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Are you ready for Teach USA?

Are you considering teaching in the U.S.? It's so exciting, right? Has it always been a dream of yours?

Cultural Vistas is thrilled to try and help you make this a reality through our [BridgeUSA](#) teacher program. We are here to support you in your journey and provide the information and guidance you need to move through each phase of the process.

First up is taking the time to examine if this is the right time and right opportunity to take the leap. It is critical that you give this a lot of thought to ensure you are emotionally ready, walk into it with eyes open and, very importantly, are financially able to support the visa process and start life in the U.S. It's so easy to get caught up in the excitement but doing this self-examination and research will help ensure you can set yourself (and your school) up for success.

Some of the details you need to consider might depend on the specific school/community where you get an offer, but some points should be considered up front before you even apply to positions.

What are your goals?

Maybe this program sounds like a dream because you love to travel and learn about cultures. Maybe you want to expand your professional skills and English skills. These are great reasons to participate in this program. The goal of the program for the U.S. government and Cultural Vistas is to facilitate cultural exchange between Americans and other nations and to increase the intercultural competency skills and global knowledge of our students.

The program is fundamentally about teaching and developing your professional skills, knowledge of the U.S. and enhancing your students' learning. You will also develop personally, we hope, by developing critical thinking skills to address problems, enhancing your appreciation of diversity, building powerful networks for collaboration, and becoming a globally adaptive leader. So, this is not about making money, becoming a U.S. citizen, or traveling all the time. We absolutely want you to travel! Just remember this is limited to weekends and school breaks since this is a full-time position. Take the time to examine what kind of program you really want. There are many options out there!

The program is not a pathway to permanent residency in the U.S. The J-1 Visa is classified as non-immigrant and both Cultural Vistas and the U.S. consular officer interviewing you for the visa will not approve your application if that is your expressed goal. The success of the program relies in large part on you returning to your home country to share your experience with your family and friends so they can get to know the U.S. better. The U.S. Department of State believes in the power of these people-to-people exchanges to enhance relations between countries.

Yes, some people may go on to other visa statuses after the program, but you should know it is not very easy and you are signing an agreement with Cultural Vistas that you will not seek a change of visa status. You also may be restricted from obtaining certain visas for 2 years after the program depending on your circumstances. If you're interested in staying in the U.S. long-term, that's totally fine! We encourage you to pursue other pathways designed for that.

Do you have sufficient finances?

First, you must consider how much savings you can put towards the cost of the visa and relocating to the U.S. Many schools pay CV fees but may not pay all. They will not be paying for your flight, and most don't offer any extra relocation bonus to help you move and set up house. That means you will need a few thousand dollars most likely to make this work. Money for the CV fees, flights, and first month's rent and furnishings. You also may not receive your first paycheck until 30 days after you start work. Hopefully, you can arrive before that and get settled so then you're looking at supporting yourself for more than 30 days. **We recommend planning to bring around \$3,000 with you to the U.S. depending on location and if you have dependents.**

Yes, you are going to be paid an American wage, but you are also going to be paying American living expenses. In most regions of the U.S., teachers are not highly paid in relation to the cost of living. Many of our teachers find cost of living much more challenging than they expected. Rents have certainly risen in the U.S. in recent years as well. You should also remember that you will pay federal, state and local taxes on your income. So, if you're looking at teacher salaries, that can be reduced by 15-25%. All that to say you may not get rich on this program. If you have high expenses back home that you need to take care of while in the U.S., you may have a very tight budget. We want our teachers to have the freedom to enjoy their community and travel! We do not encourage you to take out high interest loans for this program to avoid you living in the U.S. but not able to enjoy yourself.

Check out [this article](#) and [sample budget](#) to think through this a bit more.

What can you do to prepare?

Know yourself, your goals, how to assess school fit, and your personal strengths and needs.

If you know people who have lived in the U.S., they are a great resource to hear about what it's like to move here. We also suggest thinking about what type of community and school feels like the right fit. You should also realize that once you commit to a school you are generally expected to remain there for the duration of the program. Transfers are not common and you can't change schools without our permission.

- Big city, small town, rural farmland? Small town within 2 hours of a big city?
- What kinds of activities are you looking forward to doing in the U.S.?
- What specific places do you want to see?
- Do you care about weather?
- Transportation options- are you willing to buy a car? This is crucial to life in most American communities.
- What are the affordable housing options in the area?
- Are you concerned about safety? Do your research on crime activity in the area.

Housing can be a big challenge and you must ensure you have a plan for where to stay and how you plan to get to school BEFORE you arrive. This includes what you can afford and whether the area of the school and housing options looks safe to you.

Are you emotionally ready?

Seriously ask yourself if you are prepared for culture shock and figuring things out on your own. There will definitely be a major adjustment to both U.S. culture and schools for most people (even native English speakers). Do you feel prepared to deal with that? How have you handled similar situations in the past? We suggest you do some research on dealing with [culture shock](#) but also ask yourself these questions:

- Are you open-minded?
- Do you like to meet new people?
- Do you enjoy or can you push yourself beyond your comfort zone?
- Can you ask for help easily from others?
- How will you feel being separated from your friends and family for so long?
- Are you resourceful and adaptable?
- Are you a problem solver?
- What if you're the only exchange teacher at your school?

We say these things so that you're realistic and also prepared for this amazing journey. Don't expect it to be just like the movies! You also should not expect your school to hold your hands and tell you exactly where to live or where to find a bank or grocery store. They will surely be helpful, but you may have to ask for advice.

Are you realistic about how difficult the transition will be?

Read education blogs and articles to see what the hot topics in education are right now.

Are there some trainings or webinars you think would be helpful to do?

Lastly, do some research on U.S. classroom management and teaching in the U.S. This is the area we hear takes a lot of adjustment. There may be significant differences in how we handle student behavior and boundaries between teachers and students. For some insight on challenges you may face, here are a few resources to check out.

Preparing for the U.S. Classroom

- [Your first 30 days](#)
- [Managing challenging student behaviors](#)
- [Building respect in the classroom](#)
- [Edutopia- Classroom management](#)
- [Teaching in the US vs. the rest of the world](#)
- [Cultural Considerations for the Classroom](#)

Real experiences from the classroom

- [Teachers work 53 hours per week and under half that directly teaching students](#)
- [Perspectives on international teachers](#)
- [Teachers speak about the outbursts they've endured](#)
- [Teachers from Philippines help struggling U.S. schools amid teacher shortage - The Washington Post](#)

We hope this is helpful as you evaluate this amazing journey that can transform your life. Don't hesitate to reach out to us for more information!

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