U.S. DRIVER'S LICENSE FOR J-1 EXCHANGE VISITORS

FRENCH AMERICAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
Exchange Visitor Program

Getting a U.S. Driver's License

Who is eligible for a driver's license or ID?

Any J nonimmigrant in lawful status may apply for a driver's license or ID card, per state or territorial law. The nonimmigrant must present necessary supporting documents required to verify legal presence in the United States.
The application process must be completed at your local Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) and, depending on the state, may include a written or practical exam.

When can a nonimmigrant apply for a driver's license or ID?

Please follow these steps before applying for a driver's license or ID:

1. Send your arrival documents to the FACC-NY within 5 days of your arrival in the U.S.

2. Once you receive email confirmation from the FACC-NY that your record in SEVIS, the government system, has been validated, wait 2 federal business days to ensure the record is updated in all relevant databases

3. Once you receive validation confirmation from the FACC-NY and have been in the U.S. for at least two weeks, you should apply for a Social Security Number (SSN) which is required by many states in order to issue a Driver's License. If required, you can find more information about applying for a SSN here.

4. After receiving your SSN, you can proceed to apply for a driver's license at your local DMV.

Please note that several states require that a nonimmigrant have at least six months left on the Form DS-2019, "Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor (J-1) Status," to be eligible for a driver's license. Either consult with the state or territory's DMV or visit its website to see if this is a requirement.

What documentation must a J nonimmigrant present to the DMV?

For specific state requirements, please refer to the DMV website or contact a local DMV office.

In general, the nonimmigrant should present the following:

- Valid passport with visa
- Form I-94, "Arrival/Departure Record"
- Form DS-2019
- Social Security number (SSN) on a Social Security card

What if the SSA refuses to give a J nonimmigrant an SSN?

A nonimmigrant who is ineligible for an SSN will receive a Form SSA-L676. The nonimmigrant may have to present this letter when applying at the DMV office to fulfill the SSN requirement, if any.

What are the requirements for an accompanying dependent (J-2)?

An accompanying dependent who applies for a driver's license or state ID should present supporting personal J-2 status documentation as well as status documentation of the primary J-1 visa holder. The DMV will look for consistency between the dependent's duration of status and that of the primary J-1 status holder. Sometimes DMV offices have difficulty when verifying dependents.

The best ways to avoid issues when applying for a J-2 driver's license:

- Always go to the DMV office with the primary (J-1) status holder
- Bring the following paperwork:
  - The primary and dependent's most current Form I-94
  - The primary and dependent's valid passport with visa
  - Proof of identity (per state requirements)
  - Proof of relationship (e.g., marriage certificate)
  - The primary and dependent's current Form DS-2019

Errors and Discrepancies

What should a J nonimmigrant do if there is an error on their passport/visa?

The FACC-NY encourages all exchange visitors to review their J-1 visa before arriving in the U.S. to ensure that all information listed is accurate.
A nonimmigrant with a passport or visa error should consult the home country's embassy or consulate to find out how to correct, update or renew the passport/visa. Most embassies and consulates have a website with information regarding this issue.

What should a J nonimmigrant do if the name on the passport does not match the name on the Form DS-2019?

Again, the FACC-NY encourages all exchange visitors to review the DS-2019 immediately after receiving it to ensure that there are no errors.
If you notice a typo or error on your DS-2019, please contact the FACC-NY immediately. We will correct the error and reissue your DS-2019.

What should a nonimmigrant do if the DMV denies the nonimmigrant a driver's license because of a discrepancy on the Form I-94?

CBP reviews requests for corrections and, if appropriate, issues the necessary replacement documents to remedy errors made on the Form I-94 at the time of entry into the U.S.

Miscellaneous

Am I required to apply for a U.S. Driver's License?

In the United States, driving laws varying depending on what state you live in. Some states will recognize your foreign driver's license, some will require an International Driver's Permit, and some will require that you apply for a U.S. license. Please consult your local DMV to confirm whether you will need to apply for a U.S. license.

What does the U.S. driver's test consist of?

Typically, to receive a driver's license in the U.S. applicants are required to pass a written test and a road test.
Again, this will vary depending on where you live. Some states have reciprocal treaties with other countries – if this is the case, you may not need to take a written test or a road test. Your local DMV will be able to confirm the steps required to obtain a U.S. license.

Will all states add the 30 or 60-day grace period to a driver's license validity period?

No. Not every state adds the 30 or 60-day period after the program end date to the driver's license for an initial applicant and/or an applicant renewing a driver's license. Many states choose to issue a benefit that is only valid until the program end date listed on the Form DS-2019. A nonimmigrant should consult with the local DMV office before applying for a state driver's license or renewing a driver's license.

Do I need insurance to drive in the U.S.?

Whether you are temporarily renting a car or purchasing a car to use throughout your program, you should always purchase car insurance. Most car rental agencies offer rental car insurance. If you purchase a car, popular car insurance companies in the U.S. include Geico, Statefarm, Allstate, and Progressive.

A note from your Sponsor:

All information on this fact sheet has been taken directly from the U.S Department of State website. Please refer to this site for any further questions.

For more state specific questions, you should contact your local DMV directly. Your HR department may also be a good resource. As a reminder, please familiarize yourself with state and federal driving laws in the United States before operating a motor vehicle. Under your J-1 visa, you are subject to the same laws and regulations as a U.S citizen

If you have any questions or concerns not answered here, please contact coordinator@faccnyc.org