

Information on J-1 programs from the State Department that oversees the program,

From: James, Michael R [mailto:JamesMR3@state.gov]

Sent: Friday, March 27, 2020 5:49 PM

To: James, Michael R <JamesMR3@state.gov>

Subject: Re: Community Support Group Update - Friday, March 27, 2020

Hello everyone, and happy Friday.

What a different world since my last update on February 28! I'm sending this from my home, since we're all teleworking to stay safe. It's surreal to think of how quickly things have changed since I attended the CSG forums in Virginia Beach, Outer Banks, and Williamsburg the week of March 9-13. If you've been thinking about the Summer Work Travel program at all, you've probably been wondering about the exchange visitors here now, and what will happen with the program this summer.

As you may know, the Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) Bureau, where I work, [strongly recommended](#) that all Exchange Visitor Program private sector program sponsors follow ECA COVID-19 guidance, including postponing ALL program start dates for 60 days after March 12, 2020. The Department of State urged sponsors to either cancel the programs altogether or defer the start dates to a date past the current recommended 60-day suspension period. Of course, time will tell if start dates need to be postponed further.

We have all been working hard to gather information and post guidance for sponsors, as well as the general public, for the many questions about current and future participants in all categories of the Exchange Visitor Program. You can find that information on our website, here: <https://j1visa.state.gov/covid-19/>

Lots of things have been happening all at once. If exchange visitors here need help, they should contact their sponsors for assistance. Sponsors are working diligently to help those need it, especially those whose employers have closed and need to be relocation to any available job placements. Due to the uncertainty regarding the impact of Covid-19, the Department is currently working with the sponsor community to protect the health, safety and welfare of U.S. persons and all exchange visitors to the greatest extent possible, which may involve repatriating exchange visitors, if it is safe and feasible to do so.

Exchange visitors should also monitor the websites of their governments or embassies for information on travel notices, particularly regarding countries that have imposed border closures. For Peru, exchange visitors can register on the Embassy's website to be notified of the next available flight.

I'm hearing great things about employers, who themselves are struggling, being flexible with exchange visitors stranded here at the ends of their winter season programs, or who arrived shortly before border closures fell into place.

I'm also hearing amazing reports of volunteers helping to take food or collecting donations of gift cards to exchange visitors for stores such as WalMart. One example: In Myrtle Beach, the Seacoast Vineyard Church and All Nations Cafe are reaching out to the local churches, and community to bring awareness to the situation of the students there. Please contact Kathy Winfree for more information on their efforts, and if any exchange visitors could use assistance: kwinfree1111@gmail.com

All I can say about the summer program, is that I'm planning for one until further notice! The information below on upcoming CSG events is the latest I have received. Of course, events in March and some in April have been postponed. The CSG Summit Planning Committee is still considering potential locations and a plan for the next Summit.

That's all for now. Stay safe and healthy!

Regards,

Michael R. James

Branch Chief

Summer Work Travel and Camp Counselor categories

Office of Private Sector Exchange Administration

Private Sector Exchange

Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs

U.S. Department of State