



# VAI Exchange Visitor Program Disclosures

## Purpose of the Exchange Visitor Program

VAI is designated by the U.S. Department of State (DOS) as a [BridgeUSA](#) Exchange Visitor Program (EVP) sponsor. DOS administers the EVP under the provisions of the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961, as amended. The program's purpose is to promote mutual understanding between the people of the United States and other countries through educational and cultural exchange. Exchange visitors are expected to return home at the end of their program to share what they have learned with the people of their home country. Cross-cultural exchange is an important component of all exchange programs.

VAI's Exchange Visitor Program provides opportunities to study, conduct collaborative research, and participate in scientific training opportunities at VAI and VAI Graduate School (GS). Our program seeks to promote the general interest of international educational and cultural exchange by offering educational, training, and research opportunities in the various research fields conducted at VAI and GS.

## Eligibility

You must meet the following eligibility criteria before VAI can issue a Form DS-2019 (Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor Status) to you:

- **Invitation** - You must have an invitation or offer letter from a VAI laboratory or the GS clearly explaining the proposed program activities, terms, and conditions, including the sponsor name and address, position duration, job duties, number of work hours, and wages or compensation (if any).
- **English Language Proficiency** – J-1 exchange visitors must demonstrate sufficient proficiency in the English language to participate in our program AND to function on a day-to-day basis in Grand Rapids. Proficiency will be assessed via an official English language proficiency test or video interview.
- **Program Funding** – Exchange visitors must provide evidence of financial support in the amount of our [estimated minimum Cost of Living for Grand Rapids](#). Evidence of funding may include VAI salary or stipend, non-VAI salary, scholarships or other sponsored funding. Personal funds will NOT be accepted for the primary J-1 visa holder, but are acceptable for J-2 dependents.
- **Educational Exchange or Research Collaboration Agreement (for visiting students and researchers only)** – Visiting Research Scholars and Visiting Student Researchers must be affiliated with a foreign (non-U.S.) institution, and VAI must enter into an educational exchange agreement or research collaboration agreement with that institution. Please speak to your sponsoring VAI lab to determine if an agreement already exists or will need to be created.
- **U.S. Immigration History** – You must not be otherwise barred from issuance of a Form DS-2019 (example: subject to repeat participation bars). Ineligibility is rare, but VAI will determine eligibility before issuing Form DS-2019.

## Explanation of Program Activities

Your program will be customized to suit your individual background and needs.

- **Postdoctoral researchers** will work with their sponsoring PI to define their research project and goals. An Individual Development Plan (IDP) will further define the exchange program.
- **Visiting Research Scholars & Student Researchers** will conduct collaborative research pursuant to a Research Collaboration Agreement. Activities must be completed within two years.
- **Graduate School Students** will enroll in a full-time course of study at [VAI Graduate School](#) to receive a doctoral degree. Students complete academic coursework, research rotations, and dissertation research.

Before signing any agreements, review your offer or invitation letter to ensure you clearly understand the role offered to you, activities, location, duration, work hours, and other terms and conditions.

## Cross-Cultural Program Goals & Components

Exchange visitors bring diverse perspectives that enhance our classrooms, laboratories, scientific discourse, and research collaborations. In addition, VAI offers and encourages exchange visitors to participate in as many academic, social, and professional development activities as possible. You will choose the number and type of activities you will participate in, but you are encouraged to participate in at least two activities per month. [Click here for more information on the type, duration, and nature of cross-cultural program components.](#)

## J-1 & J-2 Health Insurance Requirement

Federal regulations require J-1 & J-2 visa holders to *continuously* maintain medical insurance coverage meeting specific coverage requirements. VAI offers compliant medical insurance plans for VAI Postdoctoral Fellows, Postdoctoral Research Fellows, Graduate School Students, and their J-2 dependents. All other J-1 and J-2 exchange visitors must purchase third-party insurance coverage and provide proof of coverage to the Office of Immigration Services (OIS) on or before their first day at the Institute. [Click here for more detailed information on health insurance requirements, plan options, and costs.](#)

## Terms & Conditions

Exchange visitors must follow all VAI policies and procedures. Michigan is an at-will employment state, so employment is always at-will. VAI is committed to the success of all our exchange visitors, so we will work with you to ensure you understand and follow all the rules. Review your offer or invitation letter for additional employment terms and conditions.

## Typical Fees & Costs

**Program fees:** VAI charges no fees to participate in our Exchange Visitor Program. J-1 exchange visitors must pay a SEVIS I-901 Fee of \$220 to the U.S. government, plus \$185 for each J-1 and J-2 visa application. [Visa reciprocity fees](#) may also apply depending on visa category and nationality.

**Deductions from wages:** If you enroll in VAI's insurance policy, insurance premiums will be deducted directly from your paycheck. VAI will not deduct costs of housing or transportation from your wages.

**Tax withholding:** Any payments from VAI will be subject to local, state, and federal tax withholding. Most payments are subject to 14% tax withholding, but rates will vary. Tax treaty benefits may be available depending on your country of citizenship and purpose in the US. For more information on tax withholding and to estimate your tax withholding rate, see <https://www.irs.gov/payments/tax-withholding>.

**Cost of living:** The estimated minimum cost of living is **\$2,000 per month for the primary exchange visitor**, plus **\$650 per month for a spouse and \$450 per month for each child**. These are minimal estimates for food, health insurance, transportation, rent for a one- or two-bedroom apartment (as applicable), and minor incidental expenses. [Click here for more detailed information on housing options and costs.](#)

*Your program funding might not cover all your expenses, so you should plan to bring additional personal funds.*

## Potential Future Restrictions

J-1 and J-2 Exchange Visitors may be subject to the following regulatory restrictions, which can affect your future U.S. immigration options:

**12-month Bar on Repeat Participation in the J-1 Research Scholar/Professor Category:** Applies to all exchange programs longer than 6 months. The J-1 exchange visitor and J-2 dependents will be barred from beginning a new J-1 program in the Research Scholar or Professor category for 12 months after their VAI program end date. [Click here for more detailed information on the 12-month bar.](#)

**24-month Bar on Repeat Participation in the J-1 Research Scholar/Professor Category:** Applies to all exchange programs in the Research Scholar or Professor category, regardless of duration. The J-1 exchange visitor and J-2 dependents will be barred from starting a new J-1 program in the Research Scholar or Professor category for 24 months after their VAI program end date. [Click here for more detailed information on the 24-month bar.](#)

**212(e) Two-Year Home Country Physical Presence Requirement:** Applies to some exchange visitors. The J-1 exchange visitor and J-2 dependents cannot change non-immigrant status within the U.S., receive a U.S. employment visa (H or L), fiancé visa (K), or permanent residence until they return home and reside there for two years or obtain a waiver from USCIS. [Click here for more detailed information on 212\(e\).](#)

## Exchange Visitor Rights & Protections

All individuals in the United States have rights, regardless of visa status. The documents below explain the rights and protections available to Exchange Visitors and employees in the United States.

- [Know Your Rights \(Wilberforce Pamphlet\)](#)
- [Exchange Visitors' Rights & Protections \(BridgeUSA\)](#)