Applying for J-2 Work Authorization

J-2 work permits are obtained from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) through an application process that may take an average of 3 months to complete. Employment cannot begin until the J-2 has received a work permit, called an Employment Authorization Document (EAD).

The EAD allows the J-2 dependent to work in any job, full-time or part-time for certain period of time, not to exceed past the J-1 program end date. Employment cannot continue beyond the end date listed on the EAD. Extension of the EAD or work authorization is possible. Should an extension be requested the application process must be repeated so please plan ahead to avoid gaps in work authorization.

Eligibility

- J-2 dependents must be physically present in the U.S. and maintaining his/her status to apply for work authorization.
- J-2 dependents may not seek employment to support the J-1 student/scholar. Regulations require that the J-1 student or scholar have enough funding to support himself/herself plus any dependents during the program.

Application Process

Step 1. Complete Form I-765 Application for Employment Authorization
Download most current fillable pdf version of Form I-765 from USCIS website, https://www.uscis.gov/i-765. ISSS does not recommend using the e-file option. See “Tips to Completing Form I-765.”

Step 2. Gather, prepare, and mail your application materials to USCIS. Checklist of items to submit.
- Two U.S. passport photos, taken within the past 30 days. Lightly write your name and I-94 number in pencil on the back of each photo. Please refer to U.S. Department of State for passport photo requirements.
- Money order or personal check for $410 made payable to “U.S. Department of Homeland Security”.
- Optional: Complete Form G-1145 to receive electronic notification.
- Completed Form I-765. Don’t forget to sign your name, fill in date and telephone number.
- J-2 Work Permission Cover Letter (see suggestions on next page)
- Photocopy of your passport, visa stamp, electronic I-94 record (found at www.cbp.gov/i94) or paper I-94 (both sides) for J-1 and J-2.
- Financial documentation within the past 6 months. Example: J-1 appointment letter, scholarships, personal funds, bank statements or letters.
- Proof of marriage. Photocopy of marriage license or certificate, translated into English, if needed.
- Photocopy of previous EAD card(s), if applicable.

Mail Form I-765 and supporting documentation to USCIS
ISSS recommends that you send your application materials by Express Mail (Federal Express, UPS, USPS Priority Mail). Make a photocopy of the entire application for your records. The following USCIS address is for California residents. If you do not live in California, refer to Form I-765 filing instructions for other USCIS mailing address.

Express Mail
USCIS
Attn: AOS
1820 E. Skyharbor Circle S
Suite 100
Phoenix, AZ 85034

U.S. Postal Service
USCIS
P.O. Box 21281
Phoenix, AZ 85036
Within 2-4 weeks of sending your I-765 application to USCIS you will receive I-797C Notice of Action in the mail. Do not lose this paper receipt. It contains your receipt or case number which is needed if you want to check on the status of your application online at https://egov.uscis.gov/casestatus/landing.do. Verify that your name and the address information printed on the receipt notice are correct.

Average processing time at USCIS is 90 days. If work authorization is granted you will receive your EAD card in the mail. It is recommended that you also keep the mailer that is attached to the card. Review the card to make sure all information is accurate. Present your EAD card to the employer as official work authorization. Remember you are only authorized to work within the dates listed on the EAD.

Suggestions for J-2 Work Permission Cover Letter
USCIS wants to ensure you are not applying for work authorization to support the J-1 spouse. Employment should be for customary recreational or cultural related activities.

In your letter mention your monthly expenses (rent, utilities, food, miscellaneous) and source(s) of income to indicate you have sufficient funding. Then you may add these statements, “I wish to be employed to pursue my interests in (topic) and experience the American workplace and culture. The income from my employment may be used for customary recreational and cultural activities. I understand that my earnings cannot be used for the support of my J-1 spouse.” If your J-2 status is valid for more than one year, you may add a statement in your letter that you would like to request employment authorization to the end of your DS-2019 (J-1 program).

Tips to Complete Form I-765
• Make sure to check the box “Permission to accept employment”.
• If you have previously had an EAD in J-2 status, check “Renewal of my permission to accept employment”.
• Box #1, enter your family name in CAPITAL or UPPER CASE letter. Use lower case for your given or first name(s).
• Box #3, enter an address where the receipt notice and EAD card should be delivered if work authorization is approved. If you move, notify USCIS by completing online change of address form. Alternatively, you may use a reliable friend or family member’s address by notating C/O <person’s name>, followed by his/her street number and name. For example, enter “c/o Sammy Slug, 1156 High Street”.
• Box #9, Social Security Number. Leave this space blank if you do not have SSN. J-2 dependents can apply for a SSN after receiving the EAD.
• Box #10, I-94 number. The 11-digit number is found in the electronic I-94 record or top left corner of the paper I-94 card.
• Box #11. Check “no” if you have never applied for employment authorization from USCIS. Check “yes” if you have received an EAD in the past. Answer rest of the questions.
• Box #12. Enter the date of most recent entry into the U.S. Refer to the electronic/paper I-94 or admission stamp in your passport.
• Box #13. Place of Entry. List the U.S. city or port-of entry. For example, San Francisco (SFR).
• Box #14. List the status received upon initially entering the U.S. For example, “J-2 Dependent,” or “F-1 Student”.
• Box #15. List your current nonimmigrant status, “J-2 Dependent”.
• Box #16, Eligibility Category, enter (C)(5).
• Applicant Signature box. Your signature must fit between the text above and signature line. If the signature is too large, touches the text above, or below the signature line, your application will be returned causing a processing delay. Sign your name smaller than normal.