

BEFORE YOU GO, YOU SHOULD KNOW

Volume 4: Budgeting while in the U.S.

Having a clear plan for your financials while in the U.S. offers distinct benefits, including minimizing stress during your FLTA program. Financial information can be found in your Terms of Award. It explains how much you will receive per month and what bills/payments are your responsibility. Your financial considerations are yours alone and will be different from the other FLTAs. Comparing your financials to others in the program is time ill spent.

Your financial considerations have been specifically tailored to your program including the part of the country where you will be and your host institution. The calculations are enough for you to pay for your housing, food and incidental living expenses, but will most likely not be enough for you to enjoy a luxury lifestyle or send money home. In order to prepare for the year ahead, we recommend you make a budget for yourself that outlines how you will spend and save the money that you receive and that tracks total earnings and spending.

When preparing your budget, consider what you are required to pay:

- ◆ Are you responsible for the gap period between the end of your orientation and the reporting date of your host institution?
- ◆ Are you responsible for your rent?
- ◆ Are you responsible for your food costs?
- ◆ Are you responsible for utilities?
- ◆ Will you have a cell phone bill?

What do you need to save for?

- ◆ Will you need to move out of your lodgings for vacation periods (this is the case with some dormitories that close during winter break)?
 - If so, how will you save to have enough funds for that time?
- ◆ Do you move out of your apartment before the end of the month (May, usually), but need to pay for the whole month?
 - If so, how will you save to have enough funds for that time?

Keep in mind:

- ◆ Your first and last month's stipend payment will be prorated to your start and end dates; budget accordingly.
- ◆ When you arrive **be sure to bring personal funds** to help you with the initial expenses of getting settled. If your host institution is paying you, there may be a delay in receiving your first payment as they may need additional time to set you up in their system. Be prepared to rely on personal funds during this time.

What would you like to save up for (a dream expense)?

Before you plan your dream trip across the U.S. during the winter vacation, purchase that new laptop or spend a month straight eating at high end restaurants, make sure you can answer questions similar to the following:

- ◆ Is your dream expense realistic considering your financial situation?
- ◆ How much do you need to save per month in order to be able to afford the dream expense?
- ◆ Have all of your required expenses been accounted for in your budget?

Emergency funds:

It's always a good idea to save some money as an emergency fund for unforeseen expenses such as:

- ◆ Medical
- ◆ Dental
- ◆ Replacing/repairing something lost or broken

Banking in the U.S.:

We recommend you open a separate bank account while in the U.S. More details on the process of selecting which bank and opening an account will be offered at the U.S. summer orientations. Once you arrive on campus and speak with your supervisor, international student advisor, and colleagues, you will have a better understanding of what is the best banking choice to make at your host institution. If you still have questions after consulting with the aforementioned parties, please feel free to contact our offices.

Recommended task:

- ◆ Use Google or another search engine and type in "personal budget worksheet" to find different templates for personal budgets. Choose one that you like the best and would choose to implement when in the U.S.

Piece of advice:

- ◆ If possible, change some of your home currency into U.S. dollars before arriving in the U.S. You may need to pay for extra luggage expenses, food items and a taxi if you miss a connecting flight or your flight is delayed. You will save yourself much stress by coming prepared with some U.S. dollars.

Regards,
FLTA Staff