



Global Educators

Visiting Teacher Program

Task Force Report

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1. Overview

The purpose of the Global Educators/Visiting Teacher Program Task Force (Task Force) was to evaluate and recommend whether AFS-USA Intercultural Programs, Inc. (AFS-USA) should continue a Visiting Teacher Program (VTP) redesigned to meet the U.S. Department of State (DOS) guidance (April 2008) for the J-1 visa category regarding teachers (*see appendix 1: U.S. State Department Guidance and Regulations*).

The State Department regulations for the J-1 visa do not require that exchange teachers be paid. However, the new guidance issued April 2008 stated that exchange teachers on the J-1 visa must be compensated “commensurate with a U.S. teacher with similar responsibilities and similar education.” AFS-USA was informed in February 2009 that it must follow the guidance.

Recommendations to National Council from the VTP Task Force

- The Task Force does not recommend implementing a program which conforms to the J-1 regulations as it is not consistent with the core values and attributes of AFS-USA’s mission.
- The Task Force recommends that AFS-USA immediately continue planning a short term program option (3 week minimum), as it requires no special visa. (Most Task Force members also participated in the short term Thai Program which took place in October 2009.) (*see appendix 2: Short Term Thai Program description and background papers*).
- The Task Force recommends a new group convene to make recommendations regarding future educator programs (this includes exploring other visa categories).

Recommendations on future educator programming

- Consider programs at alternate times of the year including times that coincide with partner country vacations, and better start times for US schools
- Consider programs including administrators
- Include AFS-USA staff person(s) and National Council liaison for task force
- Include a partner country person on the new task force
- Set an expectation of time line and work required
- Use conference calls as needed
- Remember the program name – “*Global Educators Program*”

Work of the Task Force

- To evaluate State Department regulations and guidance to determine whether the VTP could be revised to comply with the J-1 regulations and guidance
- To survey similar organizations which use the J-1 visa for teacher exchanges, US schools regarding hosting desires for a teacher exchange program, AFS partner countries regarding the elements of an educator exchange program they could support and AFS-USA volunteers involved in the VTP.
- To gather relevant information (i.e. other visa categories for an educator exchange program)
- To formulate recommendations to AFS-USA in regards to continuing a Visiting Teacher Program within the confines of the J-1 Teacher Category

Key Findings

- B-1 and B-2 visa categories appear to offer a good alternative to the J-1 for an educator exchange program (*see page 11: Alternative Visas in this report and appendix 3: Visa Information*)
- Shorter programs are feasible and offer benefits to international educators, U.S. schools and support the AFS-USA mission
- U.S. Schools and many AFS Partners have a strong interest in an educator exchange program (*see page 8: Survey Summaries in this report*)

2. U.S. State Department Guidance and Regulations for J-1 Teacher Exchange Programs

Due to changes in the office of designation, including new personnel and interpretation of the regulations governing the teacher category of the J visa regime, the US Department of State issued new guidance in April 2008. This guidance states in part:

Sponsors are reminded that Exchange Visitor Program teachers are expected to teach full-time at a primary or secondary accredited educational institution in the United States and are expected to receive payment commensurate to a US teacher with similar responsibilities and similar education (*see appendix 1: U.S. State Department Guidance and Regulations*).

The AFS-USA Visiting Teacher Program was designed as a cultural exchange, and participants have understood that they would not receive salaries. Also, AFS-USA has never asked host schools to provide a salary or the monetary equivalent of a salary for the teachers they have hosted as this program is designed as a volunteer experience. Although the State Department well understood the nature of the AFS-USA Visiting Teacher program when it granted the original designation, AFS-USA was informed in February 2009 that AFS-USA and all other organizations hosting international teachers must now meet the compensation requirement. Furthermore, the regulations state that teachers must teach full-time and satisfy the teaching standards in the host state. As a result, AFS-USA was left with two choices to move forward: continue with the current program which would result in having our designation revoked, or voluntarily suspend the program for the 2009-2010 academic year until it had addressed the issues. AFS-USA made the decision to voluntarily suspend the program. Revocation would have meant that AFS-USA would not be eligible to apply for re-designation for a 5-year period. Suspending allowed the possibility to restructure the program to meet the new guidance or to find a more suitable visa category.

Since May 2009, a Task Force of volunteers and staff has been working on a set of recommendations on how the program should move forward. Details follow in this report. For meeting minutes, please refer to the AFS-USA wiki: http://www.afswiki.org/index.php/Global_Educators_Program.

3. Description of the VTP Task Force and Its Work

The Task Force began meeting in May 2009 to explore all options to continue the VTP while pursuing the feasibility of the J-1 visa route. Objectives and a timeline were designed to help reach conclusions which are detailed on the AFS wiki: http://www.afswiki.org/index.php/Global_Educators_Program.

The group designed surveys to gather background information and data, developed a written history (this document), as well as developed recommendations for next steps. Members of the Task Force participated actively in and learned from the Short-term Thai Program in October 2009 which was instituted in response to funding support and encouragement offered by the U.S. Embassy in Thailand and AFS Thailand. The group identified information and questions to help guide a future Task Force to continue researching the future of the Visiting Teacher Program.

The Task Force met weekly via phone conference from May 2009 until January 2010 as well as regular email communication and GoTo meetings as needed. The Taskforce met three times in-person. No additional costs were incurred for in-person meetings as they occurred in conjunction with previously planned meetings: The VT End of Stay (EOS) June 13-16, 2009; The Short Term Thai EOS October 21-22, 2009; and a sub-committee during the AFS-USA Support Conference in Austin, TX July 10-13, 2009. The group also met in sub-committees via conference call to design survey questions to collect data from AFS partner countries, U.S. school districts, U.S. volunteers, and other exchange programs.

Every effort has been made to ensure all steps were open for review, including keeping the National Council informed and posting meeting minutes on the AFS-USA –wiki:

http://www.afswiki.org/index.php/Global_Educators_Program. In addition, a DVD was developed to record one of the 2009 Short-term Thai program visits and a 2006 CD, recording a VT in action both at the elementary and a high school levels. Local newspapers also took interest in the short-term program. (*see appendix 3: short term Thai Program background papers*)

Sincere appreciation goes to staff support, especially to Erin Abrams, Sponsored Programs Specialist (FLEX, CBYX, Youth LEAD and Global Educators) for her ongoing commitment and dedication to the program, and to the Training and Marketing Department for their assistance in approving the survey designs along the way. Also, gratitude is extended to the U.S. Embassy in Thailand, and to AFS-Thailand, for making possible the short term exchange opportunity to share intercultural education.

4. Description of the Year/Semester VTP 1972-2008

The Global Educator Program, which began in 1972, was primarily a school year or semester program in which educators from other countries came to share their cultures in American schools and to learn about American culture and education by observing, presenting and teaching in American schools and living with one or more American host families. AFS-USA hosting program has historically been referred as the Visiting Teacher Program (VTP). VTs generally provided cultural enrichment, including foreign language, geography, history, and the arts, in a variety of classes. Based on volunteer feedback, it has been reported that in recent years VTs did more teaching in elementary and middle schools and more observing in high schools.

Recent VTs reported that they came to improve their English, learn teaching methods and experience the culture of the U.S. Some also came with a desire to travel within the United States.

Schools often hosted teachers to increase diversity and increase interest in foreign languages. Schools did not pay the VTs, but some provided school lunches, transportation to school, field trips, teaching materials to take back to the VT's home country, and gifts. In the 1990's teachers came from a variety of countries, making the program more attractive to potential host schools. In more recent years, teachers came primarily from Thailand and China with a few teachers from Turkey and Latin America and have been hosted for either an academic year or semester.

Most VTs stayed for the full school year; however, a significant number came for one semester. Essentially all VTs lived with host families and taught in primary or secondary schools, generally in public school systems though some have been placed in private charter and religious school as well. The program varied depending on the volunteer VT coordinator within the Area Team and the region of the country. Some teachers had one school and one family placement for the year. Others had 2 to 4 school and family placements in order for teachers to have a broader understanding of U.S. life and schools. Visiting and observing several schools and all grades K-12 was encouraged. Volunteers found the school and host family placements with some aid from regional Field Staff and the VT Program Coordinator in the New York National Service Center. AFS-USA gave area teams funds equal to those for student placements. When possible, several teachers were clustered in one area team.

One important difference from the student program is that AFS-USA students have few occasions to talk about their culture while VTs regularly talk about their culture and language to many students and colleagues both in the US and their home country, thus, creating tremendous a multiplier effect for intercultural learning.

Pre-2009 VT Program Elements

Scope of the Program

- School year (August to June) or semester (August to January / January to June).

- Hosted on average 50 VTs per year
- American educators have participated in sending programs to China and Thailand. These programs are dependent on funding opportunities as well as human resource capabilities to run the program within the hosting and sending AFS partner countries. Currently, AFS Thailand and AFS Panama are hosting educators with oversight from the AFS-USA Sending Staff.

Placements

- Some Area Teams (ATs) regularly hosted 1-2 VTs; others, as many as 7. Some ATs were in close proximity which allowed for occasional, larger group activities.
- VTs live with host families.
- Most ATs planned on 1 host family per VT, but some planned on 2-4 with the intention of providing a broader experience.
- VTs were placed in accredited schools ranging from kindergarten through grade 12.
- Visiting a variety of schools and grade levels was encouraged.

Countries that have participated

- Argentina
- Bolivia
- Brazil
- China
- Chile
- Colombia
- Honduras
- Paraguay
- Soviet Union/Russia
- Thailand
- Turkey

Expertise of VTs

- Most were high school English teachers
- A few were teachers of subjects such as biology or math, or were elementary school teachers or college professors
- Some Latin American and Turkish VTs were part-time teachers or translators.

English Proficiency

- Most had proficient conversational English.
- Chinese, Turks, Russians and Latin Americans generally had good English.
- Thais generally had good understanding, but their spoken English was sometimes more limited.
- Teachers with weaker English needed more support and seemed to benefit from a year-long program

Funding

- Freeman Foundation, Starr Foundation, American Turkish Society, Otto Bremer Foundation, U.S. Embassy in Thailand and FLEX program. Some provided monthly stipends for VTs. Full or partial scholarships were covered depending on the funding amount and partner country fees.
- In some instances, teachers from China and Thailand received funding from their home schools or the government. Some VTs paid all of their AFS-USA program fees themselves.

Orientations

- Arrival and End of Stay in New York City for all VTs
- Most VTs had host community arrival orientation

- Some regions had VT orientations in October and March/April.
- Some ATs held mid-year orientations.
- Group orientations were easier in ATs hosting several teachers.

Restrictions in Recent Years

- No driving
- Approval required for independent travel
- Compensation from schools not allowed, except gifts, transportation, and lunches.
- No independent travel to Canada for Chinese teachers (per AFS China)

Issues

- Homesickness for family, especially young children. Earlier, China limited VTs to those with young children to ensure they would return.
- Excessive desire to travel during program.
- Adjustment issues.
- Ineffective use of teachers by schools, resulting in boredom.
- Occasional placement of teachers in language immersion programs thus limiting their opportunity to improve English.

5. Short-Term Thai Program, October 2009

AFS-USA offered an interim program for twelve Thai educators, eight teachers and four administrators, from October 9 to 22 (Short-term Thai Program). The program was supported by AFS Thailand and funded by the U.S. Embassy in Thailand. Thai administrators were a new element to the VTP.

The VTs were sent to four area teams in groups of three. AFS Thailand grouped each cluster prior to arrival so that one teacher in the group had strong speaking English skills as not all teachers selected for the program were proficient in English. VTs stayed with host families and visited local schools for 1-3 days each. They mostly observed, especially in the upper grades, but most talked with students, made some presentations to classes and discussed teaching methods and methods of administration with faculty and administrators. They also were taken to local cultural events and sites.

The elementary and middle schools appreciated the program most and were interested in having future programs. The high schools were cooperative, but in some there was less interaction between the VTs and the students or staff.

Thai administrators participated in presentations and interacted with students and teachers and were especially interested in talking with American administrators. The Thai administrators had limited English which often required other VTs or Thai AFS students to translate for them.

Members of the Task Force volunteered to plan and coordinate the within their respective area teams for this pilot program. At the conclusion of the program, the volunteers felt the following:

- The program was too short with only five to seven days in schools
- Thai educators often had only one day per school
- Thai educators might not have received a satisfactory impression of schools given the short length of the program
- The program did not allow for significant meaningful interactions between visiting Thai educators and US teachers or students
- A program of this type should be a minimum of three weeks

The Short Term Thai Program

- Required extensive preparation efforts by volunteers and AFS-USA staff
- Required a high level of volunteer time during the visit
- Included need for follow-up reports including financial documentation
- Included participation by educators with limited English skill which added the challenge of the need for translators
- Was an enjoyable opportunity for most of the schools, host families, and volunteers
- Allowed for participation by new schools
- Resulted in increased interest in short visits by international educators

6. Survey Summaries¹

6.1. Other Organizations Involved in Teacher Exchanges

The Work Group reviewed a list of 62 organizations which use the J-1 visa to bring international teachers to U.S. primary and secondary schools.

Five organizations completed the survey (all of whom use the J-1 Visa):

- One public school system.
- Two non-profits.
- Two private international schools.

Responses indicate the organizations generally:

- Pay full salary provided by the host school
- Use teachers as foreign language teachers with a full-time schedule – primarily teaching French, Spanish and Chinese language
- Have teachers stay for 1 to 3 years
- Complete background checks: US [3], home country [2].
- Place at all grade levels K-12
- Do not provide home stays in a host family

Specific interesting responses

- Two respondents had no programs less than three years.
- Teachers received state certification in Massachusetts and Indiana
- Two respondents also had foreign teachers on H-1 visas, even beyond three years
- Teachers from one program received partial salary from the home country
- The non-profits placed teachers in public, private and charter schools

6.2. U.S. Schools

Eighteen useful responses from schools representing all grade levels, but mostly high schools

Schools who have hosted foreign teachers

- Six schools
- None indicated the visa used
- One foreign teacher on a Fulbright program received compensation
- Teachers stayed a semester or a year

School that might host or send teachers in the future

¹ For copies of full survey results, please email Erin Abrams at eabrams@afs.org.

- Hosting teachers, 3 replied “yes.” 12 “maybe,” 3 skipped
- Sending teachers on exchange, 3 “yes” (one comment “probably only short term”), 6 “no,” 9 skipped
- Subjects schools would like visiting teachers to cover:
 - Language (10),
 - Country specific culture (6),
 - ESL (5),
 - History (4),
 - Math (4),
 - Science (3),
 - Art (3),
 - Economics (1)
- Reasons for not hosting teachers:
 - Did not know it was possible (8),
 - Financial challenges (6),
 - State certification requirements (4),
 - Testing requirements limit time available for course content (3),
 - Received insufficient information (2),
 - Effort required (0)

Additional comment:

- We were very pleased to have a teacher join our school, last spring, through the auspices of AFS-USA. We'd gladly host others, as the experience was beneficial for everyone. (This school hosted an AFS-USA teacher for a semester in spring 2009.)

6.3. AFS International Partners

Partner Countries who responded – 23 responses from 21 Partners

Argentina, Austria, Belgium French, BFL - Flemish, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Denmark, Egypt, Ghana, Honduras, India, Italy, Panama, Paraguay, Philippines, Portugal, RSA, Russia, Spain, Thailand [3 replies]

Length of program desired

- Semester 16
- Year 13
- Three weeks 10

How many teachers can you recruit?

- 48% said 1-2: Colombia, Honduras, Spain, India, Bolivia, Panamá, Belgium French
- 40 % said 3-5: Portugal, Paraguay, Belgium Flemish, Austria, Italy, Denmark, Argentina (more for 3 week program), Ghana, Egypt
- 20% said 6-10: Brazil, Thailand, Philippines, RSA

Are you able to recruit educators who meet J-1 requirements?

- Proficiency in English – Generally YES
 - 4 No's: Honduras, Paraguay, Spain, Thailand,
- 3 yrs teaching experience – Generally YES.
 - 5 No's: Paraguay, Honduras, Thailand, Belgium FR and Belgium FL
- Certification – Generally YES.
 - 4 No's: Colombia, Honduras, Thailand (1 of 3), Bolivia

About half the partners have a screening process for teachers similar to a criminal background check. The ones that do: Argentina, Belgium FL, Belgium FR, Bolivia, Brazil, Denmark, Egypt, Philippines, Thailand.

Costs and possible funding sources

- 6 replies indicated difficulty if the program costs were \$3000 to \$5000
- 14 replies indicated difficulty if the program costs were \$5000 to \$7000
- School salary while on leave for professional development
YES – Thailand, Argentina, Ghana

Partners supported all the program benefits suggested in the survey. The following responses were checked by 90% of respondents

- Education and training
- Improved English
- Increased cultural awareness
- Learning new teaching methodologies

6.4. AFS VTP Volunteers

The Task Force surveyed volunteers who have worked with the VTP in the last five years. Conclusions from this survey were used in Section 9 of the report on the benefits of the VTP.

6.5. General Conclusions for a Future VTP

The Task Force reviewed all the surveys and came to the following conclusions.

- Other exchange organizations, schools and departments of education are offering teacher exchanges that seem to be compliance with the J-1 visa regulations.
- The experience of many J-1 exchange teachers is different from the experience of teachers who participated in the AFS VTP
- Exchange teachers stay between 1 and 3 years
- Schools have an interest in hosting teachers.
- Lack of information and financial challenges are perceived obstacles for schools.
- The strongest interest in high schools is for foreign language instruction.
- Schools did not anticipate extra work would be an obstacle to hosting.
- Several AFS Partners have a high degree of interest in an educator exchange of a semester or year duration
- AFS Partners believe they could support a program

7. Consequences of a Revised J-1 Visa Teacher Program

The Visiting Teacher Program Task Force is of the opinion that complying with the State Department J-1 Guidance and Regulations for future VT Programs would not be consistent with the mission of AFS-USA nor in the spirit of the Fulbright Hayes Act. Based on our discussion, research, and surveys we conclude that there would be adverse consequences of changing the AFS-USA VT program so that it meets the guidance requiring compensation of VTs with a salary commensurate to their counterparts in their host schools, teaching full-time and satisfying the standards in the state in which he or she would teach as it would mean moving away from the core values and attributes of AFS-USA's mission of providing international and intercultural learning experiences to participants.

For example, International teachers:

- Would need to meet certification guidelines in the states in which they would be teaching

- Would need to be paid compensation that is equivalent to the compensation received by a full-time teacher in a US school
- Would teach full time (generally a language class)

A program meeting J-1 Visa requirements:

- Could leave less time for cultural lessons for all students
- Could restrict scope of classes VT could teach because of the school's curriculum and educational requirements
- Could limit time for VTs to explore U.S. culture
- Could limit opportunities for teachers to observe and to learn teaching techniques
- Could restrict recruitment of teachers who would benefit most from a cultural exchange, for example, a teacher with less English proficiency or teaching experience
- Could limit the countries for an AFS-USA program
- Could limit the variety of schools and grade levels which would have an interest in or benefit from the AFS-USA program

A recent VT said, *“I applied for the AFS-USA visiting teacher program to learn American culture and teaching methods and to share my culture with American students, teachers and families. If I were required to teach a full schedule and be responsible for a full set of classes all year, I would not have been able accomplish these goals. If I had the same responsibilities as an American teacher, I would expect to be paid like an American teacher. However, I chose the AFS-USA program because it provided the intercultural benefits I wanted. I did not expect to receive a salary in addition to these benefits.”*

A Visiting Teacher from China to the U.S. 2008-2009

8. Alternative Visas

Visa descriptions were obtained from http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types/types_1286.html. (see appendix 3 for a complete list of visas and other resources)

As referenced, the J-1 visa category guidance from the State Department requires that teachers be compensated at the same level as teachers in the school(s) they are visiting in the US.

As alternatives the VTP Task Force considered exchange visitor, tourist and business visas as follows:

Q visa – International cultural exchange visitors

- Requires employment and compensation

B-2 visa – Tourism, vacation, pleasure visitors

- Recreational in nature, including tourism, amusement, visits with friends or relatives, rest, medical treatment, activities of a fraternal, social, or service nature, and participation by amateurs, who will receive no remuneration, in musical, sports and similar events or contests

B-1 visa – Business visitors

- Individuals participating in a voluntary service program which benefits a U.S. local community, who establish that they are a member of, and have a commitment to, a particular recognized religious or nonprofit charitable organization
- Travel is to consult with business associates, travel for a scientific, educational, professional or business convention, or conference on specific dates
- Participating in a training program that is not designed primarily to provide employment
- Will receive no payment or income from a U.S. based company/entity, other than an expense allowance or expense reimbursement related to traveler's stay
- Individuals who will engage in independent research

Tourist or Business Visa Length of Stay: Persons admitted to the United States on B-2 or B-1 Nonimmigrant Visas are usually granted a 6-month stay. The maximum length of stay for visitor visa holders is 6 months. The immigration officer at the port of entry determines how long each visitor is allowed to stay in the country. Most visitors have their I-94 cards stamped with a 6-month stay, however the immigration officer has the right to issue a shorter stay on a case by case basis.

In certain circumstances, some activities that are done on exchange visitor visas, for example the J-1, are also permitted on business (B-1) or tourist (B-2) visas.

The Task Force recommends looking at either the B-2 or B-1 visa category in pursuing future VT Programs. It should be noted that for tourism, countries that participate in the US Visa Waiver Program are exempted for stays up to 90 days. However, historically, the VT Program did not pull from the countries on this list. Due to likely length of stay issues in either visa category, program lengths of 3 weeks to one semester are suggested.

9. Benefits of the Visiting Teacher Program

The Task Force surveyed volunteers² who have worked with the VTP in the last five years and conducted End-of-Stay evaluations with teachers over the years. Task Force members used this information and their knowledge of the program and the participating schools to prepare this list of benefits.

- All participants, visiting teachers, host families, and school colleagues, learn from sharing cultures
- Hundreds of students in the US and in the teachers' home countries are exposed in a fun and positive way to the differences in cultures around the world
- The VTP supports the AFS-USA Mission.

9.1. Benefits for VTs

- Improved English, especially spoken English and idioms.
- Gained understanding of US culture.
- Learned U.S. teaching methods.
- Obtained teaching materials.
- Made U.S. friends and contacts
- Increased professional opportunities in the home country

9.2. Benefits for U.S. Schools and Educators

- Enriched the curriculum and supported programs for intercultural learning and global awareness
- Enlivened traditional subjects with new topics of instruction, e.g. tsunamis in science, paper cutting or calligraphy in art, Thai dance in physical education,
- Increased interest in foreign languages

² For full survey results, please contact Erin Abrams at eabrams@afs.org.

- Provided foreign language instruction by a native speaker
- Provided opportunity to meet citizens of other countries
- Promoted intercultural awareness
- Made new friends and contacts from other countries
- Provided US educators with understanding of other teaching approaches

9.3. Benefits for AFS Partners

- Enhanced VTs appreciation of volunteering.
- Helped open China to AFS-USA student program.
- Helped AFS-USA-Thailand since most AFS-USA volunteers in Thailand are teachers.
- Interested new groups of people in AFS-USA programs

9.4. Benefits for Volunteers and AFS-USA

- Learned from sharing of cultures
- Formed new personal relationships
- Retained volunteers who were not interested in student program
- Brought in additional volunteers
- Opened new schools for student program
- Interested students in travel or hosting

10. Suggested Elements of a Revised Visiting Teacher Program

10.1. Essential Elements

- Duration of at least 3 weeks
- Home stay
- Variety of participating countries
- Local AFS-USA volunteer support
- Visiting educators with classroom experience
- School plan for effective use of teachers
- Arrival orientations
- Program expectations effectively communicated to teachers, schools, and host families
- Out-of-school activities for teachers
- Benefits for host schools

10.2. Useful Elements

- Teachers with good conversational English
- Permission for VTs to drive with guidelines
- Opportunities for limited independent travel with guidelines
- Stipends for teachers
- Increased placements in elementary schools
- Opening of program to administrators

10.3. Undesirable Elements

- Requirement for full pay and certification
- Teachers teaching their language only
- Payment to host families
- Participants primarily interested in extended travel
- Teaching full-time
- Inadequate opportunity for cultural exchange