



The Value of the J-1 Cultural Exchange Program Key Messages — Updated March 2013

Camps and Cultural Exchange

- Camps value the important cultural exchange that participants in the J-1 Program both bring to the camp experience, and receive by being an integral part of the camp community.
- Camps participating in the J-1 Program represent a broad spectrum of programs including: Girl Scouts, YMCA, family-owned camps, camps that serve children with disabilities, religiously-affiliated camps, independent camps and sports camp — just to name a few.
- J-1 Visa holders (both Camp Counselors and Summer Work Travel) who are placed in camps have a very different experience from J-1 participants who are placed in other environments. Camp placements are an integral part of the camp program, and are treated the same as American staff.
- We believe that both the J-1 Camp Counselor program and the J-1 Summer Work Travel program are important to the furthering of the goals expressed in the [Fulbright-Hays Act](#) of 1961.
- J-1 Visa holders serve in a variety of roles at camps including camp counselors, and program and support staff such as waterfront, kitchen, arts and crafts, sports, etc.
- In 2011 alone, more than 25,000 individuals were placed in American camps through the Exchange Visitor Program. Of these 25,000 individuals, approximately 5,000 participated through the Summer Work Travel (support staff) program and the remaining 20,000 through the Camp Counselor program.

Camps and Compliance with U.S. Department of State Regulations

- We understand the importance of and support the rules that protect the security of the J-1 Visa.
- The exchange visitors participating in camp programs through both the Camp Counselor and Summer Work Travel programs — and their camps — have a long history of compliance with the provisions of the J-1 Visa.
- Sponsors and the camps they work with have an established, long-standing placement program. Including:
 - All applicants are thoroughly screened by the sponsor.
 - The sponsor conducts personal interviews, reference checks, medical screening, and criminal background checks in the home country and in the United States.
 - Additional personal interviews are also conducted by the camp that will utilize the J-1 Visa holder.
- The American Camp Association provides camps and sponsors with [educational information](#) about how to comply with the J-1 Visa Program, and how to provide the optimal experience for the J-1 Visa holder, their American counterparts, and the children in the camp programs.

Cultural Exchange and the Impact on American Campers

- For many children, camp is the only time they will have the opportunity to interact directly with someone from another country.

Camp's Impact on the Cultural Exchange Visitor

- The J-1 Visa holder has a unique opportunity to experience cultural exchange by living in the United States and interacting with the campers and staff in a special community that is the camp experience. The participant is an integral part of the camp community and is housed and paid just as their American counterparts.
- Sponsors and camps ensure that the J-1 Visa holder experiences other cultural exchange outside of their experience at camp — as per the regulations for Summer Work Travel.

Input to the U.S. Department of State

- It is our request that as you examine rule changes, you will consider the impact that international exchange visitors have on the development of children participating in camp programs throughout the United States — and the unique experiences the J-1 Visa holders themselves gain by participating in the camp community.
- It is also our request that you recognize that placements in camp (whether Camp Counselor or Summer Work Travel) are unique from placements in other environments. Camp placements are treated the same as their American counterparts.