

# The Specialist Program



A Specialist is defined as a foreign national who is an expert in a field of specialized knowledge or skill. The Specialist participates in the BridgeUSA Program to observe, consult, or demonstrate that specialized knowledge or skill at scientific institutions, government agencies, museums, corporations, libraries and similar types of U.S. institutions. Qualifying areas of expertise may include communications, sciences, youth leadership, international education, museum studies, public administration, library science or law.

The Specialist program promotes the exchange of knowledge and skills among foreign and American specialists, and promotes collaboration between foreign and U.S. institutions.

Applicants in the Specialist program must demonstrate to IIE that they are recognized as an expert in a field of specialized knowledge or skill. This may include publications, speaking engagements, membership in associations, awards, professional references, and/or professional experience in a high-level capacity for organizations in their field.

Specialist positions are temporary and may not fill an employment need. The maximum program duration is 12 months.

For an overview of eligibility requirements, visit the U.S. Department of State's BridgeUSA program website:

<https://j1visa.state.gov/programs/specialist/>.

## Compensation and Funding

IIE recommends that specialists have a minimum of \$2500 per month available for expenses. Specialists cannot be "self-funded" and must show some type of third-party financial support, either through host organization wages, continued home employer salary, scholarship, fellowship, and/or government

## IIE Program Fees

*Fees to be paid by the host organization:*

- Initial sponsorship fee (up to 12 months) = \$1500
- Extension of sponsorship, per year = \$500
- Expedited processing service (optional) = \$750
- Enrollment in IIE group insurance (optional) = Inquire directly

*Fees to be paid by either the host organization or specialist:*

- J-2 sponsorship fee, per dependent = \$500
- Individual insurance meeting minimum J-visa requirements = varies, from \$75 - \$200 per month
- Travel validation fee = \$25
- DS-2019 re-issuance fee = \$50

## Other Fees

*These fees are not included in IIE's services but must be paid during the J-1 Visa application:*

- \$220 SEVIS Fee
- \$160 nonimmigrant visa application fee

funding. Please be aware that compensation provided by a host organization might not cover all expenses and specialists should prepare to bring personal funds. Additional funding must be shown for J-2 dependent applications.

## Cost of Living

The cost of living can vary greatly depending on where the host organization is located. Prior to accepting a position, specialists should research online to budget accordingly. Housing in a large city can cost approximately \$2000 per month, while housing in a smaller town might cost closer to \$500 per month. Utilities may include electric or gas (\$50 - \$100 per month, depending on the size of the housing), cable and internet (\$50 - \$200 depending on plan). In a single-family home, the tenant may also be responsible for water and trash collection, about \$150 - \$200 annually. Cost of food may range from \$200 - \$500 per month, depending on location and preference to cook or eat out regularly.

## Transit

Most urban areas have public transit, such as subways, buses, and trains and this is a great environmentally-friendly option for transit. The cost of monthly public transit tickets ranges from \$25 - \$150 for local service, or higher for regional service. Owning a car in the U.S. can be expensive, and gas prices can be between \$2 - \$4 per gallon. Drivers will need to make sure they have or obtain the proper driving license (through the Department of Motor Vehicles for the state) and vehicle insurance.

## Payroll Deductions

If the host organization is providing compensation, taxes will be deducted from each paycheck. J-1 exchange visitors are subject to federal, state and local income taxes but are exempt from FICA and FUTA. Specialists receiving income in the U.S. might expect to pay 22% - 24% of their annual salary in taxes. Tax returns are filed in April for the preceding year. Specialists are responsible for knowing their personal filing requirements. Questions should be directed to a tax professional with experience in nonimmigrant filing.

## Next Steps

Interested in exchange visitor sponsorship through IIE? A representative of the U.S. host organization should contact IIE at [visasponsorship@iie.org](mailto:visasponsorship@iie.org) or 212-984-5313 to begin our online application process.

IIE recommends submitting the application at least 2-3 months in advance of the intended program start date. As part of the application specialists will need to provide documentation including, but not limited to: Resume, diplomas, references, and passport.

The passport should be valid at least 6 months past the expected program end date.