J-1 STEM Sponsorship Initiative @UGA
Department of State – BridgeUSA
November 2022

Immigration Services at UGA is pleased to present a new initiative being implemented by the U.S. Department of State (DoS) through their “BridgeUSA” J-1 STEM Sponsorship Initiative.

Traditionally, the J visa program has been used by our office to bring scholars from other countries to conduct research and work at UGA. Through this new program, UGA will facilitate the sponsorship of J-1 Exchange Research Scholars at third-party host companies based in Georgia, and doing business in STEM fields. The program will streamline the visa process for scholars who have appointments or position offers at qualifying US STEM companies, as determined under the Office of Global Engagement (OGE) policies. Offering these sponsorships will broaden the scope of research done both at UGA and by UGA faculty and affiliates in Georgia.

Some scenarios to which this sponsorship category could apply are:

- Research positions offered to UGA graduates at Georgia-based STEM companies
- Research positions at start-up STEM companies associated with UGA faculty, institutes or departments

Please note: The Exchange Visitor Program (EVP) fosters global understanding through educational and cultural exchanges. As a result, sponsorship under this visa category is not a typical work visa, although it does allow salaried and compensated work. All exchange visitors sponsored through this new program will be part of the J-1 research scholar program mission to promote the exchange of ideas, research, mutual enrichment and linkages between research and academic institutions in the United States and foreign countries. More information can be found on the BridgeUSA website: https://j1visa.state.gov/programs/early-career-stem-research-initiative/

J-1 STEM Initiative Sponsorship Process

Final determination as to whether the company is in a STEM field, or the position offered qualifies under the State Department policies, will be made solely by the Immigration Services office at UGA.

The sponsorship for the J-1 STEM Initiative involves five steps:

1. The Director of Immigration Services (IS) at OGE meets with the sponsoring company’s HR office representative, the scholar’s work or performance supervisor, and the scholar, to discuss the process and review the work conditions and location. A contract for sponsorship between the company and UGA’s Immigration Services office will be signed by both OGE and the hosting company.
2. An IS immigration advisor will visit the work location to ensure the facilities and the purpose of the exchange falls within State Department policies.
3. The hosting company and the international scholar will submit electronic applications for sponsorship to IS at UGA.
4. IS will review the position offered and the scholar’s educational and experiential credentials.
to ensure an appropriate match with State Department guidelines.

5. If approved, IS will issue Form DS-2019 and express mail it to the scholar.

6. The scholar will apply for the J-1 visa at a U.S. Consulate, and enter the U.S.

**Note:** We cannot guarantee approval of the J-1 visa by the U.S. Consulate. That decision is made solely by the Consular Officer, based upon the position offered and the applicant’s background.

**Conditions of the Position:**

The duration of the sponsored position may be between three weeks and five years. Sponsorship may be for up to one year initially, with up to four subsequent annual extensions. The employer must pay the offered salary, and provide health insurance and other benefits as are offered to other employees. OGE is responsible for reporting certain information regarding the sponsorship to the U.S. Department of State and Department of Homeland Security.

Once in the U.S., the international scholar will submit an electronic check-in form to IS, confirming they have entered the U.S. and are beginning the sponsored position. Depending upon the length of the position, subsequent “check-ins” with IS may be required to ensure the sponsorship is progressing smoothly and successfully, including ensuring availability to cross-cultural events and / or programming. The J-1 researcher must comply with health insurance requirements set by the Dept. of State, and must be offered health insurance that is normally offered by the employer to all employees. This must include supplemental medevac and re-patriation insurance.

**Sponsorship Costs:**

The hosting company would be required to pay the following fees to OGE.

- Travel expenses for initial site visit to work location
- J-1 sponsorship fee - initial: $1,500
- J-1 extension fee: $500
- J-1 Amendment to position fee: $300
- Express mailing fees (UPS or Federal Express)

In addition, the international scholar will need to pay the “SEVIS” fee to the U.S. government prior to applying for the U.S. visa, and the U.S. visa application fee to the U.S. Dept. of State. The fees may be paid by the company or the scholar. As of Fall 2022 rates are:

- SEVIS fee: $220
- US Visa application fee: $160

Depending upon the country of citizenship, there may be an additional visa application “reciprocity” fee. These government fees are subject to change: [https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/Visa-Reciprocity-and-Civil- Documents-by-Country.html](https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/Visa-Reciprocity-and-Civil- Documents-by-Country.html)

**More Information:**

For more information about these opportunities please contact Robin Catmur-Smith, Director of Immigration Services at UGA: rcatmur@uga.edu; 706 202-2546