



The CSIET Guide to United States International Student Visa Programs



Christopher Page,
Executive Director

In recent years, the number of high-school-age students attending school in the United States on an F-1 Visa has seen exponential growth. While just 6,500 high school students traveled to the United States on F-1 programs in 2007, that number has grown to more than 83,000 in 2014. For comparison, 25,211 high school students participated in J-1 programs in 2014-2015 academic year.

With limited regulatory guidance for F-1 programs, and with the F-1 visa program poised for continued growth in the future, CSIET is extending its international exchange program oversight to include F-1 programs and participating school districts (in addition to the traditional J-1 international exchange organizations).

CSIET has been the standard-bearer in supporting safe, rewarding international student exchange experiences for more than three decades. The recent inclusion of F-1 programs into CSIET's list of approved programs has facilitated a new and robust dialogue among its members; J-1 operators and F-1 operators are sharing best practices and collaborating in a new and energizing way.

International Student Visa Programs: What is the Difference?

The **J-1 High School visa** is regulated by the United States Department of State. A student participating on an exchange through a J-1 visa will be sponsored by a State Department-compliant, independent sponsor organization. *(Click here for a run-down of CSIET-listed [J-1 sponsor organizations](#))* By definition, the focus of a J-1 visa program is “cultural exchange” – specifically, promoting mutual understanding between the people of the United States and other countries. Generally speaking, participants are not required to pay tuition to schools; schools and host families are not compensated for their involvement in a J-1 program, though most cite hosting an exchange student as a life-changing event.

The **F-1 visa international student program** is regulated by the Department of Homeland Security and is for the stated purpose of gaining an education in the United States. Unlike the J-1 program, schools (or school districts) themselves sponsor the student. The student is required to pay tuition to the host school. *(Click here for a run-down of CSIET-listed [F-1 sponsor organizations](#))*

J-1 VS F-1: Quick Facts

	J- 1 Programs	F-1 Programs
Purpose of Program	“Cultural”	“Academic”
Responsible Organization	Exchange programs affiliated with the U.S. Department of State	U.S. Department of Homeland Security authorized school or educational organization
Duration of Stay	Up to one year	Up to one year (public school); Length of Academic Program (private school)
Tuition Requirement	Not Required	Students pays tuition costs (required)
Participate in athletic programs?	Yes, though cultural exchange remains the priority among CSIET-listed J-1 sponsors	Yes, though same states require students to be participating in a CSIET-listed program for athletic eligibility. Education must remain the priority among CSIET-listed F-1 sponsors.
Application Form	DS-2019	I-20



J-1 VS F-1: Frequently Asked Questions

Why did CSIET defer its audit of J-1 programs while beginning to audit F-1 programs?

CSIET strives to provide a forum for exchange providers to share best practices and to promote safe, positive intercultural experiences – regardless of the designation they use to facilitate their exchanges. Because the J-1 programs are closely regulated by the Department of State, CSIET reviews any outstanding complaints and each program’s standing with the U.S. Department of State in determining which CSIET programs are eligible for listing. Because the F-1 programs are not overseen by the Department of State, CSIET requires its listed F-1 members to apply for the CSIET program audit process. The audit, conducted by independent CPAs according to CSIET’s template, is one vital part of our review to ensure our members’ adherence to CSIET values and listing requirements.

J-1 programs are considered to be more closely regulated than F-1 programs. Are they safer?

To be a listed CSIET program, F-1 programs need to commit to a set of values, policies and procedures designed to ensure the safest possible environment for exchange participants. While the governmental regulations and levels of oversight may vary between the two, we believe the CSIET Seal of Approval should give parents and prospective participants an added level of confidence in the integrity of their chosen sponsor.

F-1 programs require schools to be compensated for hosting an exchange student. Are they hosting for the right reasons?

We firmly believe CSIET-listed programs are committed to providing meaningful, rewarding experiences to their participants. CSIET-listed F-1 providers have the policies, procedures and values in place to facilitate exchanges that are as safe and as educationally rewarding as possible.

If a prospective exchange student or host family asks, which program does CSIET recommend?

CSIET does not endorse one method over another. CSIET exists to ensure that students are given a safe and rewarding experience no matter which program they pursue. Parents and prospective exchange participants should evaluate their options and determine the best path forward for them.

[Click here for more information about the differences between J-1 and F-1 programs](#)

About CSIET

Celebrating its 32nd year in 2016, CSIET has provided leadership and support for the exchange and educational communities, ensuring youth are provided with safe and valuable international and cultural exchange experiences since 1984. CSIET has risen to meet the challenges and demands as the J-1 visa program has grown; working collaboratively, CSIET’s membership has affected new industry standards to best protect our visitors and students.

We are excited to expand our thought leadership and best-practice sharing to F-1 providers, and we look forward to a continued robust dialogue among all our members to achieve CSIET’s mission. For more information, visit CSIET.org.



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