125 per week. At the other end of the spectrum an exchange visitor reported sharing a 2 bedroom house, with 3 rooms, each paying \$38 per week.

Host employers (18 of 21, or 85.7%) reported that public transportation is available for exchange visitors. Yet, exchange visitors (28 of 128, or 21.9%) reported problems with transportation. Long waits, limited access, and inconsistent shuttle and trolley schedules were the reasons given for their dissatisfaction.

Most host employers (18 of 21, or 85.7%) included exchange visitors in activities organized for all staff, such as pizza parties, holiday parties, movie and ice cream nights, bonfires, and other events. Many took exchange visitors on trips to nearby and local sites. Host employers often gave them free or discounted ski passes. Some host employers' managers and staff, personally took them on activities or trips, or welcomed them to their homes for major holidays such as Christmas and New Year's.

### *Winter Challenges*

The most common issue is low hours due to decreased business activity resulting from a lack of snow. This winter was rough for Vermont this year. The hotels and resorts in the area all confirmed that this seasons' warmer than usual weather and low snow fall impacted their season, leading to less work hours for exchange visitors. Exchange visitors in Vermont averaged 30-32 hours per week in comparison to the overall average of 40 hours per week.

Host employers made great efforts to make sure exchange visitors were at least receiving their minimum number of hours promised, 115 of 128 or 89.8% of the winter exchange visitors said they worked the number of hours they were promised. Exchange visitors also reported that they were aware that poor snow quantity might happen and that as a consequence fewer work hours would be available.

Some winter host employers in New Mexico and Vermont reported that the foreign entity<sup>7</sup> rather than the sponsor orientated them on the program, contacted them for vetting documentation, and served as their primary contact on issues with exchange visitors. In essence, the foreign entity's relationship with the host employer supplanted any communication between the sponsor and host employer.

#### Recommendations

- ◆ Sponsors should work with their host employers to have contingency plans in place should an area experience poor snowfall.
- ◆ Sponsors must work with host employers to identify available housing and transportation options, given the tighter supply in winter season placement

locations.

- ◆ Sponsors must work directly with the host employers, rather than the foreign entity, to manage their programs and ensure compliance with regulatory requirements to protect the health, safety and welfare of exchange visitors in their programs.

## Spring Season

Spring season monitoring primarily occurred in April and May 2016 in conjunction with OPA attendance at community support group host employer forums in Ocean City, Maryland; Cape Cod, Massachusetts; Outer Banks, North Carolina; Sandusky, Ohio; Virginia Beach, Virginia; Door County, Wisconsin; and Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin. Monitors also conducted field site reviews in eastern Pennsylvania and Washington, DC. Monitors interviewed 176 exchange visitors and 58 host employers. These interviews mostly included exchange visitors from the Philippines (147, or 83.5%) and Ecuador (21, or 11.9%), the only countries currently where college and university break dates cover the spring season.<sup>8</sup>

### *Spring Highlights:*

The spring season is typically referred to as the “shoulder season,” when host employers begin preparing for the summer vacation season. Host employers said they distinctly note an increase in business activity starting in March that steadily grows week-by-week into the start of summer (i.e., Memorial Day weekend). Only a few countries have college/university breaks during this time period and exchange visitors typically have less competition for hours and housing. The average number of hours worked per week was 40, with many exchange visitors receiving overtime. Exchange visitor satisfaction with housing was high: 160 (90.9%) had their housing pre-arranged, and 159 (90.3%) said they were happy with their housing.

At amusement parks, exchange visitors worked in the Human Resources department processing new summer hires, or cleaned and stocked the game and retail booths. At restaurants, they trained while business activity was still at a moderate level. Host employers said the spring exchange visitors in turn trained the new summer season exchange visitors in May and June. At hotels, they cleaned the property before the hotel opened for the summer season.

Exchange visitors from the Philippines are exceptional for two reasons: 1) the Philippines governments’ Commission for Filipinos Overseas (CFO) conducts pre-departure orientations (which nearly all exchange visitors interviewed had attended) to inform the exchange visitors of their rights in the United States, and 2) many of the Philippines exchange visitors treat the program as an internship where they gain valuable work experience for their careers. Even those working in housekeeping incorporated the program as part of their university studies (often in Hospitality and Tourism programs).

### *Spring Challenges*

As is evident in Table 2, the rate of exchange visitors interviewed in the spring who said they participated in cultural activities outside of work (114 of 176, or 64.8%), was far lower than the

rate in the winter (96.9%) and summer (87.2%). Monitors observed that host employers gave less thought to cultural component aspect for spring season exchange visitors than for those in the summer. The same host employers who could provide lists of weekly scheduled cultural activities for summer season could only point to one or two host employer-arranged activities in the spring.

#### Recommendations

- ♦ Sponsors and host employers should make more an effort to organize extracurricular activities.
- ♦ Sponsors and host employers need to assist exchange visitors with transportation and help their local communities develop public transportation options.

## SUMMER FIELD SITE REVIEWS

The bulk of the Department's findings on the SWT program comes from the mass field site reviews conducted during each summer, given that around 85% of SWT participants each year come during the summer months of May through September.

The remainder of the report will address the findings from 2016 monitoring for each of the primary elements of the SWT program in detail.

### Program Costs

#### *Best Practices*

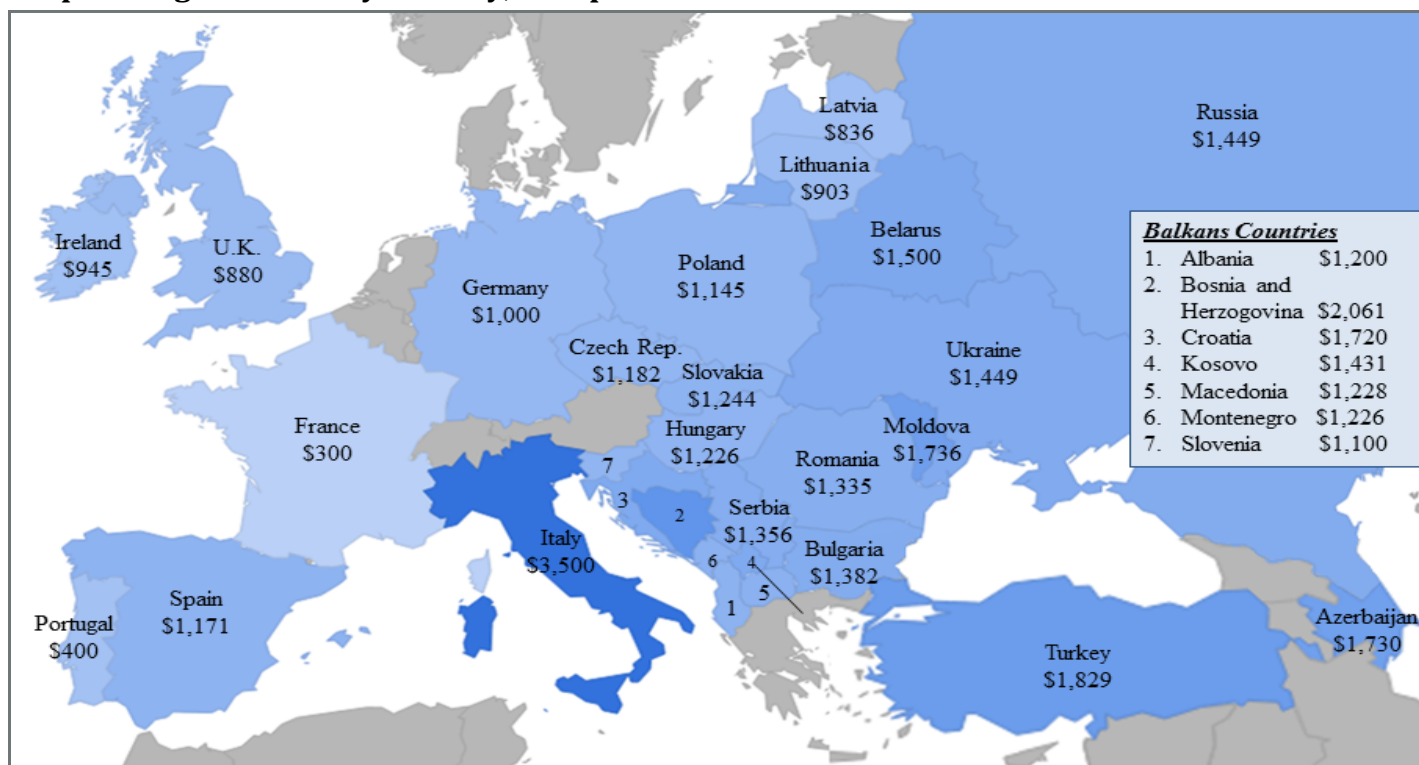
Monitors asked exchange visitors how much they paid to participate in the SWT program (including any SEVIS I-901 fees, visa fees, and insurance fees), and then asked for airfare separately.<sup>9</sup> On average, summer exchange visitors said they paid \$1,557 for all program fees charged, while the average for all seasons was \$1533. However, these program fees amounts varied widely from \$300 in France to \$3,500 in Italy.<sup>10</sup> The maps below provide a comprehensive view of the average program costs by country reported from SWT exchange visitor interviews (including those in winter and spring).

Transparency in fees and any additional program costs is a best practice. Many sponsors provide budget sheets for exchange visitors to know how much money they need to bring with them to pay living expenses until their first paycheck.

#### *Challenges*

The program fees that exchange visitors pay is widely divergent depending on the country. In most cases, exchange visitors pay the foreign entity (i.e., recruiting partner agency in the home country) a fee, and the foreign entity provides a flat rate to the sponsor per the written agreement the sponsor has with the foreign entity. In some countries, China being the most notable example, participants pay fees to other parties in the chain of recruiting entities (such as university

Map 2: Program Costs by Country, Europe

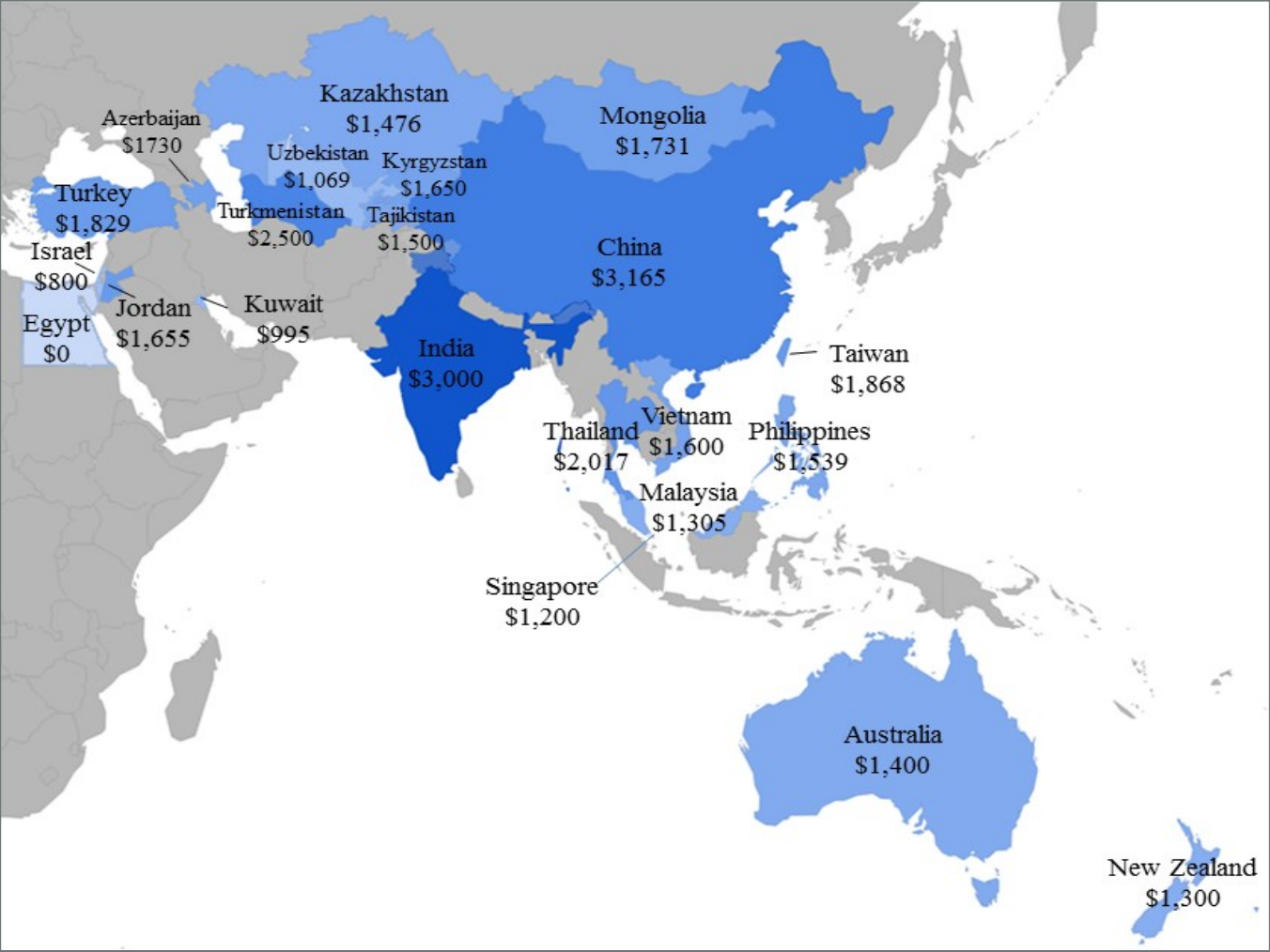


Map 3: Program Costs by Country, the Americas





Map 4: Program Costs by Country, Middle East and Asia



Map 5: Program Costs by Country, Africa



Refer to Table 3 on the next page for the number of SWT exchange visitors interviewed in each country who provided this program cost amounts.

teachers) and end up paying more on average in program costs.

Some exchange visitors were unclear on the exact service the sponsor provided for the program fees they paid. Some did not seem to understand they could reach out to their sponsors to help resolve problems they may be experiencing (e.g., bed bugs, pay issues, or surprise fees), since sponsors are ultimately responsible for addressing issues that affect their health, safety, and welfare. Of the exchange visitors interviewed, 75 (6.8%) felt their sponsor was not responsive to their needs. One exchange visitor commented, “What does a sponsor do? I know I paid them, but what is their role?”

Many exchange visitors expressed concern about not earning enough to recoup the cost of the program, particularly when they receive lower weekly hours from their host employer. Many received loans from their parents or other family members, and expressed concern about not paying their family back.

One issue often reported to the Department is the cost of the program, and exchange visitors paying more on arrival than they did not expect. Of all SWT exchange visitors interviewed, 160 (14.4%) said they paid unexpected fees and/or expenses once they arrived in the United States. Most of the fees/expenses cited by these exchange visitors included: workplace uniforms, taxi/shuttle from the airport upon arrival, daily commuting expenses (e.g., for metro, bus, car-sharing service), housing deposit, certificates and training course for job, housing supplies (e.g., bedding, furniture, pots/pans, dishes).

#### Recommendations

- ◆ Sponsors should instruct host employers to include all information on the job agreement about specific deductions from paychecks or other expenses required of exchange visitors (e.g., uniforms), to avoid exchange visitors becoming confused or feeling taking advantage of with unclear deductions.
- ◆ Sponsors should educate exchange visitors on the sponsor’s role in the program; i.e., the service that the sponsor provides for the program fees they collect.
- ◆ The Department should explore with sponsors whether, and how, to control fees charged by third (or fourth) parties in countries where programs fees are the highest, such as China.
- ◆ Sponsors must ensure host employers understand that exchange visitors must receive their pay in accordance with Department of Labor regulations and cannot withhold pay because a Social Security number has not been issued.



**Table 3: Exchange Visitors Interviewed by Country, All Seasons**

Albania	1	Hungary	12	Peru	92
Argentina	12	India	1	Philippines	153
Australia	2	Ireland	21	Poland	47
Azerbaijan	2	Israel	2	Portugal	1
Belarus	1	Italy	1	Romania	90
Bosnia and Herzegovina	5	Jamaica	81	Russia	33
Brazil	8	Jordan	10	Serbia	50
Bulgaria	65	Kazakhstan	19	Singapore	1
Chile	14	Kosovo	3	Slovakia	29
China	96	Kuwait	1	Slovenia	1
Colombia	9	Kyrgyzstan	4	Spain	12
Costa Rica	2	Latvia	7	Taiwan	27
Croatia	6	Lithuania	20	Tajikistan	1
Czech Republic	33	Macedonia	6	Thailand	77
Dominican Republic	28	Malaysia	1	Turkey	106
Ecuador	24	Mexico	56	Turkmenistan	1
Egypt	1	Moldova	15	Ukraine	50
France	1	Mongolia	19	United Kingdom	24
Germany	1	Montenegro	7	Uzbekistan	10
Ghana	4	New Zealand	2	Vietnam	3
Guinea	1	Nigeria	2	<b>Total</b>	<b>1,414</b>

## Orientations

### *Pre-Departure Orientations*

#### *Best Practices*

Per 22 §CFR 62.32(e) of the EVP regulations, sponsors must provide exchange visitors with information related to the Summer Work Travel program, important contact information, instructions on steps to take once they arrive in the United States, recommendations on how to experience American culture while on program, and a number of other important details prior to their arrival in the United States. Pre-departure orientations are essential in providing exchange visitors with accurate information and properly preparing them for their program experiences. Sponsors and foreign entities typically provide pre-departure orientations in-person

in small or larger group settings, on-line or by providing written orientation materials to exchange visitors. In-person orientations allowed the exchange visitors to better absorb information on what to expect, ask questions, voice any concerns, and possibly even meet sponsor representatives who may have attended.

During field site reviews, 1,014 (91.4%) of exchange visitors reported receiving pre-departure orientations, the same rate reported in 2015. Of those, 729 (71.9%) said they attended an in-person orientation (often as part of a group orientation), an increase of 37% from 2015. For those who received an orientation by other means, 182 (17.9%) said they received orientation materials by email, and 256 (25.2%) said they completed an online orientation.

### *Challenges*

Monitors asked exchange visitors whether they found the pre-departure orientation helpful. Among those who received a pre-departure orientation, 42 (4.1%) said it was not helpful. Some of these exchange visitors explained that they already knew the information (having learned it elsewhere, such as on the Internet or from friends/relatives), but others said the information they received was minimal and/or too general.

#### Recommendations

- ◆ Sponsors should ensure that exchange visitors receive information about the specific area to which they will go for their job placement, rather than only general information about the United States.

### ***Post-Arrival Orientations***

#### *Best Practices*

Post-arrival orientations increase exchange visitors' knowledge of the local area and help them feel comfortable in a new environment. Through post-arrival orientations, host employers or other parties (such as local community support groups) can supply exchange visitors with information about resources in the area (e.g., banks, grocery stores, department stores, medical clinics, potential housing), and local sites to visit (e.g., museums, parks, local sightseeing destinations).

This summer, 803 (72.3%) of exchange visitors reported receiving a post-arrival orientation including information on the local community, and of those 699 (87.0%) received the orientation from their host employers. This was a 19% increase over the rate in summer 2015, another indicator of increased involvement by host employers in assisting exchange visitors.

#### *Challenges*

Many host employers limit post-arrival orientations to instructing exchange visitors on their job duties and host employer rules. In many cases, exchange visitors said they researched the communities on their own.

### Recommendations

- ◆ Sponsors should encourage host employers to include information on the local area for exchange visitors during their standard job orientations.

## **Job Placement Issues**

### *Best Practices*

Job agreements should contain accurate and realistic information about the terms and conditions of the exchange visitors' job placements. Many of the complaints that the Department receives involve cases where the job conditions (e.g., number of hours per week, the pay per hour, the position description, overtime hours available) did not meet the information they received about the job in advance. However, the vast majority of exchange visitors interviewed, 1,051 (94.7%) said that the hours they received matched or exceeded the hours expected on the job agreement. Around the same number, 1,053 (94.7%), did not report any problems in receiving their paychecks.

### *Challenges*

In several cases, exchange visitors reported that they performed duties or worked schedules that did not correspond to their job agreements. Occasionally, exchange visitors were promised one schedule and set of duties only to arrive and find that they would receive fewer hours and a different position (see the Hours section for more on hours issues). From past complaints about placement issues, OPA has also observed cases of host employers that move to another sponsor after the current sponsor decided against working with that employer ("sponsor hopping").

Despite the increase in pre-placed (i.e., placed with a host employer by the sponsor directly in advance) exchange visitors, only 171 (15.4%) found their positions through their sponsors. Exchange visitors mostly found their positions through the foreign entity (516, or 46.5%), via a referral from friend or family member (164, or 14.8%), on their own (90, or 8.1%), or through a jobs website (37, or 3.3%).

### Recommendations

- ◆ Sponsors should ensure that all the information about the job and housing conditions are included on the job and housing agreements, and that host employers honor these agreements by making adjustments as necessary (e.g., to increase weekly hours early in the summer season).
- ◆ Sponsors should share information among each other regarding issues they have experienced with host employers, especially if a sponsor has decided to stop placing with a host employer.

## Hours

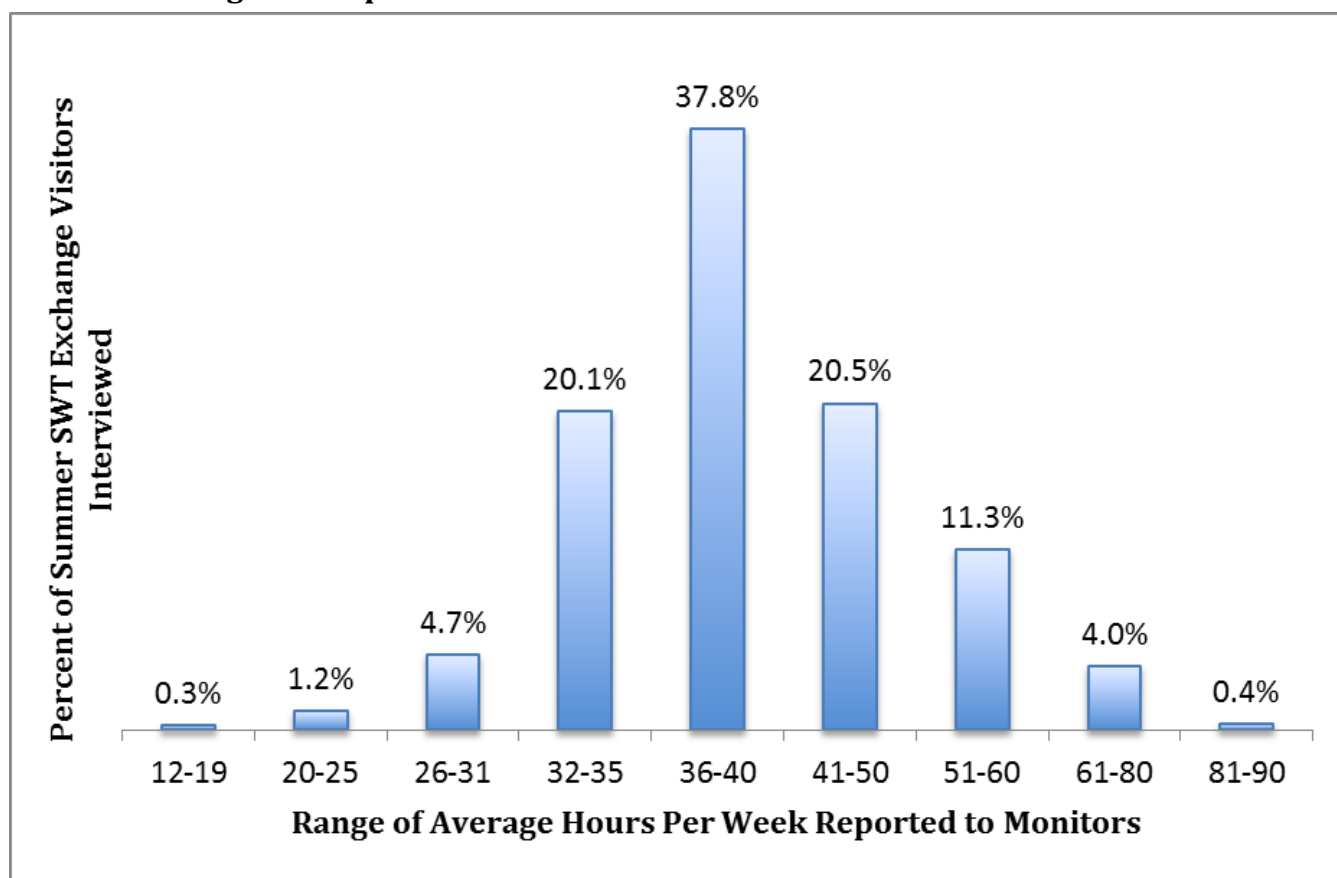
### *Best Practices*

The number of hours exchange visitors work has a tremendous impact on the quality, enjoyment and affordability of their program. Host employers should make good faith efforts to provide exchange visitors the number of hours of paid employment per week as identified on their job offers. Exchange visitors should also be paid in accordance with applicable State or Federal laws.

Monitors interviewed several host employers whose Human Resources (HR) departments systematically checked, with department managers, whether exchange visitors received at least 35 hours per week. If their hours were too low, the HR managers either talked with their department managers to see if more hours could be offered, or if they could move to another department that could provide more hours. Larger host employers, such as amusement parks, often offer participants an option for a regular “second job” in another department if they want more hours. Some host employers reduce exchange visitors’ rent to compensate for the low number of hours during periods of slow business, and one host employer even paid exchange visitors for hours not worked to meet the minimum on the job agreement.

As noted in the Job Placement section, 94.7% said they received a number of weekly hours that met or exceed the number of hours stated in their job agreements. Chart 1 contains a breakdown of the weekly hours ranges reported by exchange visitors that shows that the majority (57.9%) work 32-40 hours per week, and nearly a third (31.8%) work 41-60 hours per week:

**Chart 1: Average Hours per Week**



Naturally, those who received more hours than the number on the job agreement (163, or 14.7%) welcomed the additional hours. Surprisingly, the high number of hours did not impact their participation in cultural activities. Of the 396 (35.7%) exchange visitors who reported working an average of more than 40 hours per week, 356 (89.9%) also said they had participated in cultural activities outside of work, a slightly higher rate than the 87.3% reported generally (see the Cultural Activities section).

### *Challenges*

Complaints about low hours are consistently the most often complaints received by the Department, particularly in the beginning of the season (i.e., June for the summer, or December for the winter), before the tourism season really begins to pick up. Exchange visitors expressed concerns about inconsistencies in the number of hours promised in their job offers, compared to the number of hours they received from host employers.

Among those 96 (8.6%) exchange visitors who received fewer hours than the number on their job agreements, some expressed worries about not earning enough to pay their program expenses. Some of these exchange visitors complained that their host employers were inflexible with the schedule or had hired too many other exchange visitors. Others said their sponsors were slow to address the situation when the exchange visitors reached out for assistance.

Monitors learned of a few occurrences of exchange visitors not being paid for the correct numbers of hours worked, as well as host employers who had not paid overtime. Overtime pay exemptions for certain businesses in state laws caused confusion for exchange visitors who expected to receive one-and-a-half times their pay for overtime hours regardless of location or business.

In camps, SWT exchange visitors working in the kitchens reported that the length of their day at camp ranged from 10-12 hours but included only eight hours of actual time working. They had one to two hours of break time between meals, but many said they spent this time relaxing in their housing or with each other rather than participating in any camp activities or leaving the camp. At some camps, exchange visitors said they only received one day off each week, with several half-days during the week, which limited their ability to visit places off camp grounds.

#### Recommendations

- ◆ The Department should further review the issue of “fixed schedules” during future field site reviews to examine ways host employers handle scheduling exchange visitors.
- ◆ Sponsors should ensure host employers provide at least one full day off each week to exchange visitors.
- ◆ Sponsors should ensure host employers have sufficient accounting systems for tracking hours worked and providing pay period statements to exchange visitors.

- ◆ Sponsors should ensure that exchange visitors receive information on overtime pay rules, including seasonal overtime pay exemptions, in either pre-departure or post-arrival orientations.

## Second Jobs

### *Best Practices*

In 2016, the number of exchange visitors reporting second jobs remained steady at 13.7% percent (152 of 1,110 total exchange visitors), almost exactly the 13.2% rate reported in 2015. Areas with the largest concentration of exchange visitors working second jobs include Pigeon Forge/Gatlinburg, Tennessee; Port Aransas, Texas; and Boothbay Harbor, Maine. This year, monitors also asked exchange visitors who did not have a second job whether they were interested or applying for a second job: 97 exchange visitors (8.7%) said yes.

Monitors learned of host employers that provided more hours to exchange visitors who requested them or provided second jobs on-site. Some host employers reached out to other host employers in the area when the exchange visitors requested more hours. Some host employers notified sponsors early about exchange visitors who they knew were seeking second jobs, allowing sponsors to reach out to them in advance. When sponsors maintained a roster of second job options, they could quickly assist exchange visitors in obtaining properly vetted second jobs before they sought un-vetted second jobs on their own.

### *Challenges*

Vetting and authorization of any and all employment is a regulatory requirement of sponsors. One goal of strong sponsor engagement with exchange visitors is to lower the number of unreported second jobs. Of the 152 exchange visitors reporting second jobs, 60 (39.5%) had not reported the job to their sponsor; a substantial decrease from the 48.8% unreported second jobs rate found in summer 2015.

However, that still means that about two in five second jobs go unreported – and un-vetted. When monitors asked exchange visitors why they had not reported their second jobs to their sponsors, exchange visitors usually provided reasons such as:

- Not knowing they were required to report the job.
- Not believing it was a big deal.
- Not wanting to obtain the paperwork because the process was complicated and lengthy.
- Not feeling like making the effort.

Sixty-eight of those who had a second job (44.7%) told monitors they had to obtain the vetting documentation themselves to provide to the sponsor, adding to the burden of reporting the job. Exchange visitors may also try to avoid the fee of \$50 or \$100 that some sponsors charge (or at least warn exchange visitors of) to cover the administrative cost of vetting additional jobs. Even the worry of not receiving approval for the second job can be enough, since some exchange visitors

told monitors they felt compelled to find a second job in order to repay loans taken to pay the program fees or make enough money for excursions, post-program travel, or leisure activities.

#### Recommendations

- ♦ The Department should conduct more site visits to host employers providing second jobs, particularly those who hired exchange visitors who have not reported the second jobs to their sponsors.
- ♦ The Department should encourage sponsors to share information among each other regarding issues they have experienced with prior host employers, especially if a sponsor has decided to stop placing with an host employer.
- ♦ Sponsors must stress the importance of reporting second jobs to the exchange visitors and host employers. However, sponsors should ensure that they do not scare exchange visitors from reporting second jobs due to fears that they will not have their second job requests approved or will be sent home for seeking a second job.

## **Housing**

### *Best Practices*

In 2016 it was evident that host employers and sponsors were more involved in assisting exchange visitors with housing. Pre-arranged housing eases the arrival process, limits the stress of the search for housing, and prevents the occasional scams from fraudulent ads on the Internet. Pre-arranged housing for exchange visitors increased from 73% in 2015 compared to 82% in 2016 (914 of 1,110). Of those 914 whose housing was pre-arranged, 639 (69.9%) said their housing was pre-arranged by their host employers, and 1138 (12.9%) said it was pre-arranged by their sponsors.

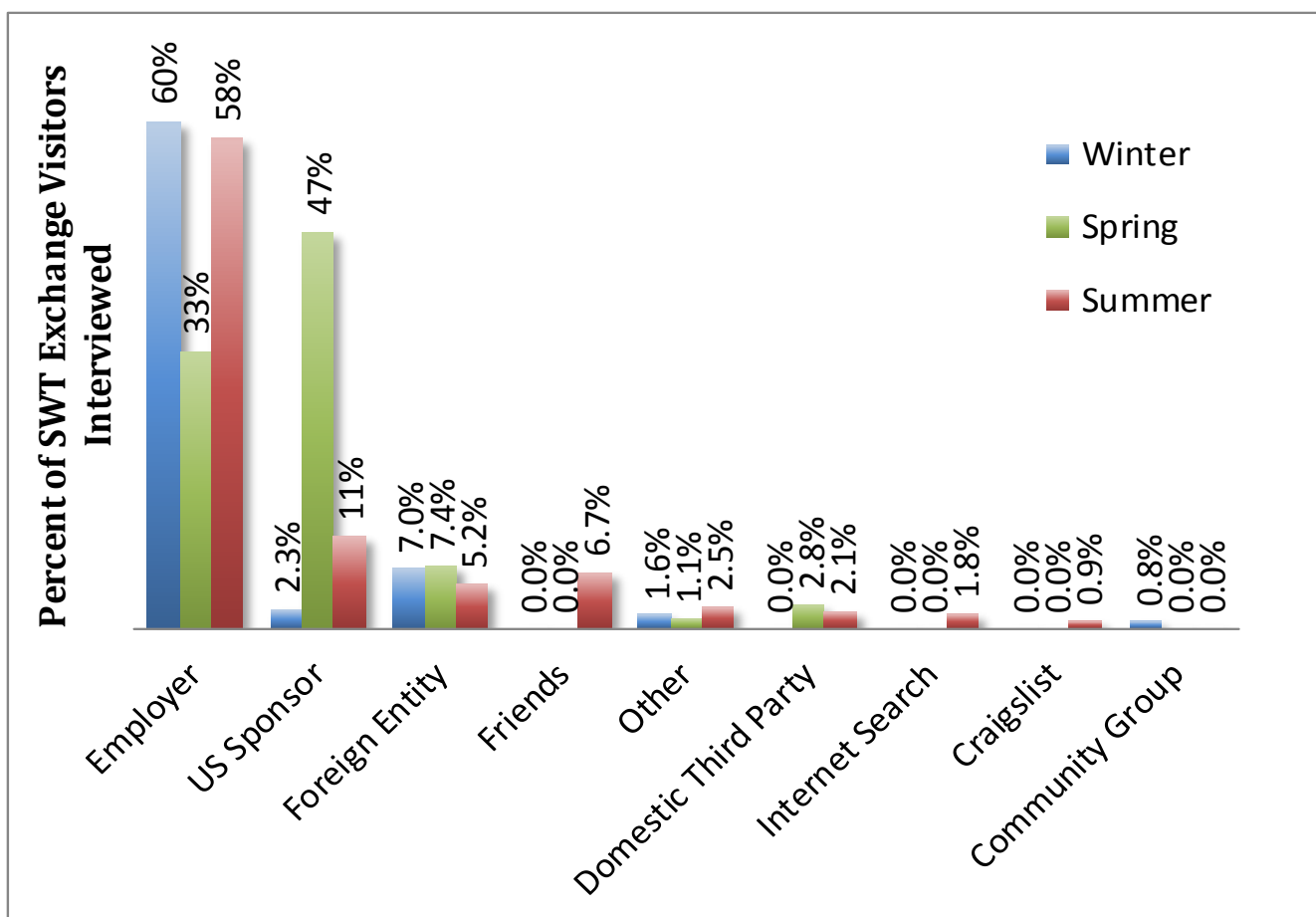
Some sponsors went above and beyond the minimum regulatory standard for housing, providing clear information about housing in orientation materials (including photos, room dimensions, and number of roommates), access to a cooking facility, proximity to host employers and shopping centers, and wireless internet connection.

Monitors reported that some hotels and resorts offered free accommodations for exchange visitors upon arrival in the United States until they could find permanent housing. Additionally, some host employers—if they could not arrange housing themselves—helped exchange visitors connect with local citizens that could provide good housing, or even serve as host families.

One monitor noted that a particular host employer was “very hands on with housing” and ‘arranged to pull old furniture out...and install new bunk bed sets and furniture in the rooms.’ In many cases, when the host employers provided housing for the exchange visitors, they also arranged for transportation as well. Certain host employers – mostly hotels – would actually arrange for exchange visitors to live on the premises, ensuring that they didn’t have to travel for work, and giving them more time to relax and use the hotel shuttle to engage in cultural activities.



Chart 2: Source of Pre-Arranged Housing



### Challenges

Monitors continued to report issues with housing due to lack of sponsor support, shortage of suitable and affordable housing, pressure to maintain low rent, and issues of transportation, and long distances from work sites. The number of exchange visitors happy or satisfied with housing decreased by 3.6% from the rate reported in 2015. In some instances, exchange visitors arrived in the United States to find that the housing options listed on their pre-departure documents were unavailable or at capacity.

Even in pre-arranged housing there were complaints about the quality, price, or suitability of their housing. This summer, exchange visitors continued to report issues with housing such as a lack of kitchens for cooking, high rent deductions from paychecks, bed bug problems, scary neighborhoods around the housing, high costs, and crowded living arrangements. Many such complaints resulted from unmet expectations of what would be included with the housing, such as furniture, kitchen equipment, and Internet. Monitors asked if they shared a bed, and of the 199 who did (17.9%), most had done so voluntarily (e.g., sharing a low-cost motel room with two beds and four people).<sup>11</sup> Some complained that having to share beds and bathrooms with others was frustrating. While exchange visitors had issues with the costs of some housing, there seemed to be a decrease in the number of complaints surrounding landlords refusing to refund deposits or deducting costs.



Many sponsors provided assistance for self-placed housing. However, exchange visitors stated their online housing resources could be outdated and unhelpful; that it was much easier for

them to find housing on their own. The 183 (16.5%) of all exchange visitors who arranged housing themselves turned to friends, the Internet, and Craigslist. Self-arranged housing could also be far from job placements, unsuitable, expensive, or a combination of all. Some exchange visitors said they selected housing in unsafe neighborhoods because they did not know enough about the area or could not find cheaper housing, or did not receive assistance in finding housing in safer neighborhoods.

#### Recommendations

- ◆ Host employers should help arrange housing before exchange visitors arrive, thus lowering the burden on the exchange visitors that are unfamiliar with the area seeking short-term rents.
- ◆ Sponsors must consider the availability of suitable, affordable housing (e.g., that meets local codes and ordinances) and reliable, affordable transportation to and from work when making job placements. This is especially important in relation to ensuring that self-arranged housing is up-to-par.
- ◆ Sponsors must always review housing/transport information provided to visitors to ensure accuracy of transport possibilities and that visitors understand costs of items they may need to purchase (bikes, air mattress, vacuum cleaner), and to make visitors aware that they should get in writing the conditions of housing, which was not adhered to in all cases.

## **Transportation**

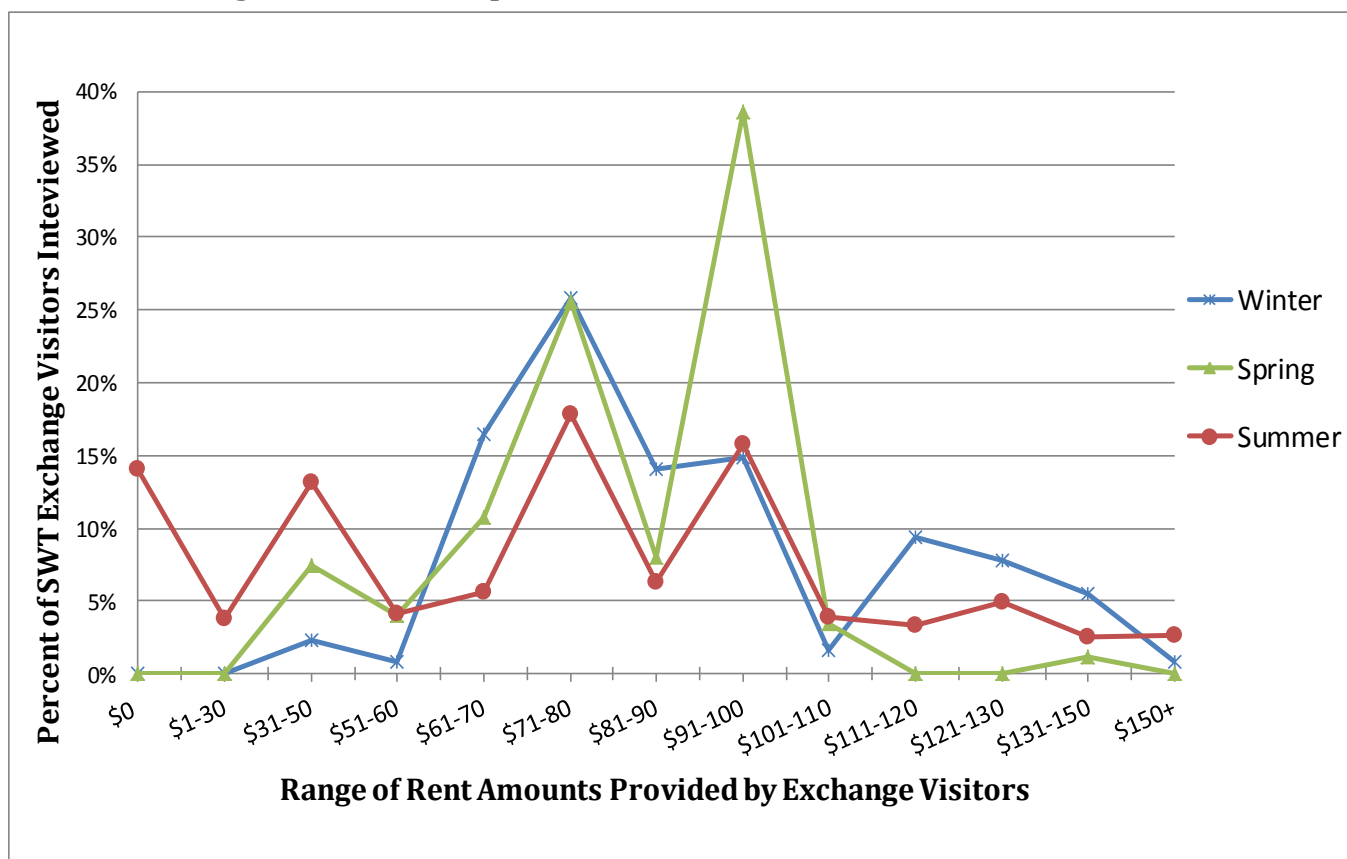
### *Best Practice*

The majority of exchange visitors interviewed said they commuted to work by walking (625, or 56.3%) or riding a bike (197, or 17.7%). For the remainder, 176 (15.9%) of exchange visitors took a shuttle, 103 (9.3%) took a bus, and 84 (7.6%) carpooled. Some of those who carpooled rode with coworkers and/or managers.

The data showed a 25% increase from last year in the number of exchange visitors who reported taking a shuttle or carpooling to work. Given that the majority of exchange visitor injuries and fatalities result from being struck by a car while walking or biking, the increased use of other means of transportation is a positive trend towards greater exchange visitor safety. This trend also indicates greater involvement by host employers in arranging transportation for the exchange visitors.

Some host employers go above and beyond what is expected. One example of that was when management of an amusement park in Texas not only provided shuttles to and from their work sites, they also coordinated with a local ride sharing company to provide additional options. In another example, when a manager noticed that many J-1 exchange visitors would have shifts

**Chart 3: Average Rent Amounts per Season**



that ended fairly late, he created a corporate Uber account that they could use through supervisors to request a ride home if they missed the last shuttle. Further, he said that most staff is more than willing to give rides to the J-1s if they need one.

### *Challenges*

Exchange visitors who reported having problems with transportation cited situations including: long commutes (40 minutes to 1.5 hours, generally), a lack of bus or shuttle options, unreliable bus/shuttle service with long wait times, no ability to go places such as downtown, and walking/biking through dangerous neighborhoods. Areas with high costs of living typically lead to high costs of transportation for exchange visitors. Limited supplies of affordable housing located far from the work sites caused increased transportation expenses for exchange visitors and strained their finances. Exchange visitors in small towns, isolated or rural locations had limited and/or infrequent means of transportation, thus experienced limited access to cultural activities.

The most common problem exchange visitors reported with transportation was limited scheduling of bus services, especially during the evenings and weekends. Many exchange visitors spend hours of each work day waiting for a bus or a host employer shuttle. In some instances, exchange visitors had to stand or sit on the floor of transportation vehicles due to lack of space. While free shuttles and other forms of transportation are a clear benefit, they must not be at the expense of exchange visitors' safety.

### Recommendations

- ◆ Sponsors and host employers must review housing and transportation information provided to visitors to ensure the accuracy of transportation possibilities, including: the distance between locations (e.g., housing to host site), the times transportation options are available, and the costs of transportation.
- ◆ Sponsors must ensure their exchange visitors are fully aware of safer transportation options. Many exchange visitors were not aware of the full extent of their options to get around, and chose instead to walk or ride their bikes in dangerous areas.
- ◆ Sponsors should work with host employers to ensure that there are adequate transportation options to and from work as well as for cultural activities. For certain areas, sponsors should work with the community to identify and/or arrange alternate, safe forms of transportation, either through host employers or city transportation authorities. Sponsors should collaborate to identify creative transportation solutions.

## **English Skills**

### *Best Practices*

Of the 1,033 exchange visitors whose first language was not English,<sup>12</sup> 939 (90.9%) said they had a chance to practice their English in the workplace. These exchange visitors were not limited to those positions with a lot of customer interaction (e.g., cashiers, front desk staff, food servers, lifeguards, ride and game attendants at amusement parks) and included a diverse spread of exchange visitors in more back-of-the-house positions such as housekeepers, cooks, dishwashers, and bussers.

### *Challenges*

Monitors continued to encounter exchange visitors who seemed to lack sufficient proficiency in English for the SWT program. Monitors particularly noted weak English ability among exchange visitors from China, as well as from Taiwan and Thailand. Monitors reported that they could not complete interviews with some exchange visitors who couldn't understand and/or answer the questions.

Some host employers in Colorado, North Carolina, and California said that they would like to take a greater role in the selection and interview process in order to truly get a sense of the English proficiency of many of the exchange visitors. Some of these host employers suspected that the exchange visitors received help behind the scenes or memorized canned answers during the online interviews (i.e., via Skype). Once the exchange visitors began working, their practical English level was much lower than the host employer expected. Many of them had to rely on translator apps on their smart phones or ask their friends to translate on their behalf. A hardware store had difficulty getting exchange visitors to learn the names of products to be able to answer questions.

Ninety-four (9.0%) of exchange visitors said they did not get to practice their English while working, and 62 of those (66.0%) were working as housekeepers. Many said they only spoke with their boss when not speaking in their native language with friends. Of those 62 housekeepers who said they did not have a chance to practice English at work, 41 (66.1%) also said they usually worked alone.

#### Recommendations

- ◆ Sponsors should review their procedures for verifying proficiency in conversational English and reading comprehension through either recognized language test administered by academic institutions or English language schools or through the required documented interviews. 22 CFR §62.32(d)(2).
- ◆ Sponsors should encourage host employers to interview exchange visitors as well to ensure the host employer is comfortable that the exchange visitors have sufficient English proficiency for the position.
- ◆ Sponsors should ensure that native-English speakers conduct oral interviews in conjunction with recognized and approved language testing instruments and/or standardized rubrics for language assessment.

## **Cultural Activities**

### *Best Practices*

The foundation of the SWT program is built around the cornerstones of education and cultural activities. What separates the SWT program from other work visa programs is that this is a cultural exchange program with a work component. Per 22 CFR §62.32, sponsors must ensure all SWT exchange visitors have opportunities to interact regularly with U.S. citizens and experience American culture while on program.

Cultural activities fall into three categories: sponsor-arranged, host-arranged, and independently-arranged.

Of the 969 (87.3%) exchange visitors who participated in activities outside of work, most exchange visitors, 734 (75.7%) arranged activities on their own or with friends. Sponsor-arranged activities did not occur as often, perhaps due to a lack of local sponsor representatives in certain areas. But when sponsors offer activities exchange visitors do take the opportunity to meet with sponsors face-to-face and see other exchange visitors in the area. One interesting trend is a growing interest in volunteering and civic engagement as a way to become involved in the community and experience American culture.

Due to the nature of camp environments, exchange visitors placed at camps generally had many host-planned events and activities at their disposal, both on-site and near to the camp.

### *Challenges*

Monitors found that most cultural activities were organized by participants themselves or with

Common examples of cultural activities provided by exchange visitors and host employers during interviews with monitors:

- Amusement parks
- Baseball/basketball/soccer/hockey games
- Boating
- Bonfires
- Brewery tours
- Civil War re-enactments
- Company factory tours
- Concerts
- Cookouts and barbecues
- Day trips to cities or parks
- Fishing
- Golfing
- Hiking and camping
- Holiday parties
- International meal nights on-site
- Kayaking/canoeing
- Movie nights
- Museum visits
- Paintball games
- Picnics
- Pool parties
- Potluck dinners
- Rafting
- Restaurant meals
- Shopping
- Sightseeing tours
- Swimming at beaches/lakes/ivers
- Zip lining

friends. When asked if they received enough information about cultural activities in the area, only 862 (77.7%) replied yes. Monitors also found that many exchange visitors may work or live in groups of friends from their home city or region, so they mostly interacted with their compatriots.

In order for exchange visitors to engage in these fun and culturally rich activities, it is important for sponsors and host employers to allow for flexibility in the work schedule so that exchange visitors have the time to participate in these experiences. Sponsors should make a concerted effort to assess cultural activity engagement during the monthly check-ins with exchange visitors.

#### Recommendations

- ◆ Sponsors should explore with host employers many ways to assist exchange visitors with locating and enjoying cultural activities.
- ◆ Host employers should be encouraged to be mindful of exchange visitors' schedules to allow them enough time off to enjoy cultural activities.
- ◆ Sponsors should also consider diversifying the nationalities and primary languages when placing many exchange visitors with one host employer, to allow for greater interaction of cultures.
- ◆ Sponsors and host employers should provide pre- and post- departure information that accurately depict and explain the local environment and available activities (e.g., rural area with limited activities, urban area with many activities, economical activities, and activities requiring car travel).

## Housekeeping Placements

### *Best Practices*

This year, 361 of all exchange visitors interviewed (32.9%) worked in housekeeping positions. While many said the work is difficult, the majority (229, or 63.6%) said they thought housekeeping is a good position for program exchange visitors. The rate of housekeepers who said they were happy or somewhat happy with their program experiences (97.7%) was equivalent with the rate for all exchange visitors (97.2%).<sup>13</sup> Additionally, housekeepers were more likely to have participated in cultural activities: 327 of all housekeepers (90.8%) said they had participated in cultural activities outside of work, versus the 87.2% rate for all exchange visitors interviewed.

Monitors interviewed several host employers that instituted well-received practices. A bed and breakfast owner in Maine rotated exchange visitors through different positions (housekeeping, hostess, food runner and waitress), provided free lodging and invited exchange visitors to his home for an international dinner. A lodge manager in Colorado offered worksite overtime and a cost combo of three meals per day and housing for \$120 per month (\$100.00 if exchange visitors are returnees). And, a hotel in Michigan arranged housing for all their exchange visitors, rotated them into interactive positions, such as front desk clerk, and organizes cultural activities. In Charlotte, North Carolina, monitors encountered exchange visitors who felt they were learning about the hotel business, since housekeeping gave them the valuable “back of the house” perspective.

### *Challenges*

Housekeeping positions continue to be controversial job placements due to concerns that these positions may not provide a sufficient cultural exchange experience. Still as many as 125 (34.4%) of housekeepers interviewed did not think the job was good for exchange visitors, providing reasons such as:

- Lack of interaction with others;
- Inability to rotate into other positions;
- Stress due to unrealistic time limits to clean room;
- Fatigue due to the physical nature of the position.

Half of all housekeepers interviewed (181 of 361, or 50.3%) said they worked alone; the rest worked in pairs or in a team. Housekeepers, particularly those working alone, were far more likely to say they did not have the opportunity to practice English at work.

These findings do not necessarily indicate that housekeeping placements cannot meet the purpose of the SWT program. The findings described above indicate some of the optimal placement conditions for housekeeping positions: working with others, having an option to rotate to other job duties, having a chance to practice English, and being able to participate in cultural activities.

Additionally, the housekeeping sector is widely diverse: 153 (42.5%) of housekeepers worked at resorts, 148 (41.1%) in hotels, 46 (12.8%) in motels. The remaining 14 (3.9%) worked in housekeeping at camps, apartments/condos, and in private homes for vacation rental cleaning services. According to the interview responses, the housekeeping experiences were just as positive – or negative – across all of these types of workplaces.

### Recommendations

- ◆ Sponsors should ensure housekeeping placements are structured to meet the purpose of the SWT program. Host employers should be firmly encouraged to schedule exchange visitors in teams, to work with others who don't speak the same primary language, and provide cultural activities to make up for any lack of communication with guests.

## **Lifeguard Placements**

### *Best Practices*

Monitors interviewed 88 exchange visitors working as lifeguards (8% of all exchange visitors interviewed). Ninety percent of lifeguards worked in four types of workplaces:<sup>14</sup>

- 36 (40.9%) at apartment complexes (mostly through pool management companies);
- 17 (19.3%) at recreational centers/community pools (either directly hired or through a pool management company);
- 13 (14.8%) at amusement parks; and
- 13 (14.8%) at resorts.

Most lifeguards (53, or 60.2%) said they were never the only lifeguards on duty, and about as many (54, or 61.4%) had a supervisor on-site. Nearly all (86, or 97.7%) passed a swim test either in their home country (56, or 63.6%) or once in the United States (30, or 34.1%). For the 80 (90.9%) who were CPR certified, most obtained their certification in the United States (60, or 69.3%) rather than in their home country (19, or 21.6%).

### *Challenges*

There is a lot of workplace uncertainty with lifeguard assignments. Only 47 (53.4%) knew their pool assignments prior to arriving in the United States; 23 of those 39 who did not know their assignments before arrival (59.0%) worked at apartment complex pools. The degree of uncertainty seems related to the constant shifting of pool management contracts. During Department verification checks on lifeguard placements at apartment complexes prior to the start of the summer season, the Department learned of 51 properties listed in SEVIS where the property managers had not actually finalized a contract with the pool management company for the upcoming season. The property managers had decided to work with another pool management company, and the sponsor had not yet been informed of the change.

Complaints from lifeguards usually involved not having a backup – 44.2% of the 77 lifeguards who said they sometimes or often worked alone were placed at apartment complexes. For some companies, lifeguards rotated pool assignments weekly, and learned their next day's assignment with only a few days' or even hours' notice. The uncertain scheduling impacted their ability to schedule time off for cultural activities. For one company in eastern Maryland, the exchange visitors were required to clock out during bad weather but could not leave the pool area.



Recommendations

- ◆ Sponsors must ensure to verify all contracts with pool management companies in the course of vetting lifeguard job placements.
- ◆ Sponsors should work with pool management companies to establish regular scheduling and sufficient backup support from other lifeguards when needed.

**Staffing Agencies***Best Practices*

Staffing agencies account for a sizeable number of housekeeping placements. The term “staffing agency” refers to any company that hires exchange visitors but assigns them to work at another work site other than their own property. For example, exchange visitors placed at a staffing agency often work as housekeepers at a hotel not owned or managed by the staffing agency. Staffing agency placements need to adhere to the requirements at 22 §CFR 62.32(g); otherwise, the staffing agency serves only as a middle-man between the work site and the sponsor. Field site reviews at staffing agency placements consistently show wide variety in the involvement of the staffing agency itself in the exchange visitors’ jobs at their actual work site. Staffing agencies must meet the following requirements to stay within the EVP regulations (see box at right).

Per the Federal regulations at 22 §CFR 62.32(g):  
 (6) Sponsors may not place exchange visitors with staffing agencies unless the placements meet the following three criteria:  
 (i) Exchange visitors must be employees of and paid by the staffing agencies;  
 (ii) Staffing agencies must provide full-time, primary, on-site supervision of the exchange visitors;  
 (iii) Staffing agencies must effectively control the work sites, e.g., have hands-on management responsibility for the exchange visitors.

When conducting field site reviews, monitors also interviewed the work site managers for locations where exchange visitors worked for a staffing agency and asked questions that assessed the extent to which these placements adhered to the staffing agency regulations:

- 10 (66.7%) said the staffing agency paid the exchange visitors directly.
- 6 (40.0%) said the staffing agency had representatives spend more than 20 hours on-site.
- 6 (40.0%) said the staffing agency trained the exchange visitors.
- 6 (40.0%) said the staffing agency managed the exchange visitors’ schedules.

*Challenges*

Based on the monitors’ reports, some staffing agencies do not appear to fulfill the requirements of the EVP regulations. Given that staffing agency requirements are part of the program regulations, the above figures should be 100%. Additionally, monitors noted a few cases where staffing agencies did not provide the hours promised on the agreement due to lack of need by work sites.



### Recommendations

- ◆ Sponsors must ensure that staffing agency placements adhere to the regulatory requirements set forth in, 22 CFR §62.10 of the EVP regulations: “Sponsors are responsible for the effective administration of their exchange visitor program (s).”
- ◆ Even though staffing agencies may be contractually obligated to provide certain programmatic responsibilities on behalf of sponsors, sponsors must ensure the program is fully administered to the intent and spirit of the program.
- ◆ Sponsors, by proxy of staffing agencies, must ensure that any and all information notated in job agreements is upheld.

## **Program as Career Training**

### *Best Practices*

The SWT program is not intended to be any type of training or internship type program. Per the description of the purpose at 22 CFR §62.32(b), the program provides foreign college and university students to work “in jobs that require minimal training and are seasonal or temporary in nature in order to earn funds to help defray a portion of their expenses.” Still, some exchange visitors told monitors that they felt they had gained valuable job experience during their time on the program. A few used the program to serve as an internship or to fulfill work experience requirements for their university/college studies. This was particularly the case for exchange visitors from the Philippines (see the section on findings from spring season monitoring).

One sponsor runs a training program for exchange visitors in Bozeman, Montana, on planning sales areas and dealing with difficult customers. Monitors in Charlotte, North Carolina learned that a major hotel worked with a university in Israel to provide an internship to students studying for a career in hospitality. The four exchange visitors applied through the “project director” at their university in Israel, and stayed in guest rooms while rotating through front-of-house and back-of-house positions. Their living expenses were covered by the subsidies provided to the program by donors.

Some exchange visitors told monitors that the program gave them the opportunity to learn about living on their own. In Port Aransas, Texas, an exchange visitor said the program has been a good opportunity to “learn new things, such as how to live and work far away from home.” Another exchange visitor said she had a “feeling of independence and freedom” being on the program. Additionally, the Jamaican exchange visitors interviewed at another Charlotte hotel said they felt housekeeping provided them with a “humbling experience” that they can do this kind of work.

### *Challenges*

The SWT program was not designed to serve as an internship, and as such the program regulations do not provide requirements to ensure that job placements provide specific training

like in the Intern and Trainee categories of the Exchange Visitor Program. Exchange visitors led to expect that they will gain extensive job experience may arrive to be dismayed that they are “only” working as housekeepers, cooks, dishwashers, etc. The most prominent example was reported in August by local South Carolina media, on the experience of an exchange visitor from the Philippines in Hilton Head, who felt deceived when she realized she would only work in the deli of a supermarket rather than the office “associate” training she expected.

Monitors reported some other examples of exchange visitors who viewed the SWT for its value on their resumes. In San Antonio, Texas, monitors met an exchange visitor from India who worried the hotel where he was placed would not provide a certificate of his experience there that he could show as evidence of his American work experience to future employers back home. Monitors also heard similar comments from exchange visitors at an Austin, Texas, hotel.

#### Recommendations

- ◆ Sponsors working with universities and/or host employers seeking to provide an internship-type program ensure that exchange visitors are given realistic expectations about the job experience they will receive in their placements as SWT exchange visitors.

## **Host Employer Involvement**

### *Best Practices*

This year’s monitoring found an increase in host employer involvement in arranging housing, transportation, and cultural activities. Even though this program is administered by the sponsors, the host employers are the entities that see the exchange visitors every day. Almost half of host employers interviewed (144, or 49.0%) stated that the reason they chose to host exchange visitors was to fill staffing needs for the season and/or a lack of available local hires. Many host employers also commented on their appreciation for exchange visitors’ work ethics: they work hard, do not often miss shifts, and are always eager for more hours. Nearly all host employers interviewed (275, or 93.5%) said they were happy with the exchange visitors working for them. Some host employers said that they preferred to hire returnees.

Many of the host employers have been hiring SWT exchange visitors for years and are well familiar with the program and the sponsors they work with to hire the exchange visitors. Of the 294 host employers interviewed, 71 (24.1%) had been hosting exchange visitors for 11 or more years, 78 (26.5%) for 6-10 years, and 82 (27.9%) for 2-5 years. Only 44 (15.0%) were in their first year of hosting SWT exchange visitors. Host employers are invested in ensuring that exchange visitors have an enjoyable summer and a successful program. Since exchange visitors are “at-will” employees, they cannot be prohibited from leaving their primary job placements if they find they are not receiving sufficient hours, are not treated well, or find the housing uncomfortable or unsafe. Furthermore, sponsors are required by regulations to assist exchange visitors who do decide to leave their original placements.

Many host employers did try to integrate exchange visitors into their regular operations to make

them feel more at home. One host employer made a note that he had the exchange visitors help him create a weekly promotional menu of food offerings from their home country. The exchange visitors had an opportunity to participate in cultural exchange, and the customers loved the menu. As a result, the corporate headquarters became interested in expanding the concept to other franchises.

### *Challenges*

While the increase in host employer involvement is encouraging, monitors also interviewed 61 (20.8%) host employers who said they were unaware of the purpose of the program. Summer monitors this year found that 477 (43.0%) exchange visitors did not participate in any host employer- or sponsor-arranged cultural activities. Some host employers may lack general knowledge about the program's purpose and a demonstrated lack of sponsor training or communication. Only 218 (74.1%) host employers provided an orientation about the local area in the initial job training.

#### Recommendations

- ◆ Host employers need to do a better job educating their staff about the J-1 program and even about the exchange visitors they are hiring. This education is for their benefit so they may maximize productivity and profitability.
- ◆ One host employer expressed that it would be nice to have the exchange visitor's contact information before their arrival, so that they can better communicate arrival times to exchange visitors, specifically in cases where the host employer has arranged to pick them up from the airport.

### **Sponsor/Host employer Relationships**

#### *Best Practices*

Frequent communication between sponsors and host employers is a key component for developing and maintaining a successful relationship and a positive program experience for exchange visitors. The SWT regulations obligate sponsors to place exchange visitors only with host employer who inform sponsors about their exchange visitors (see box at right). Even so, direct communication is essential to ensuring that host employers are invested in the program.

From the 294 host placement interviews, 225 (76.5%) host employers expressed an understanding of the purpose and objective of the program. Prior to the arrival of the exchange visitors, 207 (70.4%) said they communicated with the sponsor at least monthly, and 217 (73.8%) said they found the sponsors helpful. Nearly half of host employers (144, or 49.0%) said the sponsor had visited them at some point.

Another best practice is sponsors having local coordinators on the ground to provide support to the exchange visitor, host employer and community. In the spring and summer, two sponsors have local coordinators that work in large beach cities such as Ocean City, Maryland; Virginia Beach, VA; and Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, readily accessible to their host employers and

exchange visitors. A sponsor's local winter representative in New Mexico is available to the host employer and exchange visitors to assist with any issues and ensures effective coordination with their host employers.

### *Challenges*

Less than half of host employers (134, or 45.6%) said they had not received any sort of vetting or training by the sponsors prior to the start of this season. Only 194 (66.0%) said they had been informed about the regulations from the sponsor directly; the remainder learned of the regulations from the company's headquarters office or the foreign entity. Thirty-six (12.2%) said they had not been informed about the program regulations. These findings show a degree of space between the sponsors and the host employers where sponsors have not educated the host employers on the program goals and regulatory requirements.

The absence of a relationship between sponsor and host employer also brought into play third parties recruited by foreign entities who have brought the exchange visitor program in notoriety and disrepute – specifically, one domestic third party who has scammed money from exchange visitors, landlords, and others while placing exchange visitors in unsafe, substandard housing and unreliable transportation.

Monitors reported that a sponsor had not informed a host employer in Grand Marais, Minnesota of the program requirements and objectives in which it placed three exchange visitors at the host employer's lodge. The owners reported that they had recently purchased the business, and that the former proprietor had hired the exchange visitors. At the time of the monitoring, the new owners had yet to receive any contact from the sponsor, and they knew very little about the program.

In Florida, monitors identified a lack of oversight and guidance from sponsors. Many host employers have been using the Exchange Visitor Program for years but seem to have little understanding of its rules, regulations, and the Exchange Visitor Program categories (e.g., intern, trainee) with which host employers may also use to host other J-1 visa exchange visitors. When the team asked host employers if a sponsor had visited, most said they had not, but would welcome a visit by a representative.

Per the Federal regulations at 22 §CFR 62.32(o):

*Host employer cooperation.* Sponsors may place participants only with host employers that agree to:

- (1) Make good faith efforts to provide participants the number of hours of paid employment per week as identified on their job offers and agreed to when the sponsors vetted the jobs;
- (2) Pay eligible participants for overtime worked in accordance with applicable State or Federal law;
- (3) Notify sponsors promptly when participants arrive at the work sites to begin their programs; when there are any changes or deviations in the job placements during the participants' programs; when participants are not meeting the requirements of their job placements; or when participants leave their positions ahead of their planned departures;
- (4) Contact sponsors immediately in the event of any emergency involving participants or any situations that impact their health, safety, or welfare; and
- (5) In those instances when the employer provides housing or transportation, agree to provide suitable and acceptable accommodations and/or reliable, affordable, and convenient transportation.

### Recommendations

- ◆ Sponsors should be the primary point of contact with host employers and exchange visitors and maintain that relationship by continuous and open communication.

- ◆ Sponsors should train and educate host employers, and their staff about the J-1 Summer Work Travel program as well as the exchange visitors they are hiring.
- ◆ Sponsors and host employers should work together to identify safe and affordable housing and reliable, safe, and convenient transportation.
- ◆ Sponsor should only work with host employers that are invested in the program.
- ◆ Sponsors must quickly make contact with host employers when businesses change hands.
- ◆ OPA should follow up with sponsors where host employers have close relationships with the foreign entities that appear distance the sponsors from direct monitoring of exchange visitors' programs.
- ◆ Sponsors should visit host employers and liaise regularly with management, especially those who directly oversee the exchange visitors' work.

## Community Involvement

### *Best Practices*

Community Support Groups (CSGs), or International Student Outreach Programs (ISOPs), are a vital part of the SWT program and play a major role in strengthening and improving the SWT program. Some CSGs have been in existence for years (going by various names, but generally referred to as CSGs), while others recently formed within the last two years. CSGs serve coastal communities, ski areas, and rural areas with popular tourist sites. The goal of the CSGs is to welcome exchange visitors, ranging from a few hundred to a few thousand in their areas, and enhance exchange visitors' overall experience.

CSGs serve as local advocates for SWT program concerns and educate local businesses and municipalities on the purpose and goals of the program. Each CSG works to address systemic challenges (such as finding suitable housing, staying safe on the roads, and avoiding being targeted by criminals) unique to their areas. Many of the CSGs provide orientations to newly-arrived exchange visitors so that exchange visitors can become familiar with their surroundings, learn about resources available to them, plan cultural activities, distribute an exchange visitor handbook, and point them to CSG-run Facebook pages or websites that all exchange visitors can use to obtain and share valuable information.

CSGs assist sponsors in monitoring their exchange visitors and help exchange visitors become acclimated to their environment. They assist exchange visitors to find resources and support their local host employers in connecting with sponsors. Many sponsors have local coordinators active in the CSGs to answer questions from exchange visitors, host employers, and community members, as well as to remedy situations raised by the CSGs.

During this monitoring period, OPA's SWT staff (OPA-SWT) presented at 15 of the 22



Community Support Group Forums\* to educate the community on the Summer Work Travel program. The spring season field site visits were scheduled around nine forums: Galveston, Texas; Cape Cod, Massachusetts; Door County, Wisconsin; Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin; Ocean City, Maryland; Virginia Beach, Virginia; Outer Banks, North Carolina; Sandusky, Ohio; and Block Island, Rhode Island.

Another best practice is communicating and working together with sponsors and the Department of State on issues and situations to be aware of in their community so that proper guidance or action can be taken to protect the health, safety and welfare of exchange visitors.

### *Challenges*

In some cases, CSGs have positioned themselves as a resource over sponsors. CSGs have occasionally become involved in exchange visitors' disputes with host companies and landlords, where it was more appropriately the sponsors' responsibility to do so. These are cases where the CSGs focused on issues that the Department cannot regulate or oversee, such as: the high cost of food or rent in the area, or exchange visitors getting into accidents while driving during personal time.

In some areas, CSGs still lack support from their Chamber of Commerce or host employers to advocate for seasonal housing and safer modes of transportation. Other CSGs lack the funds necessary to provide informational resources to exchange visitors.

The Department encourages the development of local community groups that provide support to exchange visitors and identify issues and trends of concern. The active involvement of these groups supports the success of the Summer Work Travel program. The following locations have established a community presence:

- 1) Block Island, Rhode Island
- 2) Branson, Missouri
- 3) Cape Cod (incl. Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket), Massachusetts
- 4) Destin, Florida
- 5) Door County, Wisconsin
- 6) Galveston, Texas
- 7) Harrisburg, Pennsylvania
- 8) Hilton Head, South Carolina
- 9) Kittery, Maine/Portsmouth, New Hampshire
- 10) Lake Tahoe, California
- 11) Myrtle Beach, South Carolina
- 12) Ocean City, Maryland
- 13) Old Orchard Beach, Maine
- 14) Outer Banks, North Carolina
- 15) Panama City Beach, Florida
- 16) Park City, Utah
- 17) Put-in-Bay, Ohio
- 18) Sevier County, Tennessee.
- 19) Rehoboth Beach, Delaware
- 20) Sandusky, Ohio
- 21) Virginia Beach, Virginia
- 22) Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin

For a list of websites for each group, go to:

<https://j1visa.state.gov/summer-work-travel-community-support-groups/>

### Recommendations

- ♦ The Department should continue to engage with CSGs, connecting them with sponsors to facilitate close communication on issues and situations in those communities.
- ♦ Sponsors should actively participate in CSGs, and encourage host employers to attend the CSGs' committee meetings and annual forums.
- ♦ Sponsors should encourage exchange visitors to attend CSGs' local orientations and ensure that host employers allow exchange visitors time off to attend these

\* For a regularly updated list of upcoming community support group events, go to:

<https://j1visa.state.gov/events/>

events.

- ◆ Per the recommendation of many CSGs, sponsors should issue exchange visitors photo identification cards for exchange visitors to carry (including their names, countries, sponsor contact numbers, and insurance information) rather than their passports, to assist police and other officials in verifying their identity and obtaining contact info.
- ◆ The Department, sponsors, and community members should maintain and develop CSGs where there is an interest and need in the community.

## Returnees

### *Best Practices*

Of the summer season exchange visitors, 224 (20.5%) of the exchange visitors interviewed had participated in the program previously. For these returning exchange visitors:

- 188 (16.9%) were in their second time on the program.
- 33 (3.0%) were in their third time on the program.
- 7 (0.6%) were their fourth or greater time on the program.

Many of the host employers interviewed said they enjoyed having returnees come back to their business for another season. Returnees did not have to be trained as heavily, and many received a raise or even a supervisory position. In some cases, they paid lower rent for host employer-arranged housing. Additionally, since returnees arranged the placement themselves by contacting their former managers directly rather than through their sponsors, returnees paid less in program fees for the “self-arranged” rates that sponsors offer. Returnees paid on average only \$1,127 instead of the \$1,557 average reported by all exchange visitors.

Monitors have interviewed managers (this year and in past years) who were former SWT exchange visitors themselves. In two locations (one in Colorado, one in North Carolina), the primary supervisor had met his current wife while working at the same host employer several years earlier – certainly two examples of the long-lasting relationships formed on the SWT program.

### *Challenges*

Returnees tend to exhibit less adherence to program rules, such as leaving placements without seeking sponsor approval first, or working unreported second jobs not vetted by the sponsor – among the 38 who were working unreported second jobs, 15 (39.5%) were returnees. Additionally, many returnees present a risk of not complying with the terms of their J-1 visas by not returning to their home countries at the end of their programs. This is particularly a concern with those recent graduates or soon-to-be graduates.

### Recommendations

- ◆ Sponsors must monitor closely returnees who show a tendency to disregard the SWT program rules.

## CAMP ENVIRONMENT

Starting in 2015, monitors began to ask Camp Counselor exchange visitors additional, specific questions about their exchange experience. This summer, monitors used a separate exchange visitor questionnaire for SWT and Camp Counselor exchange visitors. The Camp Counselor interview questionnaire included questions to assist with the ongoing Camp Counselor category review led by the ECA/EC Policy office. Monitors continued to use the standard Host Placement questionnaire with a supplemental set of questions for camp host employers. Monitors visiting camps selected for the Camp Counselor category review used an altogether different set of questions for interviews with camp directors.

SWT program participants usually work at camps as camp support staff, often times in the kitchen preparing meals daily for campers, in facility maintenance or grounds-keeping. While some SWT exchange visitors worked directly for the camp, many of the other exchange visitors at camps worked for staffing agencies that managed the kitchens and cafeteria on behalf of the camp. At some camps, the exchange visitors who worked as kitchen staff prepared food for hundreds of campers daily, for all three meals of the day. Exchange visitors in the Camp Counselor program have an entirely different role. Camp Counselor program exchange visitors primarily serve as “counselors per se, who have direct responsibility for the supervision of groups of American youth and their camp activities. These counselors may also have to perform some non-counseling chores, but may not “serve as administrative personnel, cooks, or menial laborers, such as dishwashers or janitors.” SWT exchange visitors also work in Camps and may be in contact with the American youth and with other camp staff while performing their job duties.

Monitors interviewed 84 SWT exchange visitors placed in camp environments, and 168 Camp Counselor program exchange visitors. The details

**Table 4: Countries of Exchange Visitors Interviewed at Camps**

Country of Exchange Visitors	Camp Counselors	SWT Exchange Visitors
Argentina	2	
Australia	19	
Austria	1	
Brazil	1	
Colombia		2
Costa Rica	2	
Czech Republic	1	2
Dominican Republic		5
France	2	1
Germany	2	
Hungary		3
Ireland	10	
Israel	2	
Jamaica		2
Mexico	1	34
New Zealand	10	
Poland	1	19
Slovakia		4
Spain	1	
Turkey		3
Ukraine		1
United Kingdom	113	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>86</b>



below first address the SWT exchange visitors at camps and how they compare with SWT exchange visitors in non-camp environments, and then describe findings for Camp Counselor exchange visitors separately.

### ***SWT Exchange Visitors at Camps***

#### ***Best Practices***

For the 86 SWT exchange visitors working at a camp, the overall happy/somewhat happy rate was 85 (98.8%),<sup>15</sup> higher than the average for all non-camp SWT placements.

As a whole, SWT exchange visitors reported having a positive camp experience, probably due to access to a variety of cultural activities and appreciation of the camp environment: 75 (87.2%) said they participated in cultural activities. In most cases, access to cultural activities came simply by way of their exposure to traditional camping pastimes. However, many exchange visitors also commented on loving the interaction with the campers and getting a unique perspective on the camp experience.

The majority of the SWT exchange visitors working at camps (60, or 69.8%) lived on site at the camp in cabins. Most camps arranged transportation to off-camp locations for errands (e.g., shopping, visits to banks) or for cultural activities to nearby locations (e.g., major cities, amusement parks, sightseeing destinations).

#### ***Challenges***

At some camps, SWT exchange visitors said they would like to be more involved in camp life. At these camps, the exchange visitors usually lived among themselves in on-camp housing. Living and working with each other, often from the same country, they also had to practice English with each other in order to get more experience beyond the limited interaction with campers while serving meals.

Those SWT exchange visitors working in the kitchen expressed some concern with a lack of full days off. Monitors learned that they usually received at least one full day off and several half-days off per week, but during full work days they usually spent between 10-12 hours at the camp working with one to two hours of break time between meals.

#### **Recommendations**

- ◆ Camps should mix their camp counselor and support staff exchange visitors in housing whenever possible, and include support staff in camp activities.
- ◆ If possible, camps should encourage SWT support staff to consider applying as camp counselors if they are interested in doing different activities. Further, they should foster exploration of the Camp Counselor category for SWT support staff who might seek career development as counselors.

## ***Camp Counselor Exchange Visitors at Camps***

### *Best Practices*

A higher rate of the 168 Camp Counselor program exchange visitors (Camp Counselors) said they are happy with their program experience (159, or 94.6%) than SWT exchange visitors generally (84.6%).<sup>16</sup> Cultural activities are a part of the Camp Counselor's job, but even so nearly all (160, or 95.2%) said they participated in cultural activities after work.

Most camp directors noted that they loved having the exchange visitors because the campers loved learning about where the exchange visitors came from. One camp for disabled children "praised the positive impact the exchange visitors have on the campers and the campers' families." As a whole, the Camp Counselor program received high praises across the board for the importance of the Camp Counselors' work and their positive attitudes.

As expected in a camp environment, almost all had housing pre-arranged (161, or 95.8%), and lived on-site in a cabin (135, or 80.4%) or yurt (4, or 2.4%). The close interaction with campers allowed those whose primary language was not English to practice their English while working (47 of 49, or 95.9%). Furthermore, a higher number of Camp Counselors said they were happy with their housing, 151 or 89.9% versus the 81.4% rate among SWT exchange visitors.

It is important to note that not all camps involved in the Camp Counselor program correspond to the typical "camp" image of a location isolated in the woods with tents and cabins. Twelve of the 31 camps visited (38.7%) were various kinds of day camps: three soccer camps, and nine typical child summer day camps. Regardless of the type of camp, 158 of Camp Counselors interviewed (94.0%) said they had access to a phone and Internet (although perhaps only a few times per week).

Where seven Camp Counselors (4.16%) arranged their own housing in the surrounding community, 161 (95.8%) had their housing arranged by the camp. Some camps visited arranged host families for their exchange visitors, usually with the families of the campers. Particularly for the roving soccer day camps, the host family experience was an integral part of the program for their Camp Counselors.

The majority of Camp Counselor exchange visitors used a combination of camp-provided car (95, or 56.5%) or shuttle (84, or 50.0%) for transportation. Most of the camps arranged transportation to off-camp locations (e.g., shopping centers, banks or nearby sightseeing destinations).

### *Challenges*

The biggest trend observed by monitors was the distance between the Camp Counselors and their sponsors. When asked for the name of their sponsors, the counselors often provided the name of the sponsor's third party recruiter in the home country. While the majority, 137 or 81.5%, said they felt they could approach their sponsor with a problem, only 71 (42.2%) listed their sponsor as a primary contact for a question or concern. Overall, 130 (77.4%) said they were happy with their sponsor, a far lower number than the 84.6% reported by SWT exchange visitors. One explanation could be the lower rate of direct sponsor contact with the Camp Counselors: 63 (37.5%) said their

sponsor contacted them at least monthly, versus 93.5% for SWT exchange visitors.<sup>17</sup>

Additionally, some camp counselors reported issues with camp housing, hours, pay, and job duties. The long-standing question is whether these problems result from improper advertisement of job positions when hiring camp counselors. Mismatched expectations of where camp counselors would be living, how often they could be “on duty,” and what they would be paid were key issues that monitors encountered. Monitors learned of problems receiving Social Security cards, such as difficulty applying at distant Social Security offices and long-delayed Social Security cards. Further, exchange visitors and host camps expressed a lack of knowledge about how their salaries were determined – they understood that salaries differed by experience, but these determinations were often made by the sponsor.

Responses from the exchange visitor interviews show that exchange visitors work extended hours for little pay. Of the Camp Counselors interviewed, 37 (22.0%) felt their work schedule had not been clearly communicated to them prior to their arrival, and 32 (19.0%) reported that the number of hours that they work is greater than the number listed in their job agreement. Further, a rough calculation of the average hours reported by Camp Counselors showed that the average Camp Counselor worked at least 55 hours a week, and 50 (30.4%) reported that they worked 80 or more hours per week. However, given the high rate of satisfaction among Camp Counselors, the money appears to be only a small part of the experience.

#### Recommendations

- ◆ Sponsors should ensure that their Camp Counselors know who their true U.S. sponsor is.
- ◆ Sponsors and camps must provide clear details about Camp Counselor positions (i.e., exact pay, housing arrangements, and transportation accommodations) well ahead of exchange visitors’ acceptance of their job offers.
- ◆ Sponsors must provide pre-arrival orientation training with specific information about working at U.S. camps for Camp Counselors.
- ◆ Sponsors must ensure that the sponsor, not the foreign entity, meets its responsibilities as outlined in the EVP regulations.

## LOOKING FORWARD

The findings from annual monitoring consistently show that the SWT and Camp Counselor programs generally meet the objectives of the Exchange Visitor Program. These programs provide the vast majority of exchange visitors with a positive experience in the United States. Additionally, interviews with host employers show that the program fills the need for seasonal staff while adding value to their businesses with the inclusion of international cultures. Most importantly, monitors reported a number of cases where exchange visitors and host

employers interacted and shared their cultures with each other.

In the Camp Counselor program, monitoring data has shown that sponsors seem to be at arms' length from the camps. The lower rate of communication between sponsors and Camp Counselors clearly affected the exchange visitors' view of the sponsor's role in responding and assisting them if they have problems. In most cases, exchange visitors have a much closer relationship with the third party recruiting agencies in their home countries. Sponsors can fill the gap with their exchange visitors and the camps by closer engagement with the camps.

There are still a number of aspects of the program that continue to impact the SWT program. Despite many of the positive trends, exchange visitor interviews in the summer also showed that:

- 20% had problems with transportation.
- 15% were not happy with their housing.
- 9% received fewer hours than those on their job agreements.
- 8% had problems with their Social Security cards.
- 5% had problems with getting paid.
- 5% worked unreported second jobs.

Housing and transportation are the perennial issues that the Department hears about most often. Sponsors, host employers, and communities need to continue working together to help identify solutions for the tight supply of suitable and affordable housing. In some areas, communities have implemented options for safer transportation: building sidewalks, adding bike lanes to roads, and modifying bus services to allow for night service and routes where many exchange visitors live or work.

Monitoring data shows that more host employers are taking an active role in locating housing options, providing transportation, arranging cultural activities, and modifying schedules to meet the minimum hours in job agreements. In some areas, sponsors and host employers have worked with the local Social Security Administration staff to find solutions to the mass of new applicants each year. Communities continue to find solutions to transportation safety and housing shortage concerns. Interviews with host employers also show that sponsors can be more closely engaged with their host employers. Building a direct, communicative, relationship with host employers and the community at large will allow sponsors to be more in tune and responsive to exchange visitors.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> During these monitoring timeframes of January through September, in 2015 the number of exchange visitors participating in the SWT program totaled 92,935, and in the Camp Counselor program totaled 21,206. (Per SEVIS reports dated January 5 and January 4, 2016, for the SWT and Camp Counselor programs, respectively, for program participants with Program Start Dates from October 1, 2014 to September 30, 2015. SWT program total excludes all participants in the 12-month Student Work and Travel programs with Australia and New Zealand.)

<sup>2</sup> In 2016 the number of exchange visitors participating in the SWT program from January to September totaled 98,892, and in the Camp Counselor program totaled 22,994. (Per SEVIS reports dated December 12, 2016, for program participants with Program Start Dates from October 1, 2015 to September 30, 2016. SWT program total excludes all participants in the 12-month Student Work and Travel programs with Australia and New Zealand.)

<sup>3</sup> At a confidence level of 95%, the samples of exchange visitors interviewed in 2016 provided a confidence interval (i.e., margin of error) of less than 3% for the SWT program and less than 8% for the Camp Counselor program.

<sup>4</sup> The Kentucky Consular Center (KCC) conducts secondary host employer vetting and job placement verification, by conducting background research on the company, and contacting the host employer to confirm the placement. When KCC learns of a problem or concern with the placement, it sends an alert to OPA. OPA then raises the issue of concern with the sponsor.

<sup>5</sup> The “somewhat happy” option was only available to the question “Are you happy with your program experience?” in summer season interviews. The response breakdown between the two was 84.5% happy, 12.7% somewhat happy.

<sup>6</sup> The “somewhat happy” option was only available to the question “Are you happy with your program sponsor?” in summer season interviews. The response breakdown between the two was 82.2% happy, 13.0% somewhat happy.

<sup>7</sup> The term “foreign entity” refers to third-party overseas agents or partners located in the home country, which the sponsor allows to recruit and pre-screen applicants for the SWT program on its behalf. Per 22 CFR §62.32(l)(1), sponsors must have obtained a written and executed agreements with such foreign third parties that outlines the obligations and the respective responsibilities of each party. Per 22 CFR §62.32(m), sponsors must have undertaken due diligence in reviewing these foreign entities and collecting certain documents annually to establish their status as a legal entity able to conduct business in the home country.

<sup>8</sup> Refer to the annually updated Program Date Chart provided on the [J1Visa.state.gov](http://J1Visa.state.gov) website for each country’s program dates.

<sup>9</sup> Note that program fees data is self-reported and subject to some range of error as some exchange visitors struggled to remember how much exactly they (or their parents/relatives) paid to participate in the program.

<sup>10</sup> These minimum and maximum average program fees amounts were provided by a single exchange visitor for each country, and may not be typical of the amounts exchange visitors from these countries.

<sup>11</sup> OPA also followed up with the sponsors upon receiving these reports from monitors, to confirm that the exchange visitors were aware of the sleeping arrangements in advance and/or had other options to choose from.

<sup>12</sup> This number omits those from countries such as the United Kingdom and Jamaica whose primary language is English.

<sup>13</sup> Although, housekeepers were more likely to be only “somewhat happy” (55, or 15.2%) than the general population of exchange visitors interviewed (13.0%).

<sup>14</sup> The remaining lifeguards interviewed worked at pools in neighborhood complexes (5), hotels (3), or camps (1).

<sup>15</sup> Seventy-five of all 86 exchange visitors at camps (87.2%) said they were happy and 10 (11.6%) were somewhat happy with their program experience.

<sup>16</sup> However, note that this number does not include the 12.6% of SWT exchange visitors who said they were “somewhat happy” with their program experience, since the “somewhat happy” response option was a part of the interview questionnaire for Camp Counselor exchange visitors.

<sup>17</sup> The SWT program regulations at 22 CFR §62.32(j)(1) require “monthly personal contacts with program exchange visitors,” but Camp Counselor program regulations at 22 CFR §62.30 have no similar provision requiring regular contact with program exchange visitors.