

With the recent wave of executive orders targeting immigrants, concerns have emerged about the potential loss of BridgeUSA Exchange Visitors. It's critical to educate lawmakers and stakeholders about the vital differences between the Summer Work Travel (SWT) program and traditional immigration programs. Misconceptions often lead to the assumption that all non-resident workers are immigrants, underscoring the need for ongoing education to clarify the program's true purpose: **cultural exchange and diplomacy**.

Although Destination Door County (DDC) is not directly involved in the BridgeUSA SWT program, we recognize the crucial role it plays in our community and national security. As a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO), we are uniquely positioned to support and enhance the program in ways that align naturally with our mission. These efforts have been seamlessly integrated into our operations without adding undue strain to our staff or budget. Our involvement has become an invaluable asset to our partners who currently participate or are interested in engaging with SWT.

Over the past 15 years, my engagement with the program has allowed me to build strong connections with the U.S. Department of State and various Program Sponsors who facilitate relationships between Participants and Host Employers. If I can offer any assistance or answer questions about the SWT program, I would welcome the opportunity to discuss it further.

Sincerely,



Phil Berndt
Director of Partner Services
He/Him/His [Why I include my pronouns](#)

Destination Door County
1015 Green Bay Road | PO Box 406
Sturgeon Bay, WI 54235
Phil@DoorCounty.com
txt/direct 1-920-493-4450

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Summer Work Travel (J-1 Visa) – Questions/Concerns?
The Door County Pledge *Let's work together for a sustainable future*

For BridgeUSA and Summer Work Travel information, visit: <https://j1visa.state.gov/>
Please get involved with The Alliance for International Exchange: <https://alliance-exchange.org/>

Here are some points that can help us effectively demonstrate how Summer Work Travel (SWT) isn't a work or immigration program and, while participants work side-by-side with Americans while they are here, their participation in our workforce expands job opportunities for Americans, helps small businesses avoid peak season closures due to labor shortages, and mid-season layoffs or reduced hours as business slows when the peak weeks of the season return to a more normal pace.

In a nutshell, BridgeUSA programs, such as the **Summer Work Travel (SWT)** program, are **not work or immigration programs**—they are **educational and cultural exchange programs** under the purview of the **U.S. Department of State**, not the **Department of Labor** or the **Department of Workforce Development**. Here are some key points and examples to reinforce the distinction:

1. Administered by the U.S. Department of State:

- **BridgeUSA programs**, including SWT, are governed by the U.S. Department of State's **Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs**.
 - The primary purpose is **cultural exchange** and fostering mutual understanding, not filling labor shortages or providing pathways to permanent residency or immigration.
 - The programs fall under the Fulbright-Hays Act of 1961, emphasizing **education and diplomacy**, not employment or immigration policy.
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2. Temporary, Non-Immigrant Visas:

- J-1 Visa holders are considered **non-immigrants**, meaning they are **temporary visitors** who are required to return to their home countries after completing their program.
 - These participants are **students, teachers, scholars, or trainees**, not workers seeking to migrate to or settle in the U.S.
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3. Education and Cultural Exchange as the Core Mission:

- While participants in the Summer Work Travel program may take up temporary jobs (e.g., at resorts, national parks, or other seasonal employers), **the emphasis is on cultural exchange**. Participants are encouraged to engage with local communities and learn about American culture while sharing their own.
 - The "work" aspect is merely a **means to support their cultural and educational experiences**, not the primary goal.
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4. Not a Part of Workforce Development:

- Programs like SWT are **not aligned with state-level Department of Workforce Development initiatives** because they are not intended to address unemployment or labor shortages.
 - J-1 participants do not compete with U.S. workers because:
 - **Destinations (or regions)** must demonstrate seasonal workforce shortages for employers within those areas to qualify as **Host Employers** in the Summer Work Travel (SWT) program. This requirement ensures that the program aligns with its purpose of fostering cultural exchange without negatively impacting the U.S. labor market.
 - Employers are required to ensure they cannot displace American workers or affect their wages.
 - Positions offered to J-1 participants are typically seasonal or temporary roles that are hard to fill with domestic workers.
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5. Participants Are Students, Not Workers:

- SWT participants are full-time university students from their home countries who use their summer break to come to the U.S. for cultural exchange. Their primary identity is as students—not as part of the labor force – and they are only eligible for the program between university semesters and must be enrolled in classes following their work & travel in the U.S.
 - Many participants return year after year with a focus on improving their English skills, engaging with host families and communities, and participating in cultural activities like festivals or educational trips.
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6. Examples of Cultural Exchange in Action:

- **Community Engagement:** J-1 participants often volunteer in local events, participate in public cultural festivals, and share traditions from their home countries.
 - **Learning Opportunities:** Many employers and local organizations host activities or trips to introduce J-1 participants to American history, traditions, and communities, further fulfilling the cultural exchange mission.
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7. Supportive Statements from Officials:

- The U.S. Department of State has repeatedly emphasized that these programs are about **building goodwill and fostering global understanding**, not filling employment gaps.
- Public diplomacy initiatives, like BridgeUSA programs, are designed to showcase America's diversity, openness, and cultural richness to the world.

Final Takeaway:

The BridgeUSA programs (like SWT) are fundamentally **education and diplomacy initiatives**, not employment programs. They are **regulated by the Department of State** and align with cultural exchange, not workforce development. This significant distinction separates Summer Work Travel from anti-immigration debates or laws targeting labor issues.

Ensuring participants aren't taking jobs from Americans

To participate in the **Summer Work Travel (SWT) program** as a Host Employer, **seasonal workforce shortages** must be demonstrated. This requirement ensures that the program aligns with its cultural exchange mission while avoiding the displacement of American workers. Here's how this works and why it's significant:

1. Proof of Seasonal Workforce Needs:

- Employers hosting SWT participants must demonstrate that the positions they offer are **seasonal, temporary, or peak-load roles** that are difficult to fill with local workers.
- This requirement ensures that J-1 participants are filling positions **only during high-demand periods**, such as summer tourism peaks, and are not being used to replace U.S. workers in year-round or permanent roles.

2. Employer Requirements:

- Host Employers must submit documentation as part of their application to sponsor SWT participants. This may include:
 - Historical staffing data showing the need for additional workers during specific months.
 - Evidence of previous recruitment efforts, such as job postings, advertisements, or reports from state Workforce Development agencies.
 - Business seasonality data (e.g., sales patterns or occupancy rates for hotels and resorts).

3. Oversight by Sponsors and the Department of State:

- Designated J-1 Visa **sponsors** (agencies authorized by the U.S. Department of State) carefully vet employers to confirm the seasonal nature of the jobs.
- Sponsors must also verify that the employment complies with federal, state, and local labor laws and that J-1 participants will not displace domestic workers.

4. Focus on Cultural Exchange:

- Employers must provide participants with access to **cultural exchange opportunities**, such as organized trips, community events, or activities that promote interaction with Americans. This further underscores the non-work, non-immigration focus of the program.

5. Differentiation from Immigration Programs:

- Unlike immigration programs that might focus on permanent or long-term labor solutions, SWT focuses on temporary roles within a specific framework:
 - J-1 participants are full-time students who return home after their program ends.
 - Employers are held to high standards to ensure compliance with the exchange program's cultural and educational goals.

This emphasis on demonstrating seasonal workforce shortages helps ensure the SWT program serves its intended purpose as a cultural exchange initiative while maintaining the integrity of the U.S. labor market.

H-2A, H-2B and F-1 Visas are also Non-immigrant work visas for Temporary Work.

H-2A visa: Temporary Agricultural Worker (Think 'A' as in Agriculture)

- **Purpose:** Allows U.S. agricultural employers to bring foreign workers to fill **temporary or seasonal** farm jobs when there aren't enough domestic workers available.
- **Eligibility:**
 - The job must be **temporary or seasonal** (usually tied to growing seasons).
 - The employer must demonstrate that they couldn't find enough U.S. workers.
 - The employer must provide **housing** and **transportation** for H-2A workers.
- **Duration:** Up to **one year**, with the possibility of extensions (maximum stay: **3 years**).
- **Common Jobs:** Crop harvesting, planting, orchard work, livestock tending.

H-2B visa: Seasonal, Non-agricultural Worker (like landscaping, hospitality, seafood processing),

H-2B visas are **non-immigrant visas**. They are **temporary work visas** that allow foreign nationals to work in the United States for a specific period in **seasonal, non-agricultural jobs**. The H-2B program is meant to help U.S. employers fill temporary labor shortages when they can demonstrate that there are not enough U.S. workers available for the job.

Since H-2B visa holders must return to their home country when their visa expires, it does not lead to a **green card** or permanent residency. However, workers can apply for visa renewals or return in subsequent years if their employer sponsors them again.

F-1 visa: Educational is another visa that has joined the discussion, but I haven't seen it yet.

The **F-1 visa** is also a **non-immigrant visa**, but it is specifically for **international students** who want to study full-time at an accredited U.S. institution (college, university, high school, or other academic programs). Unlike work visas like the H-2B, the F-1 visa is designed for education rather than employment.

Key Points About the F-1 Visa:

- **Temporary status:** It allows students to stay in the U.S. for the duration of their academic program and any authorized practical training.
- **Work limitations:** F-1 students can work only in specific conditions, such as:
 - On-campus jobs (limited to 20 hours per week during school and full-time during breaks).
 - Off-campus employment through **Curricular Practical Training (CPT)** or **Optional Practical Training (OPT)**.
- **No direct path to a green card:** However, some F-1 students transition to work visas (e.g., H-1B) or apply for permanent residency through employer sponsorship.

So, while it allows students to stay in the U.S. temporarily, it is **not** an immigration visa for permanent residency.