



Guidelines for Administration of the WEST (Work, English Study, and Travel) Program with Korea

The Department of State is pleased to announce that the Government of the Republic of Korea and the Government of the United States recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to extend the BridgeUSA Korea WEST (Work, English Study, and Travel) program through December 1, 2028.

The Korea WEST program is an exchange opportunity for top university students and recent graduates from the Republic of Korea. The WEST program provides exchange visitors with structured English language and cultural training for two to five months, a work-based internship in their academic field of study of up to 12 months, and one month of independent travel in the United States. The maximum program duration is 18 months.

Program Administration

The WEST program is administered under the J-1 Intern category of the Exchange Visitor Program. Interested sponsor organizations are designated by the U.S. Department of State to coordinate with Korean government partners and provide visa sponsorship. These U.S.-based program sponsors also help WEST exchange visitors secure customized internship placements that align with their professional goals. WEST program sponsors receive a separate designation under which the program is administered.

The WEST program is also facilitated by the Korean National Institute for International Education (NIIIE). The Republic of Korea Ministry of Education is responsible for the initial vetting and selection of prospective WEST exchange visitors. The Ministry of Education receives funding from the National Assembly every year to cover some program costs. The Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs also provides student loan guarantees for eligible WEST exchange visitors.

Placement

During the first phase, interns must complete at least 90 classroom hours of English language training every four weeks. During this phase, interns also take coursework in American business practices and gain familiarity with business procedures, corporate culture, and general office management issues. The minimum duration of the first phase is two months and a maximum duration of five months. Upon completion of these educational requirements, interns complete a work-based internship of up to twelve months with a corporate, non-profit, academic, or another host organization. Upon conclusion of the internship or between English training and the internship, WEST exchange visitors may travel in the United States for one month. This travel phase is separate from the 30-day grace period that is applicable to all J-1 exchange visitors.

Screening and Selection of Exchange Visitors

WEST program exchange visitors are initially selected through a rigorous application process conducted twice a year by the Korean Ministry of Education. To learn more about the application process, prospective applicants may visit the websites of the [Korean Ministry of Education](#) and the [U.S. Embassy in the Republic of Korea](#).

Final screening and selection of exchange visitors is the responsibility of designated WEST program sponsors. All applicants must be interviewed and must meet the following program eligibility requirements:

- Be a citizen of the Republic of Korea;
- Receive approval for participation from the Republic of Korea;
- Be a bona fide full-time student or recent graduate of a foreign post-secondary academic institution; [A recent graduate is someone who graduated no more than 12 months prior to the anticipated WEST program start date. Vocational students or graduates at a tertiary level academic institution are ineligible.]
- Provide proof of sufficient financial resources to support themselves throughout their program in the United States and for their return home; and
- Will not be accompanied by a spouse or dependents.

Monitoring and Support

Within ten days of arrival in the United States, exchange visitors are required to notify their program sponsor of their arrival, their U.S. residential address, and confirm that they have begun their program. Upon receiving this information, the sponsor must validate the exchange visitor's SEVIS record within 30 days of the program begin date to reflect the current U.S. residential address and primary site of activity (language training site).

Sponsors must update the exchange visitor's Form DS-7002, Training/Internship Placement Plan (T/IPP), with the internship phase information as soon as the host organization is confirmed. The travel phase must also be reflected in the T/IPP.

Sponsors must contact exchange visitors and host organizations every 30 days for the duration of the program to monitor the health, safety, and welfare of the exchange visitors, and to ensure that the program's goals and objectives are being met.

All other Intern category regulations apply. This includes adherence to regulations on U.S. address changes, program evaluations, T/IPP updates, and program amendments and terminations.

The Government of the Republic of Korea will continue to provide reciprocal opportunities for U.S. participants under its Working Holiday Program (WHP). To learn more about the reciprocal program for Americans, please visit [Working Holiday in Korea](#).

Contact DesignationMOU@state.gov with any questions regarding the WEST program.