



Foreign national physicians who seek entry into U.S. programs of graduate medical education (GME) or training must obtain an appropriate visa that permits clinical training activities. One visa commonly used by foreign national physicians is the J-1, a temporary nonimmigrant visa reserved for participants in the U.S. Department of State's **Exchange Visitor Program**. As a public diplomacy initiative of the Department of State, the Exchange Visitor Program was established to enhance educational and cultural exchange and mutual understanding between the people of the United States and other nations. In keeping with the program's goals for international exchange, **J-1 physicians** are required to return home for at least two years following their training before being eligible for certain U.S. visas.

The Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG) is designated by the Department of State as the visa sponsor for all J-1 physicians who participate in clinical U.S. training programs. ECFMG administers its sponsorship program in accordance with the provisions set forth in a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of State and in the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations. ECFMG must ensure that J-1 physicians and host institutions meet the federal requirements for participation. ECFMG does not sponsor physicians for other U.S. visa types.

General Eligibility & Requirements

Eligibility for J-1 visa sponsorship should not be presumed and cannot be determined until a complete review of an individual's U.S. visa history has been conducted. Foreign national physicians seeking J-1 sponsorship to enroll in programs of GME or training in the United States must fulfill a number of general requirements, detailed in ECFMG's Exchange Visitor Sponsorship Program (EVSP) application materials. At a minimum, applicants must meet all of the following requirements:

- Hold a Standard ECFMG Certificate without expired examination dates, if applicable. (Note: Graduates of LCME-accredited U.S. and Canadian medical schools are not required to be ECFMG-certified.)
- Have passed United States Medical Licensing Examination® (USMLE®) Step 1 and Step 2 Clinical Knowledge (CK); or the former Visa Qualifying Examination (VQE), National Board of Medical Examiners® (NBME®) Part I and Part II, or Foreign Medical Graduate Examination in the Medical Sciences (FMGEMS); or an acceptable combination thereof.
- Hold a contract or an official letter of offer for a position in an approved GME or training program.
- Provide a "Statement of Need" from the Ministry of Health in the country of most recent legal permanent residence.

Sponsorship Process

ECFMG facilitates J-1 sponsorship through the coordinated efforts of training institutions and foreign national physician applicants. ECFMG verifies that foreign national physicians meet J-1 eligibility requirements. Each host institution assumes responsibility to provide J-1 physicians with approved clinical training as evidenced, in part, by dually signed contracts for GME. Host institutions designate Training Program Liaisons (TPLs) to facilitate the sponsorship application process and serve as resources for J-1 physicians training in their programs. TPLs streamline communication between the training program, the J-1 physician, and ECFMG. Additionally, TPLs are responsible for reporting any issues affecting the J-1s' full-time participation in the training programs and/or their overall well-being. This communication ensures regulatory compliance and provides required administrative oversight.

The Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) is a national, web-based tracking system implemented by the U.S. Government to assist educational institutions and government agencies in managing foreign national student and exchange visitor data. As a designated visa sponsor, ECFMG is required to process J-1 visa sponsorship through SEVIS.

Upon establishing an applicant's eligibility, ECFMG issues **Form DS-2019, Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor (J-1) Status**. The physician may also request Form DS-2019 to enable dependents (spouse and unmarried, minor children) to apply for J-2 dependent status. Issuance of Forms DS-2019 indicates that the physician and dependents are eligible to apply for the J visa. Agencies of the U.S. Government make decisions regarding the issuance of visas. The DS-2019 is one of many factors considered by the U.S. Government in determining whether to issue the visa. Policies and procedures of the U.S. Government are subject to change. J-1 physicians and J-2 dependents are responsible for complying with all U.S. laws and regulations pertaining to foreign nationals.

Once secured, maintenance of J-1 status in the "physician" category requires annual application to ECFMG, through which ECFMG reevaluates a physician's continued eligibility to participate in the J-1 program.

ECFMG's sponsorship for GME participation is limited to the time typically required to complete specialty/subspecialty training requirements as determined by one of the member boards of the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS). The duration of sponsorship is further limited to a maximum of seven years.

Resources

ECFMG Exchange Visitor Sponsorship Program — Visit ECFMG's website at www.ecfm.org/evsp for access to:

- EVSP *Reference Guide* detailing sponsorship requirements, selected federal regulations, and program guidelines
- J-1 visa application information
- Important updates

ECFMG Certification — www.ecfm.org/certification

U.S. Department of State Exchange Visitor Program (DOS-EVP) — <http://j1visa.state.gov>

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services — www.uscis.gov

U.S. Department of Homeland Security — www.dhs.gov

U.S. Embassies and Consulates — www.usembassy.gov

American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) — www.abms.org

Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) — www.acgme.org

Additional Information

ECFMG-EVSP representatives are available to answer your questions by

- phone** at +1 (215) 823-2121, Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Eastern Time in the United States;
- e-mail** at evsp-support@ecfm.org; or
- mail** at 3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104-2685, USA.