

BridgeUSA Program Survey

Absence of Crucial International Exchange Visitors Devastates Seasonal Businesses Across the United States

From September 13 to October 15, 2021, the Alliance for International Exchange surveyed 665 seasonal businesses and summer camps nationwide, of which 72% are small businesses. Below are responses from these businesses, 31 in Tennessee.

SUMMER WORK TRAVEL PARTICIPANTS*

	2019	2020	2021	Decrease from 2019
United States	108,303	4,952	39,647	63% ↓
Tennessee	2,018	209	1,197	41% ↓

*Data source the U.S. Department of State, J-1 Visa Exchange Visitor Program.

- ECONOMIC IMPACT -

60%
Of Businesses
Lost Revenue

20%
Of Seasonal
Positions Unfilled

3 in 5
Shortened their
season/hours or closed
business locations



Did not meet peak
staffing needs without J-1
Visa Exchange Visitors



Reported staff burnout



Reported lower quality of
customer service or longer
customer wait times

In Tennessee, 18 businesses reported a total loss of \$12,133,000, averaging

\$674,056
per business

- PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IMPACT -

Lack of J-1 Visa Exchange Visitors hamstrings U.S. public diplomacy goals by taking away a key positive U.S. experience from tomorrow's international leaders, and preventing them from engaging with their American host communities.

Host employers across America agree or strongly agree that Summer Work Travel and Camp Counselor participants:



Enable U.S. based staff to gain a better understanding of other cultures



Contribute to a positive culture in the workplace



Make the community more sensitive to other cultures

"The staffing shortage led to customer perceptions that we do not want to take care of them. Inflated wait times. Staff turnover of U.S. based employees. Burnout and frustration."

- Restaurant in Pigeon Forge, TN

"International participants help to grow our economy and educate our local community by bringing multicultural awareness."

- Retail Store in Gatlinburg, TN

"Lost hours due to closing earlier because I didn't have staff to cover. No way to truly calculate all revenue lost."

- Retail Store in Gatlinburg, TN

"Program participants expand our knowledge of various cultures and provide lasting friendships for our employees."

- Hotel in Gatlinburg, TN

"We have made life long friendships with many of the BridgeUSA students, many of whom have gone on to be business owners, doctors, lawyers, engineers, etc."

- Restaurant in Gatlinburg, TN

"We are closed one day a week at all stores. We can not open for lunch at my 2 steakhouses. We had to cut breakfast entirely (all 7 days) at 2 concepts. ETC ETC."

- Restaurant in Sevierville, TN

"You can't put a number on the number of phone calls missed! Or lack of service during this craze!"

- Hotel in Gatlinburg, TN

"The lack of staff has hurt the entire industry tremendously. There is really no way of knowing just how bad we have been hurt financially."

- Restaurant in Gatlinburg, TN