



USAID
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COMPLETE GUIDE TO USAID VISA COMPLIANCE

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INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Thousands of people a year are brought to the United States and enrolled in training, education and invitational travel programs funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID). With few exceptions, each USAID-sponsored visitor to the U.S. must travel on a J-1 visa issued under one of two USAID program numbers.

The Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) is a web-based system for maintaining information on international students and exchange visitors in the United States. SEVIS is administered by the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP), a division of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The purpose of SEVIS is to monitor the issuance of F, M and J visas, and to gather and monitor information about students and exchange visitors in the U.S. from entry to exit. In accordance with Department of State and Department of Homeland Security regulations, all exchange visitor program sponsors, including USAID, are required to use SEVIS to print the Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor (J-1) Status (Form DS-2019), electronically, and they must update SEVIS with information on all exchange visitors in the United States. Only approved U.S. citizens, located in the U.S., are able to have access to SEVIS. Agency policies address this need for U.S.-based centralization.

This document provides an overview of, and specific guidance regarding, procedures and systems required for J-1 visa processing for USAID sponsored participants. Detailed instructions for using the supporting computer systems are provided in accompanying appendices.

The preparation of the DS-2019 form is a critical step in the process of obtaining a visa for USAID-sponsored visitors to the United States. This form is presented to the Consular Officer, along with supporting documents, to obtain a J-1 visa prior to travel to the United States. After the Exchange Visitor is issued his or her J-1 visa and arrives in the United States, the information required on this form must be kept up-to-date or the participant will fall out of status and could be subject to action by authorities.

Policies governing participant training are contained in ADS Chapter 253, and policies governing visas for entry into the U.S. are contained in ADS Chapter 252.

COMPUTER SYSTEMS

All USAID Exchange Visitors (EVs) traveling to the U.S. are subject to the policies contained in USAID's policy documents, ADS-252 and 253. USAID Missions, Washington Offices and implementing partners must use TraiNet to track and report participants to USAID/Washington. TraiNet is the sole source of information on all USAID sponsored exchange visitors. Because only U.S.-based staff may access SEVIS, the Visa Compliance System (VCS) provides an interface between TraiNet and SEVIS.

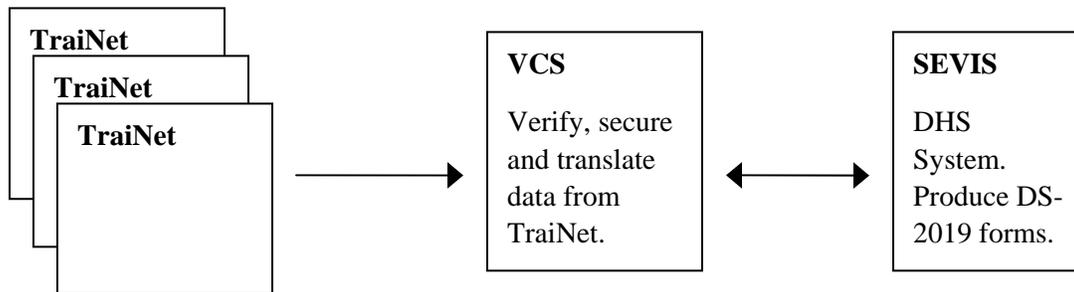


Figure 1 TraiNet, VCS and SEVIS Interaction

TRAINET

Contractors and Missions use TraiNet to capture and update data on training and exchange programs. TraiNet is the point of entry for all required data for the J-1 visa application process. In addition, TraiNet is used to update the information required by DHS during the EV's visit.

USAID VISA COMPLIANCE SYSTEM (VCS)

VCS is a secure web-based system that facilitates the data interchange between TraiNet and SEVIS. VCS performs three functions: First, it implements a process to verify data from TraiNet. Second, it translates TraiNet data to the format required by SEVIS and manages its transmission. Lastly, it provides approval management of requests for and changes to DS-2019 information as they move through the workflow process.

VCS users must be approved centrally and assigned a role with the appropriate security precautions addressed. VCS adheres to all USAID password and login procedures, including password length, character sets and password expiration.

STUDENT AND EXCHANGE VISITOR INFORMATION SYSTEM (SEVIS)

SEVIS is the computer system created by DHS to vet, approve and monitor students and exchange visitors in the United States. It creates a means for information collection and reporting via the Internet. VCS communicates DS-2019 information to SEVIS, which produces the actual forms. SEVIS reports back errors and alerts related to exchange visitors. All automated processes are handled through VCS; however there are instances that require the USAID/Washington Responsible Officer (RO) or an Alternate Responsible Officer (ARO) to utilize the real-time, web interface to handle particular situations.

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES/WORKFLOW

Sponsoring Units are responsible for tracking the whereabouts of their participants in the United States and their return status at the conclusion of training. Current information must be provided to the USAID Washington Responsible Officers at any time upon request.

There are four roles for stakeholders involved in USAID's J-1 visa process:

- **Initiator:** Using TraiNet, is responsible for entering all required information for initiating visa applications and tracking participants. (See Appendix 1)
- **Verifier:** Using VCS, verifies participant data as transferred to VCS from TraiNet. (See Appendix 2)

- **Approver:** Using VCS, provides Mission confirmation of the legitimacy of each participant and training intervention; approves participant data after being verified by R2. (See Appendix 3)
- **Submitter:** Submits approved participant data to SEVIS for processing, manages user access to VCS, and monitors the workflow through the system.

Every exchange visitor candidate must be deemed appropriate by each of these roles before a DS-2019 form can be produced. If a candidate is rejected by the Approver or Submitter at any time during the process, the candidate is sent back to the Verifier.

INITIATOR

This role is performed by the employee responsible for data entry in TraiNet. All participants nominated for training in the U.S. must be entered into TraiNet.

The initiator does not have to be a U.S. citizen. This role can be served by a USAID Contractor, centrally funded organization, or USAID Mission. There is no limit to the number of individuals who may be assigned to the Initiator role.

At no time should the Initiator perform the role of the Verifier or use the username or password of the Verifier.

Responsibilities of the Initiator include:

- Entering data in TraiNet to create new EVs and Programs.
- Transmitting TraiNet data to the global data repository.
- Updating data in TraiNet during the course of a program.
- Updating all status fields throughout the program and when it is completed in compliance with Agency guidelines.
- Correcting data in TraiNet to resolve data errors.

Initiators may receive the following email notifications from the systems indicating that immediate action may be required:

- One time notification that an EV has been terminated.
- Daily notifications of EVs who have a return status in TraiNet of “Unknown” and are one to three days past the end date of their programs.

VERIFIER

The verifier is responsible for ensuring that data entered into TraiNet is complete and correct when imported to VCS.

The verifier does not have to be a U.S. citizen. The Verifier role can be served by a USAID contractor, centrally funded organization, or USAID Mission, but cannot be served by the same individual(s) in the Initiator role.

At no time should the Verifier share his or her username and password with anyone.

Responsibilities of the Verifier include:

- Verifying TraiNet data that is imported to VCS.
- Communicating data errors to the TraiNet Operator for correction in TraiNet.
- Determining disposition of participant by either removing nomination or moving to USAID Mission for approval through VCS.
- Communicating with the Approver and Submitter to determine status of questionable applications and to provide any information required for Security Risk and Fraud Inquiry (SRFI), see ADS 252.3.3.
- Ensuring that all Exchange Visitors are properly validated within three calendar days of their program start date.
- Retaining a black and white copy of stamped, endorsed DS-2019 after EV's arrival in the US.
- Providing the Submitter with information and documentation pertaining to an Exchange Visitor upon request.

Verifiers may receive the following email notifications from the systems indicating that immediate action may be required:

- Daily notifications of EVs whose data in VCS has errors preventing processing.
- Daily notifications of EVs to be reviewed and either verified or rejected in VCS.
- One time notification of EVs whose programs are scheduled to begin, sent on the day the program is scheduled to begin.
- One time notification of EVs whose programs are scheduled to end, sent on the day the program is scheduled to end.
- One time notification that an EV has been terminated.
- One time notification that an EV has been marked as "Not Returned" in TraiNet (i.e. is a non-returnee at the end of his or her program).
- Daily notifications of EVs whose return status is "Unknown" and are four to six days past the end date of their program.
- One time notification of EVs whose return status is "Unknown" and are six days past the end of their program and therefore subject to being terminated in SEVIS for non-compliance, sent six days past the program end date..

APPROVER

This role must be performed by a U.S. citizen at a USAID Mission or at USAID Washington to approve participant data or data updates for Exchange Visitors.

The number of individuals assigned the Approver role is determined by the Mission Director or USAID representative.

Responsibilities of the Approver include:

- Providing Mission confirmation of the legitimacy of each Exchange Visitor who is a resident of the country, as well as confirmation of the training intervention, and certifies that a SRFI has been conducted.
- Approving data from field offices to send to USAID EGAT through VCS.
- Entering last four digits of the passport number and country of citizenship of Exchange Visitor.
- Sending disapproved applications back to the field office for correction or removal.
- Communicating potential problems to TraiNet supervisors in field offices.
- Nominating people to fill the role of Verifier.

Approvers may receive the following emails from the systems indicating that immediate action may be required:

- Daily notifications of EVs to be reviewed and either approved or rejected in VCS.
- One time notification that an EV has been terminated.
- One time notification that an EV has been marked as “Not Returned” in TraiNet (i.e. is a non-returnee at the end of his or her program).
- One time notification of EVs whose return status is “Unknown” and are six days past the end of their program and therefore subject to being terminated in SEVIS for non-compliance, sent six days past the program end date.

SUBMITTER

This role is performed by the Responsible Officer (RO) or Alternate Responsible Officers (AROs) within the EGAT/ED office approved by DOS to access SEVIS.

Responsibilities of the Submitter include:

- Submitting approved VCS applications to SEVIS through batch transfer function.
- Sending disapproved applications back to Verifier for correction or removal.
- Receiving and processing alerts from SEVIS (RTI and batch).
- Communicating potential problems to TraiNet supervisors in field offices and officers at USAID Missions.
- Managing signing, printing, and shipping of DS-2019 forms back to Missions and field offices.
- Managing VCS access of Verifiers, Approvers and other Submitters.
- Managing all State Department and Department of Homeland Security reinstatements.

Submitters may receive the following emails from the systems indicating that immediate action may be required:

- Daily notifications of EVs who are not “validated” in SEVIS and are nearing the date when they will fall out of status and become “No-Show.”
- One time notification that an EV has been marked as “Not Returned” in TraiNet (i.e. is a non-returnee at the end of his or her program).
- One time notification of EVs that have a return status in TraiNet of “Unknown” and are 4 days past their program end date, sent 4 days past the program end date.
- One time notification of EVs whose return status is “Unknown” and are 6 days past the end of their program and therefore subject to being terminated in SEVIS for non-compliance, sent 6 days past the program end date.

It is fully expected that there will be communication among these different roles. Verifiers, for instance, are expected to communicate with their TraiNet Operator and Approver. **However, it is never (repeat, never) appropriate to give an Exchange Visitor contact information for a Mission’s Approver without prior consent of the Approver.**

VCS USER AUTHORIZATION

The Responsible Officer designates one or more Alternate Responsible Officers to serve as VCS User Managers. VCS User Managers are responsible for assigning user access to the VCS. Since it is impossible for one person to physically know every potential world-wide user of the system, the authorization process requires that each VCS role authorize and verify the roles that report to them. The processes for authorizing VCS users are detailed below:

Submitter Authorization Process

1. Submitters are the State Department-approved USAID Responsible Officer (RO) and Alternate Responsible Officers (AROs).
2. The RO is responsible for assigning access to other Submitters.
3. Submitters, as designated by the USAID RO, can be set-up as a VCS User Manager. VCS User Managers assign access to other VCS users and handle all requests for resetting passwords.

Approver Authorization Process

1. The Mission Director must nominate a U.S. Citizen who is a Mission Employee as the Approver or Alternate Approver in an email addressed the USAID RO. The email must include the full name and email address for the nominated individual. Washington Assistant Administrators or Deputy Assistant Administrators may nominate Washington Office Directors.
2. The VCS User Manager will provide the nominee, via email, his or her user ID, instructions on roles and responsibilities as well as a citizenship certificate which must be filled out by the nominee, NOTARIZED and returned to the VCS User Manager.
3. Upon receipt of the nominee’s notarized citizenship certificate, the VCS User Manager creates a user profile. The R3 will then receive an email including his or her VCS password.

4. Any requests for passwords or resetting of passwords must be sent directly to the VCS User Manger.
5. Requests to remove an Approver or Alternate Approver must be sent by the Mission or USAID/Washington office to the USAID RO.

Verifier Authorization Process

1. Approvers must nominate Verifiers by email to the TraiNet/VCS helpdesk at jvisa@devis.com and the VCS User Manager.
2. A username and password are assigned and separately communicated to the new Verifier.
3. Any requests for passwords or resetting of passwords must be sent directly to the VCS User Manager.
4. Requests to remove a Verifier should be sent to the TraiNet/VCS Helpdesk and VCS User Manager.

Initiator Authorization Process

1. Initiator's access to Trainet is set by each TraiNet site administrator (individual designated when TraiNet site ID is assigned).
2. Missions, offices and partners who do not yet have TraiNet access should contact the TN/VCS Helpdesk at jvisa@devis.com.

WORKFLOW AND MAJOR EVENTS

The information flow in the workflow process is linear. Data originates in TraiNet and is transferred to the VCS. After verification and approval, the data is then submitted to SEVIS. Incorrect or erroneous data is corrected directly in TraiNet. When SEVIS completes data processing, it sends a file back to the VCS with the results of its processing. This allows the following major events to be centrally managed and controlled:

- **Issuance of DS-2019:** In order to create a Form DS-2019, information about the prospective EV is entered in TraiNet and transferred to VCS for verification and approval. Authorized USAID personnel electronically submit data from VCS to SEVIS. The Form DS-2019 is generated by SEVIS, downloaded, printed and signed in Washington before being sent to USAID Missions.
- **Participant Status Changes:** Throughout a participant's stay in the United States, USAID is required to transmit changes in the participant's status to SEVIS. Among the most important of these status changes are "Validation", "Program end" and "Return to home country." Key dates and timeframes are noted in the chart below.

Event	Initiator	Verifier	Approver	Submitter
DS-2019 Request	Enters all data. It is recommended that this step be done 4-6 weeks before the interview at the Consulate. This timeframe may vary by country.	Verifies that information is complete, correct, error free. Communicate errors to Initiator for correction.	Manages Security Risk and Fraud Inquiry, approves request.	Submits request to SEVIS, prints and signs DS-2019 form, ships signed forms to the field.
Validation	Updates EV status to “In Training” within 3 business days of the arrival.	Verifies status within 3 business days of arrival.	n/a	Submits validation to SEVIS
Program End	ASAP update of completion status upon confirmation.	n/a	n/a	n/a
Departure from United States	ASAP update of return status to returned or not returned, once confirmed.	Receives notification if Initiator does not update TraiNet within 3 days.	Receives notification if visitor will be terminated in SEVIS for non-compliance.	Terminates visitor if he or she does not return to home country.

INITIATION PROCESS

A Sponsoring Unit intends to request a DS-2019 to allow a participant to apply for a J-1 visa. The organization provides full training intervention and participant biographical information to the TraiNet Operator who enters the request into TraiNet. When necessary, the organization must report changes in the participant’s data to the TraiNet Operator to update the system. Data from TraiNet is transferred to VCS, and VCS provides some automated data validation.

VERIFICATION PROCESS

The Verifier checks information transferred to VCS from TraiNet on a daily (or as needed) basis. The Verifier may either:

1. Communicate any error to the Initiator for correction in TraiNet,
2. Reject the application outright, or
3. Verify that the information is correct, and send the application to the Mission for approval of the R3.

APPROVAL PROCESS

The USAID Mission receives the verified application data from the Verifier and can:

1. Approve, indicating that the data is correct and that the participant and intervention are legitimate, or
2. Reject the application and send it back to the Verifier.

SUBMISSION PROCESS

The USAID Responsible Officer (or Alternate Responsible Officer) in the U.S. receives the application and can:

1. Review and submit the approved application to SEVIS, or
2. Reject the application and send it back to the Verifier

The Responsible Officer (RO) in the U.S. is notified by DHS that the DS-2019 is approved or that there are errors. If approved, the RO prints, signs and ships the DS-2019 form as specified in ADS-252. If errors exist, the RO communicates the error to the Verifier for correction.

Signed DS-2019 forms must remain in the control of the USAID Sponsoring Unit (or implementer, as designated) until they are submitted with supporting documents to the U.S. Consulate, where the J-1 visa is issued. The organization must ensure that if a participant does not depart for training as planned, the DS-2019 form is expeditiously returned to the Responsible Officer for disposal with an explanatory cover memo. DS-2019 forms may not be destroyed outside the borders of the U.S. and must be accounted for by the USAID Responsible Officer.

WHERE TO GET HELP

Inquiries regarding system access, password resets, VCS user issues and DS-2019s should be directed to Linda Walker at lwalker@usaid.gov. Inquiries regarding ADS-252 policy may be directed to James Nindel at jnindel@usaid.gov. Inquiries regarding visa and immigration issues may be directed to Ms. Marina Gelles, Esq. at mgelles@devis.com.

The TrainNet/VCS helpdesk is available to answer technical and usability questions:

Email: jvisa@devis.com

Phone: +1.703.527.4340

Website: <http://trainet.usaid.org>

Website references:

USAID Visa Compliance System: <https://vcs.usaid.gov>

TrainNet/Web: <http://trainetweb.usaid.gov>

USAID ADS Chapters 252 and 253: <http://www.usaid.gov/policy/ads/200>.