



INTEGRATING J-1 PARTICIPANTS INTO YOUR WORKPLACE

Hiring J-1 participants can be both a great staffing solution and a wonderful way to enrich your workplace. It can also present some cultural uncertainty. This factsheet is designed to give you some ideas for how to integrate your J-1 participants into your workplace, and help them settle into their new surroundings. Living in a new country can be a challenging experience, and employers make a big impact in how well participants adapt to life in the U.S.

Culture shock

Culture shock is what happens when our culture is challenged by another’s way of thinking or doing something. It is part of the process of cultural adaptation, and it is natural for J-1 participants to experience it at some point during their stay in the U.S. While culture shock affects each individual in different ways and at different times, there are generally four phases. Note that the phases do not necessarily happen chronologically, and may occur more than once.

Excitement	Frustration	Adjustment	Feeling at home
When they arrive, your participants will likely have an initial period of excitement about the start of their adventure—with lots of interesting new experiences to keep them busy.	Your participants may soon realize that some things in the U.S. are boring, strange, and even frustrating, just like at home. They may feel anxious or withdraw from people around them. During this phase it may be hard for them to be positive. It is during this phase that kindness and compassion from their employer and co-workers can make a huge difference.	Soon your participants will likely get used to life in the U.S. and start to feel more confident and familiar. Their day-to-day life will get easier and they will be happier as a result.	Your participants will eventually feel at home in the U.S. They will be enjoying the culture and be able to function well in it. They may start to prefer parts of U.S. culture over their own.

Advising your participants on dealing with culture shock

It may be helpful to give the following advice to your participants if you think they are suffering from culture shock:

- Stay positive
- Give yourself a chance
- Try not to withdraw from your surroundings, it can make it worse
- Be open and friendly, people will respond in kind, which will help
- Keep an open mind and your sense of humor—both good and bad feelings are part of the learning experience

Cultural differences

There are likely to be many cultural differences between Americans and your J-1 participants. Many of these will be harmless, but some may need to be addressed.

- Personal space
- Punctuality standards
- Personal hygiene routines
- Tolerance of smoking
- Smiling and other gestures
- Tone and demeanor in different situations



IMPORTANT

If you are concerned about one of your participant's welfare, you or they should contact CIEE for help. CIEE has professional support staff available to help our participants with culture shock and adjusting to life in the U.S. If you need to report a participant issue, open our Employer Support Tool at www.ciee.org/hire/support.

In the workplace

Your J-1 participants should perform to the same standards as any other employee, but they may need a little extra help from you as they settle into your workplace and learn their jobs.

- Patience and communication are critical – your participants may need a little more time and extra instructions before they master their duties
- Always speak slowly, clearly, and directly to your participants – maintain eye contact and be careful with your tone and body language – this will help them to understand your intent
- It's a good idea to double check that they really understand your instructions – they may pretend to understand something in order to avoid embarrassment – asking them to repeat things back to you is a good way to make sure
- You may need to be more specific about your expectations in areas such as punctuality, personal hygiene standards, smoking, and meal break policies

Good communication—key to success!

Good communication is the key when employing J-1 participants. Finding ways to maintain contact with them throughout their stay can make a big difference. Don't be afraid to ask them what's wrong if they are not meeting your expectations or if you notice behavior that is of concern to you.

Some of your participants may always speak their mind, while others you may not hear from at all. Some participants may unintentionally appear argumentative or disgruntled, yet others may keep quiet or say they're okay when something is in fact bothering them. Cultural and other misunderstandings can be resolved through good communication.

CIEE support staff are available to assist if you are not able to resolve conflicts with your participants on your own. We encourage all employers to contact us sooner rather than later when having issues with their participants, so that we can help before the problem escalates.

EMPLOYER BEST PRACTICE

Here are some things you can do to help alleviate culture shock issues in your workplace:

- Train and/or discuss cultural adjustment issues with the managers and local staff who will interact the most with your J-1 participants
- Attend CIEE offered webinars that address differences and culture and successful managing tips
- Learn about your participants' culture before their arrival and encourage your local staff to do the same
- Plan staff activities like cookouts or trips to local tourist attractions that allow your participants to experience more than just work, and to get to know their American co-workers and managers outside the work environment. As an added bonus, these things can boost your reputation as a J-1 employer, increasing demand for your jobs!
- Consider designating a staff member for your participants can go to with problems