

CSIET Guide to U.S. International Student Visa Programs

By Chris Page on October 03, 2017

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(Editor's Note: This article was written by the staff of the Council on Standards for International Educational Travel, under the direction of Executive Director Chris Page.)

Celebrating its 33rd year in 2017, the Council on Standards for International Educational Travel (CSIET) has consistently provided leadership and support for the exchange and educational communities, ensuring that youth are provided with safe and valuable international and cultural exchange experiences. CSIET has risen to meet the challenges and demands as the J-1/F-1 Visa programs have grown; working collaboratively, CSIET's membership has affected new industry standards to protect all international student exchange visitors.

Every year, CSIET publishes a new Advisory List of International Educational Travel and Exchange Programs. The Advisory List includes only those programs that have demonstrated compliance with CSIET Standards. State high school associations often refer to the CSIET Advisory List on the website (www.CSIET.org), which is updated annually in the spring, to determine which programs have shown compliance relative to athletic issues.

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 through F-1 programs in 2007, that number rose to more than 90,000 in 2015. By comparison, 23,716 high school students participated in J-1 programs in the 2016-17 academic year. With limited regulatory guidance for F-1 programs, and with the F-1 Visa program poised for continued growth, CSIET has extended its international exchange program oversight to include F-1 programs and participating school districts – in addition to the traditional J-1 international exchange organizations. The inclusion of F-1 programs into CSIET's list of approved programs has facilitated a new and robust dialogue among its members; J-1/F-1 operators are sharing preferred practices and collaborating in a new and energizing way.

This dialogue will continue at CSIET's 33rd Annual Conference October 18-20 in Indianapolis, where representatives of J-1 and F-1 organizations, the Department of State and the Student Exchange & Visitor Program [SEVP] will be participating.

International Student Visa Programs: What is the Difference?

At times, it is difficult to tell the difference between the J-1 and F-1 Visa programs, so following are some distinguishing features.

The J-1 High School Visa is regulated by the United States Department of State. J-1 exchange students must be sponsored by a State Department-compliant exchange organization. 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.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the purpose of the CSIET Advisory List and who is the intended audience?

CSIET annually publishes an Advisory List of International Educational Travel and Student Exchange Programs to disseminate findings and decisions relative to compliance with CSIET Standards. The goal of CSIET is to distribute and display this information in a way that constructively serves educators, exchange programs, exchange students host/natural parents, schools and state high school associations.

What are the CSIET Listing Categories and what do they mean?

CSIET exchange program members that have successfully completed the CSIET evaluation process (and have demonstrated compliance with CSIET Standards) are conferred a Listing Status in one of three categories. Not all CSIET members are conferred a Listing Status. CSIET member organizations that have been denied listing do not appear in the Advisory List.

The following listing types were designed by the CSIET Board of Directors to encourage organizations to administer their programs according to the highest possible standards:

- Full Listing is the status that organizations and programs described in the CSIET Advisory List are accorded when they have demonstrated full compliance with the CSIET Standards.
- Provisional Listing reflects the determination that an organization, during its first or second evaluation, is judged to be in compliance with CSIET Standards. Provisionally listed organizations have met all the criteria for listing and should be accorded the same consideration as fully listed organizations.
- Conditional Listing is issued to organizations that are determined to be substantially in compliance with CSIET Standards but which need improvement in one or more areas.

(All CSIET Listed Programs possess a current listing letter and listing certificate to demonstrate the legitimacy of their compliance. Look for the CSIET seal of approval before accepting your international exchange student. If your program does not have a current, signed letter and a current seal of approval, it is not a CSIET Listed Program.)

Does CSIET have a complaints process?

In response to the increased compliance oversight and regulatory enforcement activity by the U.S. Department of State, CSIET has revamped its evaluation process and only accepts complaints regarding parts of CSIET Standards that are not part of U.S. Federal Regulation (22 CFR 62.25). These specifically include athletic participation/eligibility issues, promotional materials and housing arrangements.

What is a Direct Placement?

- J-1: A Direct Placement is one in which either the student or the sending organization in the foreign country is party to an arrangement with any other party, including school personnel, for the student to attend a particular school or live with a particular host family; however,
- F-1: The term Direct Placement, in the context of the original J-1 definition, does not apply because federal regulation requires all international students to “apply and be accepted by an SEVP approved school” prior to applying for the F-1 Visa. Therefore, in the F-1 context, CSIET programs provide transparency and report to the NFHS any F-1 student for whom participation in interscholastic varsity athletics was a known motivating factor at the time of application.

What is the promise of the CSIET seal of approval?

The CSIET Seal of Approval should give parents, students and state associations an added level of confidence in the integrity of their chosen sponsor. 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. To be a listed CSIET program, F-1 programs commit to a set of values, policies and procedures, including those related to safety as well as those related to athletic recruiting/participation.

Every spring, a new current version of the Advisory List is posted on the CSIET website. Individuals can also order a print version of the current Advisory List with full descriptions of each program. Schools are encouraged to request a “CSIET Listing Certificate” from any exchange organization to verify that it has gone through the CSIET evaluation process. For more information, visit www.CSIET.org.