



## 2022-23 FLEX & YES Re-Entry Orientation

Dear FLEX and YES Local Coordinator,

YES and FLEX students are required to participate in a re-entry evaluation session in their host community to be sure that they are taking with them the thoughts, ideas, and lessons that we hope they have learned over the course of the year. Included in this packet is everything you need to be able to conduct these sessions with your students as well as some basic return travel information. Please submit the signed confirmation sheet and return it via email to [ayagrants@aifs.org](mailto:ayagrants@aifs.org) or fax to 203-724-1536 by June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

### Return Travel

Returns are scheduled on pre-determined group flights throughout the months of May and June. American Councils and AFS are in the process of booking all flights. Students will receive an email with detailed travel instructions a few weeks prior to departure.

Please be sure that all students have registered on the Department of State Alumni website at [www.alumni.state.gov](http://www.alumni.state.gov) which will be a great resource for them to stay in touch, browse international jobs, internships, and grant opportunities, and access one of the largest online periodical libraries around! Remember that host families and LCs can also register on the alumni network as a way to stay connected to their students.

Please also be sure that your students take the online year-end survey which is also administered by the Department of State. We are required to have 100% participation in this endeavor, and we appreciate your help in reminding your students to take it! The link to the survey will be sent out in an email to all FLEX and YES students between April and May.

Thank you for all of your hard work and dedication in helping to make this yet another successful year. Your efforts are changing lives for the better every day and you are the foundation of the AYA program. Thank you for all you do, and we look forward to the wonderful new stories the next class will bring!

Warm Regards,

Lisa Schacter  
Deputy Director



## Table of Contents

Re-Entry Orientation: Tips & Information .....	3
Re-Entry Orientation Objectives .....	3
Common Pre-Departure Feelings .....	4
Re-Entry Concerns Expressed by Exchange Students .....	4
Reverse Culture Shock .....	5
RE-ENTRY ORIENTATION: EXERCISES & ACTIVITIES.....	6
Self-Reflection .....	6
Looking Back to Look Ahead .....	6
A Picture Then a Thousand Words .....	7
Reflecting on Internal Change and Preparing for Differences .....	7
Changes Questionnaire .....	7
Re-Entry Action Plan .....	7
Bringing Closure .....	8
My American Life in Six Photos .....	8
Evolving View of the U.S. ....	8
Leave Well to Enter Well: Building your R.A.F.T. ....	8
Moving On .....	9
The Important Role Alumni Play .....	9
Alumni Project Planning .....	10
Sharing and Continuing the Experience .....	11
My Re-entry Action Plan Worksheet.....	11
Moving On .....	13
Common Problem and Resolutions Role Play.....	14



### Re-Entry Orientation: Tips & Information

- ✓ In this packet you will find information about reverse culture shock and coping mechanisms as well as various exercises and activities you should conduct with your student(s).
- ✓ It is strongly advised to conduct your re-entry orientation in a group setting so that students can reflect back on their year together and share their thoughts and ideas.
- ✓ Conducting re-entry orientations for all your students is encouraged, but the re-entry orientation for your FLEX and YES students should be grant specific.
- ✓ The orientation should take place a few days to several weeks before departure. You should allow for up to three hours to conduct the exercises and to facilitate discussions, we recommend that you combine your re-entry orientation with a group dinner and/or a fun social activity. You are welcome to arrange a longer retreat-style orientation as well.
- ✓ Ensure that the location of your re-entry orientation provides an atmosphere in which students can speak without interruption and focus on the topic at hand. Due to ongoing concerns of COVID, orientations may be conducted virtually but we recommend in-person.
- ✓ Make sure to review the exercises in the packet beforehand to collect any materials you may need for the exercises.
- ✓ Once you have conducted the re-entry sessions with your grant students, please complete the attached form, and return it to [AYAGrants@aifs.org](mailto:AYAGrants@aifs.org) or via fax 203-724-1536 with ATTN to Lisa Schacter.

### Re-Entry Orientation Objectives

- To help students reflect on what they have learned since their arrival in the USA and how they will incorporate these changes into their daily lives when they return home.
- To assist the students in the process of a positive departure and understanding framework of the re-entry phase.
- To help the students understand that re-entry into their home culture may be difficult and equip them with coping mechanisms.
- Explore and discuss options to continue to be global citizens including specific information about the Alumni network.



## Common Pre-Departure Feelings

- Anxiety
- Lack of tolerance/patience
- Tension
- Sadness
- Anger
- Defensiveness
- Mood swings, irritability
- Withdrawal
- Feeling neglected or ignored
- Feeling abandoned, alone or used

It is important to help students recognize that the above-mentioned feelings are common as they face leaving the U.S. Encourage students to talk openly about their feelings with you and their host families in the coming weeks to help them deal with their emotions and behaviors.

## Re-Entry Concerns Expressed by Exchange Students

Listed below are concerns expressed by several hundred international students who were about to return home and American students returning from their host country.

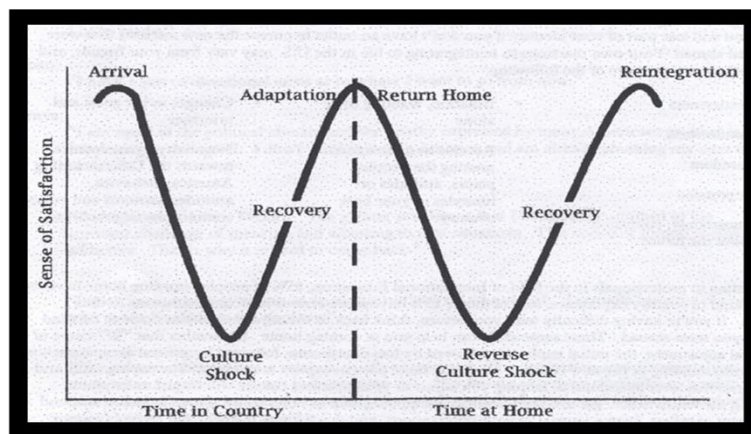
Area of Concern	Concerns Expressed by Exchange Students
<b>Family</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fitting back in</li> <li>- Not living up to family's expectations</li> <li>- Natural family's jealousy over son or daughter's attachment/love for host family</li> <li>- Readjusting to the formality of meals, manners, and food</li> <li>- Being treated like a child after having experienced a lot of freedom and independence</li> <li>- Being considered arrogant – not understood and accepted</li> <li>- Boring family with tales of American life</li> <li>- Family will see them as "more America" than Russian, Egyptian etc.</li> <li>-</li> </ul>
<b>Friends</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reactions of old friends to the "new me"</li> <li>- Being able to communicate with friends</li> <li>- Former classmates will have graduated; need to make new friends in a younger class</li> <li>- Friends will think they're bragging and showing off when speaking about US</li> <li>- Not being able to live up to their expectations</li> <li>- Being able to pick up old friendships – is it possible?</li> </ul>
<b>School</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Making up missed semester or year</li> <li>- Speaking native language well enough</li> <li>- Going back to a more rigorous academic system; more studying</li> <li>- Ability to pass university entrance exam</li> </ul>



<b>Language</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Being less fluent in native language now</li> <li>- Mixing English into native language</li> <li>- Losing the ability to speak English well</li> </ul>
<b>Personal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Missing host family and friends</li> <li>- Wanting to maintain some new attitude</li> <li>- Loss of independence</li> <li>- Less money to spend</li> <li>- Seeing their own country realistically; how to communicate this</li> <li>- Catching up on missed news, developments</li> <li>- Returning to host country</li> <li>- Conveying their exchange experience to those at home</li> <li>- Feeling more American than their native nationality</li> <li>- Missing luxuries; having to return to a simpler life</li> <li>- Living up to expectations in the community of being a Grant student.</li> <li>- Handling more traditional gender role issues at home</li> </ul>

## Reverse Culture Shock

As students begin to prepare for their return they may experience anxiety or stress about returning home. Students should begin to prepare themselves for what feelings they may experience when they return home so they can become aware of the symptoms of Reverse Culture Shock and know how to identify and manage it. Below is an image of the W curve of culture shock that describes a student's journey from arrival to reintegration in their home country.



**Provide students with examples, facts and coping mechanisms for RCS.**

### Facts about RCS:

- RCS is often overlooked or dismissed; only a few expect problems readjusting to home
- RCS is characterized by stages similar to those of culture shock (see above)
- For many, RCS can be much more difficult than initial culture shock
- RCS is different for everyone; the more intense the exchange experience, the more difficult RCS can be



- RCS cannot be avoided, but it can be managed
- RCS affects both the student and host family before and after the student departs

### Why does RCS occur?

- People and places have changed
- Students have changed and see things with new eyes
- There is a gap in information; life did not stand still, waiting for the student to return
- People may not be as interested in hearing about their experience as they are in sharing
- Few expected to have trouble adjusting home and therefore do not prepare

### How to manage RCS?

- Recognize the symptoms of RCS
  - Think about how you dealt with culture shock
  - Communication; talk to host family and discuss the departure
  - Keep in touch with family and friends back home within reason
  - Take some time to consider how you have changed, learned and grown from the experience
  - Compare both cultures; consider what aspects of American culture you would like to take home with you
  - Bring closure to your experience; say goodbye and thank you and make plans for continuing your relationship.
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## RE-ENTRY ORIENTATION: EXERCISES & ACTIVITIES

### Self-Reflection

*This point of the year is optimal for students to practice introspection and it is the perfect way to begin the re-entry orientation exercises. Guide your student(s) through easy and fun activities that will allow them to self-reflect and review their exchange experience.*

### Looking Back to Look Ahead

This activity is quick, simple and is a great way to kick-off your re-entry orientation. This exercise will allow students to think about how much they have and will change in the scope of 5-10 years and how this experience can help shape the rest of their lives.

Have each student describe themselves 5 years ago and 5 years from now in the perspective of them at that age in 1-2 sentences. For example: If the student is 16 S/He would state "I am 11 years old and attending school, I'm on the soccer team and my favorite thing to do is write" then S/he would describe themselves in the future "I am 21 years old, since being a foreign exchange student I decided to study journalism and currently am interning at a local Newspaper while I attend school etc."



### A Picture Then a Thousand Words

- Instruct students to pick 4-6 photographs that illustrate each stage of their experience in the U.S. from before they left home to now. *You can use photographs, postcards or magazine clippings for this exercise.*
- Instruct them to pick one more that they expect will illustrate going home.
- Instruct them to pick one card that could serve as the cover of the book they could write.
- Find a card that captures how they, their natural family and their host family are feeling right now.

### Reflecting on Internal Change and Preparing for Differences

*Through the provided exercises, students will reflect on how they have changed this past year and should also begin to consider how their home communities may have changed since they have been gone. Preparing to face differences upon returning home will help students to readjust when they return home. You can discuss the importance of change, why it is inevitable and necessary to grow.*

### Changes Questionnaire

Ask students the questions below to generate discussion about the ways in which they have changed.

- How Have You Changed?
- What surprised you when you first arrived in the U.S.?
- What kind of surprises might await you at home?
- What Does Home Mean to You?
- Is this an accurate description of your host family home? Your natural family home?
- Who at home is most likely to understand and appreciate the experience you have had in the US?
- How will your relationships change?

### Re-Entry Action Plan

This activity encourages students to create an action plan of how they will prepare for and deal with personal and emotional stress upon their return, how they plan to be an engaged citizen in their local community, how they plan to actively integrate their new knowledge into their academics, and how they plan to incorporate their new skills and interests into their professional path.

Introduce the activity by instructing students to fill out their own **Re-Entry Action plan** on page 12 which will help them to begin thinking about integrating new skills in their present and future lives. Let them know they will have 10-15 minutes to create their action plan and afterwards some of the plans will be shared with the group.



Depending on your group size you can break the students up into groups of 2-3 and ask them to share with their breakout group or you can come together as one group and ask everyone to share with each other.

### Bringing Closure

*Students and host families may find themselves in a difficult time at the end of the year filled with mixed emotions. Students are looking forward to returning home and seeing their family and friends but will also miss their host family and friends they made in America. Students may even withdraw from their host family in order to make the process of saying goodbye easier. Discuss positive ways students can say good bye to their host family, friends and communities. Give them ideas such as writing thank you cards, nominating their HF for "HF of the Year", making their host family a scrapbook etc. Students and families can also discuss how they will stay in contact. Will they set up a schedule to talk? How will they communicate? By phone, Skype, E-mail, Facebook etc.? Students should understand the importance of keeping in contact with their host families but host families must also keep in mind that it may be challenging for a student to frequently communicate with them.*

### My American Life in Six Photos

Prior to the re-entry orientation session tell your students to bring six photos that they took throughout the year that exemplifies their American life. Students can post their pictures on the wall and share their photos or can pass their photos around for everyone to see as they share.

### Evolving View of the U.S.

Ask students to share the view of American culture before they arrived and their view of American culture now.

### Leave Well to Enter Well: Building your R.A.F.T.

David Pollock developed the acronym, R.A.F.T., to help people with transition. Below is a model your students can use to help build their own RAFT to prepare themselves for their departure from the U.S. and the return to their home country.

**R** – Reconciliation. Reconciliation includes both the need to forgive and be forgiven. Just because you will be leaving doesn't mean the problem you have faced will go away – instead it goes with you.

Sample Reconciliations:

- Host sibling I wasn't nice to
- Not following my host family's rules
- Ignoring a kid at school who was nice to me

**A** – Affirmation. Is there anyone you are super thankful for? Anyone who has helped you through your exchange experience? Tell them! Let them know how much you appreciate them and what they did for you.



Sample Affirmations:

- Local Coordinator who helped resolve an issue with my HF
- Coach who made sure I got to play
- Host mother who made sure I was safe

**F** – Farewell. The not so fun part of leaving; saying good-bye. Say good bye to people, places, pets and possessions. Schedule times to say good-bye. It may be hard, but saying good-bye helps to bring closure.

Sample Farewells:

- Friends and family
- Pets
- Special places – art room, playing field, backstage of a theater
- Objects – piano, host family record collection, deep-fried pickles

**T** – Think Destination/Tasks. Start to think realistically about returning to your home country and what you can expect when you return. Also, think about tasks you need to complete before you leave.

Sample Tasks:

- School records
- Close accounts and memberships
- Distribute things you can't take home

## Moving On

Ask the students to finish the sentences provided on page 13 with their own words. This exercise will help them think about their future and what they will take with them from this experience going forward as they return home and become future leaders of the world. Give students 10-15 minutes to complete the worksheet, when time is up choose a few sentences and ask students to share their responses. You can also choose to break the students up into groups of 2-3 and ask them to share their responses with each other.

## The Important Role Alumni Play

*A very important component of the YES and FLEX program is the Alumni network. Their impact doesn't end when they depart America but rather grows once they return home and they further the values and goals of the programs through alumni activities. They can continue the experience at home through:*

- ✓ Community service
- ✓ Youth Leadership
- ✓ English/American studies
- ✓ Civil Society – playing a more active role in government, civics, voting, laws etc.
- ✓ Professional Development – participating in alumni sponsored seminars and networking opportunities

*Students can easily get involved by registering with [www.alumni.state.gov](http://www.alumni.state.gov) and by contacting their program office in their home country. The Alumni network can offer great opportunities such as grant applications for alumni projects, trainings through conferences and workshops, and finding funding sources for projects.*



### Refer students to websites and resources:

- [www.yesprograms.org/alumni](http://www.yesprograms.org/alumni)
- FLEX Alumni Newsletter: [www.bradleyherald.org](http://www.bradleyherald.org)
- <https://www.americancouncils.org/alumni>
- Program specific Alumni Facebook pages

## Alumni Project Planning

Have students choose an issue to practice planning for an Alumni project that FIRES them up:

### Education

- Mentoring/Tutoring
- Literacy
- Access to education
- Empowering youth

### Environment

- Water
- Energy conservation
- Recycling
- Protecting wildlife
- Increasing green space

### Health

- Physical activity
- Healthy eating
- Disease prevention
- Access to health care

### Poverty, Hunger, Homelessness

- Workforce readiness
- Emergency food
- Affordable housing
- Neighborhood improvement

### Format for Alumni Project Plans

On a separate piece of paper have students answer the following questions to help shape a project.

- What is the problem or condition?
- Give background information
  - Why it is a problem
  - How big is the problem?
  - Where is the problem?
- What is your solution(s)?
- How will you achieve the results?
- Who do you need to collaborate with?
- What resources do you need?



- What do you think the timeframe might be for accomplishing your goals?

### Sharing and Continuing the Experience

*The programs' goals are to create forward thinking citizens of the world to share beliefs, ideologies and values across cultures. In order to effectively achieve these goals students are expected to return to their home countries to utilize the experience and skills they have acquired while in the U.S. Please review the Two-Year residency requirement with your students, which states that they must reside in their home country for two years, cumulative, not successive, before they may become eligible to apply for an immigrant or temporary worker visa. It is possible for an alumnus to defer the fulfillment of this two-year requirement if s/he is granted an F, J-1, tourist or other type of non immigrant visa. S/He still remains under an obligation to fulfill the two-year requirement and must return home to do so when period of deferment ends.*

### My Re-entry Action Plan Worksheet

#### Personal/Emotional Process Plan

I plan to do the following in order to prepare for and deal with the personal/emotional stress I may face upon my return to home:

#### Civic Engagement

I plan to do the following in order to contribute to positive social change at my school or home community and/or continued involvement with my host country or region:

#### Academic Reintegration

I plan to do the following in order to actively integrate my new knowledge, interests and skills into my academic experience:





## 2022-23 FLEX & YES Re-Entry Orientation

### Professional Development Plan

I plan to do the following in order to incorporate my new skills and interests into my professional path:

*Adapted from AFS-USA, Inc. Re-Entry Orientation Leader's Guide, 2013*



## Moving On

**Complete the following sentences with your own words. You may write whatever comes to your mind.**

1. When I think of leaving I feel .....

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2. For me America means .....

---

3. The things that I will miss are .....

---

4. For me, the single most difficult feature of living with another family and community has been ...

---

5. For me, the single greatest benefit of living with another family and community has been .....

---

6. When I think of returning I feel.....

---

7. The process of returning will be.....

---

8. I think my family will expect me to.....

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9. I expect that my friends at home will.....

---

10. I think that the hardest part of coming back for me will be.....

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11. I think that the easiest thing for me to handle when I come home will be ....

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*Adapted from AFS-USA, Inc. Re-Entry Orientation Leader's Guide, 2013*



## Common Problem and Resolutions Role Play

You can use the Typical Re-Entry Problems role-plays provided in this packet or devise your own. Below are four re-entry problems, which are common to many exchange students upon return home. Choose one to illustrate with a role play or prepare to share how you would deal with one of the problems.

### **Typical Re-entry Problem 1**

You are an exchange student returning home after a semester or year in the USA. You have changes and matured in numerous ways during your experience away from home. You have grown in self-assurance, in your need for independence and respect and in your knowledge and competence regarding all sorts of things. The family members and old friends whom you will meet upon arrival back home probably do not realize this, they may treat you the same as on the day of departure from home. How will you cope with this?

*Possible solution: Remember that it may be hard to understand the experience you had in America and the changes you made. You should discuss your feelings about yourself and try to encourage positive change to these relationships. This may also be an opportunity to seek out new friendships with people who you feel you are more compatible with at this time in your life. You should also keep in mind that it is normal for friendships to change and evolve with time.*

### **Typical Re-entry Problem 2**

You have lived among other people for an extended period of time and find upon return home that you notice many features of your home environment and culture that you never noticed, or at least never questioned. It is not a problem that you become aware of things you once took for granted, but you find yourself beginning to be critical of many of these things. Family and friends become annoyed at your "negative attitude". Even if you keep the criticisms to yourself you are disturbed to find yourself feeling negative about people and events in the place you call home. What do you do?

*Possible Solution: Deep differences in cultural patterns require time to explore and understand. Take time to evaluate both cultural perspectives. Share your feelings with others but be cautious in choosing situations in which to bring up controversial issues.*

### **Typical Re-entry Problem 3**

You return to your family and friends bursting with stories, ideas, facts, and all kinds of other interesting things to tell anyone who will listen. However, you find that almost everyone either (a) will not listen for more than a few minutes or (b) listen politely but simply cannot comprehend the richness and vitality of your experiences. How do you share your experience without feeling ignored?

*Possible solution: Friends and family at home may never have had an experience comparable to yours and find it difficult to understand and share your enthusiasm. They also need time to adjust to the changes you have made since departing your home country. Be patient with your family and friends and seek guidance and support from other Alumni.*

### **Typical Re-entry Problem 4**

You are bringing back new values and patterns of behavior. Some may be sharply different in relation to your family and friends at home. You may not realize the ways you have adjusted in your interactions with your host family and new friends in the USA. Your family members and friends are bewildered and perhaps offended by your new (and "strange") behavior. They begin acting a little strangely to you. How can you avoid a misunderstanding?

*Possible solution: Talk to your friends and family about your adjustment process and ask them to be patient as you readjust to your home community. Ask your friends and family to communicate with you a behavior that bothers them so you can try to avoid that in the future. You have learned great skills in communication and understanding that you will take with you in all life situations.*