

J1 Visa Tips

FROM THE OFFICE OF GRADUATE MEDICAL EDUCATION

INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL GRADUATES

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Just the Facts

The U.S. Department of State has designated ECFMG to be the sole sponsor for all J-1 Visa exchange visitor physicians. ECFMG sponsors J-1 visa holders to enable them to participate in residency and fellowship training programs in the United States.

Any resident on a J-1 visa is subject to the **Two Year Home Country Physical Presence Requirement, which states that after completion of your training program you will return to your home country for a period of two years.**

Regardless of citizenship, any individual that graduated from an international medical school must be certified through ECFMG.

To be eligible for ECFMG certification the applicant must have graduated from an international medical school included in IMED, and passed Step I, Step II CK, and meet CS Pathway. Refer to the [ECFMG website](#) for more information on eligibility.

It is strongly recommended that each applicant consult with an immigration attorney to decide if a J-1 visa would be the proper choice for them.

For more detailed information & instructions on the application process, please visit the [EVSP website](#).

The Office of Graduate Medical Education (OGME) is



available to assist with any questions regarding the application process. Annelisa Herter and Jennifer Rodgers are the designated ECFMG Training Program Liaisons (TPL) at SIU School of Medicine. They can be contacted at the following email addresses: aherter@siumed.edu or jrodgers@siumed.edu. Both can be reached via phone at 217-545-8853.

J-1 Sponsorship Application Process

The J-1 sponsorship application is initiated by the TPL once a signed letter of offer or contract is received. Once the appointment is made by the TPL in ECFMG's EVNet system, an email will be sent to the Coordinator with a checklist of required documents. The program coordinator & applicant will work together to submit this supporting documentation to the

OGME for review and submission. Once the TPL uploads the documents and submits the application, **the applicant must log in to OASIS to accept the appointment & pay the \$370 application fee.**

If you have a spouse or dependent child that will be accompanying you, the application for a J-2 dependent must be completed online &

submitted with the application. Evidence of family relationship and a copy of each dependent's passport name page must accompany the J-2 application.

There are no additional fees for dependents. J-1 sponsorship applications must be renewed annually prior to the end date of your contract.

MOONLIGHTING:

Federal regulations strictly prohibit J-1 visa holders from moonlighting outside of their training program. Moonlighting could lead to visa revocation and the inability to complete your residency or fellowship.

There is an annual application fee for a J-1 visa. It is currently \$370

Supporting Documentation for Initial Application

Each ECFMG applicant should use the checklist provided from the ECFMG website to ensure they are submitting a complete application to prevent delays. Supporting documentation consists of the following:

- **Contract or Letter of Offer** (start & end dates of training year, specialty, training level, stipend amount, signatures of the resident and the program director)
- **Fellowship program description** (only if applicable)
- **Statement of Need** from the Ministry of Health (MOH) in

your home country or country of most recent legal permanent residence; **this must be an original mailed directly to ECFMG or electronically sent from the MOH to ECFMG.**

- **Current C.V.** must detail education & professional history **TO DATE WITH NO GAPS;** month/year to month/year format (i.e. June 2016 to July 2020)
- **Copy of Passport Name Pages**

Additional documents may be required and/or requested by ECFMG.

If you are a graduate of an LCME accredited U.S. or Canadian Medical School you must also submit:

- Copy of Medical School Diploma
- Full-Face Passport-Size Photo
- English Language Attestation Form if graduate of an LCME-Canadian medical school & are without ECFMG certification.



Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS)

Once a J-1 visa sponsorship application is complete and all regulatory requirements are satisfied, ECFMG creates an electronic record for the J-1 applicant and each J-2 dependent in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS).

SEVIS is a database jointly administered by the U.S. Departments of State and Homeland Security.

There is a fee of \$220 that must be paid in addition to the ECFMG fee for initial J-1 applications or if you

are reinstating your J-1 visa . Only J-2 visa holders are exempt from paying the fee.

The fee must still be paid for those applicants who are already in the U.S. and do not need to re-enter the country (Internal Change of Status).

You will be expected to present a SEVIS receipt of payment at the embassy or U.S. port of entry.

The SEVIS fee must be paid directly to the Department of Homeland Security. **For information and instruc-**

tions on paying the fee visit their [website](#).

Remember the SEVIS fee is separate from the ECFMG fee, and both must be paid in full by the applicant.

**THE SEVIS FEE (\$220)
MUST BE PAID DIRECTLY
TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
HOMELAND SECURITY**

Changing Visa Status

If you are currently in the United States with a visa other than a J-1, and you wish to change your status to a J-1, you may be required to provide additional information. If you do not plan to leave the U.S. prior to beginning your training, you may need to complete an Application to Extend/Change Nonimmigrant Status form (I-539) through the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service

(USCIS). This form is also known as the Internal Change of Status form. The processing fee is an additional \$370. The process of filing an internal change of status can take 4+ months. It is your responsibility to ensure the documents are submitted in time to begin your training.

It should be noted that one can not transition from a J-2 visa to a J-1 visa without exiting the country and

providing proof of the exit to ECFMG. Only at that time will your DS-2019 be released. H1-b to J-1 transitions can occur internally. **For more information on this process, visit the [DHS website](#).**

In order to ensure your timely arrival for training, it is generally recommended that you depart the U.S. to change your visa status versus filing an Internal Change of Status.

J-1 Continuation Sponsorship Application

Residents on J-1 visas must renew their sponsorship each year through ECFMG. It is the resident's responsibility to ensure they maintain a valid visa throughout their residency training. The following information is required when submitting a continuation sponsorship application (see ECFMG Checklist for Continuation):

- **Contract or Letter of Offer**
(start and end dates of training year, specialty, training level, stipend amount, signatures of the resident and the program director)
- **Updated Statement of Need**
(only if required—must be origi-

nal sent directly to ECFMG)

- **Form I-644**
- **Form I-94: submit a copy of your I-94 from the [website](#).**
- Additional documentation may be required.

All documents, except a new Statement of Need, should be sent as PDFs to your program coordinator. The Coordinator will then send them to OGME for review & submission to ECFMG.

The TPL will upload the documents to the EVNet system and submit the application. Then the applicant can log

in to OASIS to pay the \$370 application fee & accept the program appointment.

ECFMG reserves the right to request original documents.

If you are entering a program that is not ACGME accredited, this is considered a Non Standard Program and there are different requirements.

Issues and Changes During Residency Training

Many things can arise during your residency training. **If you are required to extend your training at any time for illness, remediation, visa delays, or any other reason, you must notify ECFMG.**

The resident must seek pre-approval for off-site rotations or a leave of absence.

In the event an emergency prompts a leave or causes an extension of training, ECFMG must be notified as soon as possible. Your TPL must be noti-

fied immediately of any serious issue, incident, or major illness requiring hospitalization.

If you accept a fellowship or any other form of specialty training or if you want to explore changing your specialty, you must notify ECFMG. These updates may require that you provide the following:

- Application for Continued J-1 Sponsorship & fee
- New Ministry of Health Letter

- Contract or Letter of Offer

- Letter explaining any extension in training

Work with your program coordinator and the OGME to ensure all necessary documentation is submitted in a timely manner.

- **If you have a change of U.S. residential address during training, ECFMG must be notified within 10 days of the change.** ECFMG uploads all address changes to SEVIS.

Tips for Faster Processing

The processing time for sponsorship applications can take anywhere from 4 to 6 weeks, based on a number of factors. In order to speed up the process, ECFMG suggests the following:

- Use the ECFMG website for guidance.
- Use the checklist provided & include all required documentation.

- Use OASIS promptly to pay application fee
- **Send the application packet to the TPL via your program coordinator. They need to have a copy of your documentation as well.**
- Contact your OGME Training Program Liaisons (TPL) with any questions or concerns:

- Annelisa Herter
aherter@siumed.edu
- Jennifer Rodgers
jrodgers@siumed.edu

Go to the [EVSP website](#) for additional information.

Pre-Arrival /Arrival /Social Security

- **Earliest arrival to the U.S. is 30 days prior** to contract start date. It is also important to have an issued medical license whenever possible to prevent delays to the start date.
- TPL must report your arrival to ECFMG with a copy of your [I-94](#) and J-1 visa stamp (if applicable).
- [Social Security](#): Wait to apply for a number until 10 business days from date of entering country AND arrival reported to ECFMG.
- [Pre-Arrival Information](#) can be found on the ECFMG website.

CROSS CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

The J-1 visa program was designed to provide opportunity for cultural exchange. J-1 physicians are expected to have opportunities to learn about the U.S. culture and society while also sharing their culture with Americans. ECFMG will ask the physician, annually, for a brief summary of the cross-cultural activities they have participated in outside of the field of medicine.

BEFORE you Travel

- You are not required to return to your home country during residency. If you choose to leave the country, please note that physicians sometimes experience delays when renewing their visa stamp. The delays may result in unpaid leave and extension of training. Please review the [GME Leave of Absence policy](#) before planning a trip.
- **If you are a new J-1 visa holder, you must request a Travel Validated DS-2019 form before departing the U.S.** This document only needs to be requested during your initial sponsorship. ECFMG will validate travel automatically with continuation applications.
- It is the responsibility of the resident/fellow to review the travel information at: <http://www.ecfm.org/evsp/travel-index.html> and to ensure that their travel validation is current.
- Be sure to have your I-94 and a hard copy of your DS-2019 form prior to travel, and carry it with you during travel. You will need to provide it for re-entry to the U.S.
- A valid passport is required for any travel outside of the U.S.

USMLE EXAMS*

Incoming residents are prohibited from receiving a contract until they have passed USMLE Step I and Step II CK, and CS Pathways.

Any resident starting at the PGY 3 level and all fellows must pass USMLE Step III to receive a contract. SIU and its affiliated hospitals issue contracts for one year.

Prior to being promoted to the PGY 3, a resident must show proof of passing USMLE Step III. The contracts for residents who do not pass Step III by the PGY 2 contract expi-

ration date will be placed on unpaid leave and the resident cannot expect their position to be held. Please plan to take the exam early in your 2nd year to avoid a gap in training.

For assistance in applying to take Step III please contact the Office of Graduate Medical Education. We are happy to assist you in this process.

*COMLEX Level exams can replace USMLE exams for qualifying trainees.



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