



FLEX

2025-2026 LOCAL COORDINATOR HANDBOOK



FLEX is a program of the U.S. Department of State with funding provided by the U.S. government.

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About the program

Thank you for your willingness to place a Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) student in your community! The Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) hopes that this handbook will help you learn more about your role in and the history of the FLEX program and give you a better understanding of what an asset a FLEX student can be to your community, your local schools, and your organization. We hope that your experience with FLEX students is both enriching and educational. We would love to hear from you about student highlights throughout the year (or questions; feel free to email us at discoverflex@americancouncils.org) and also encourage you to follow FLEX's official social media accounts:

 **@FLEXProgram**

 **FLEXProgram**

 **discoverFLEX.org**

 **FLEX Program**

The United States Department of State



BUREAU OF EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS

Promoting Mutual Understanding

The U.S. Department of State (DOS) is the federal foreign affairs agency which Congress has charged with administering global educational and cultural exchange programs. Through the Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), grants of federal funding are awarded to private, not-for-profit organizations (including the placement organization which you represent) to carry out the FLEX program.

ECA's mission is to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries by means of educational and cultural exchanges that assist in the development of peaceful relations.

As mandated by the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961, ECA works to build friendly, peaceful relations between the people of the United States and the people of other countries through academic, cultural, sports, and professional exchanges, as well as public-private partnerships. ECA administers global education and cultural exchange programs for hundreds of individuals each year. By placing and supporting FLEX students with U.S. families and schools, you, too, are playing a role in connecting people and making the world a safer place.

ECA refers to the organizations which place students in host families and schools as *placement organizations* (POs). Every organization wishing to place students under the FLEX program must submit to ECA a proposal in which it describes what it proposes to do if it receives a grant. The proposals are reviewed by a panel of DOS officers that selects the organizations whose plans they think will best fulfill the goals of the FLEX program.

When your organization decided to accept a grant from the federal government, it signed a contract which obligated it to fulfill certain requirements (e.g., submissions of periodic program and financial reports). Therefore, it is likely that when your organization's headquarters asks you to do something that you do differently for your private exchange students, it probably is required under the terms of the federal grant.

ECA also issues an award to an organization that covers FLEX program administration, which includes student recruitment, selection, health clearance, pre-departure orientation (PDO), international travel, working with POs on on-student support, and carrying out alumni activities in FLEX countries. The recipient organization is also the channel for communications with students' natural families, as described in the next section.

How is FLEX implemented?

Program funding:

ECA is responsible for funding, design, and implementation of programs as legislated by the U.S. Congress. ECA sets overall direction, monitors, and oversees all aspects of program implementation, including on-program student support issues. ECA issues cooperative agreements, like grants, to one organization to carry out FLEX's administrative components, and to multiple placement organizations (POs) to place and support FLEX students.

Administrative components:

American Councils for International Education is currently responsible for oversight of student recruitment and selection; PO student assignments; student notification; travel to and from student home countries and host communities; pre-departure orientations; on-program support communications among ECA, POs, and natural parents; Civic Education Workshop and virtual workshop programming; publications; program websites and social media; disabilities component coordination; and alumni programming and reporting.

Placement:

POs are responsible for the recruitment and selection of host families and schools in accordance with the J-1 visa regulations; support and monitoring; and implementation of program activities while in host communities.

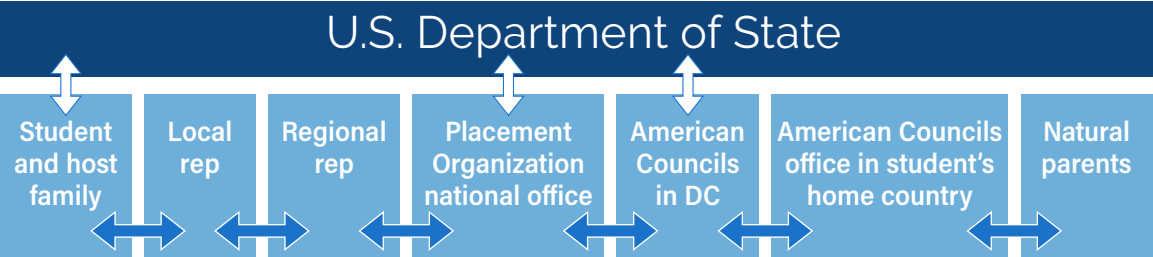
Disability component:

Mobility International USA (MIUSA) currently supports participating students with disabilities. Prior to the students' arrival, MIUSA prepares preliminary assessments for POs based on information gathered by American Councils during recruitment. Upon students' arrival, MIUSA conducts a workshop in Eugene, Oregon, to prepare students with disabilities for the exchange year ahead and gather additional information about each student's access needs, independent living skills, and interests. MIUSA provides POs with detailed portfolios about their assigned students that include disability-related information, recommendations,

and community-specific referrals to resources. MIUSA works with American Councils’ designated Disabilities Coordinator to assist POs, host families, and schools to most effectively address the students’ access needs within the reasonable accommodations framework.

Chain of communication:

Students learn about the Chain of Communication at their PDOs. The chain is ideally how all reports of concerns should be conveyed, so that all stakeholders are on the same page in supporting the student. The chain looks like this, with ECA taking part in several places depending on the circumstances:



What is FLEX?



Left to right: Former Senator Bill Bradley, former Moldova Prime Minister and FLEX alumna Nataliia Gavrilita, and Department of State Deputy Assistant Secretary for Professional and Cultural Exchanges Nicole Elkon, October 18, 2023.

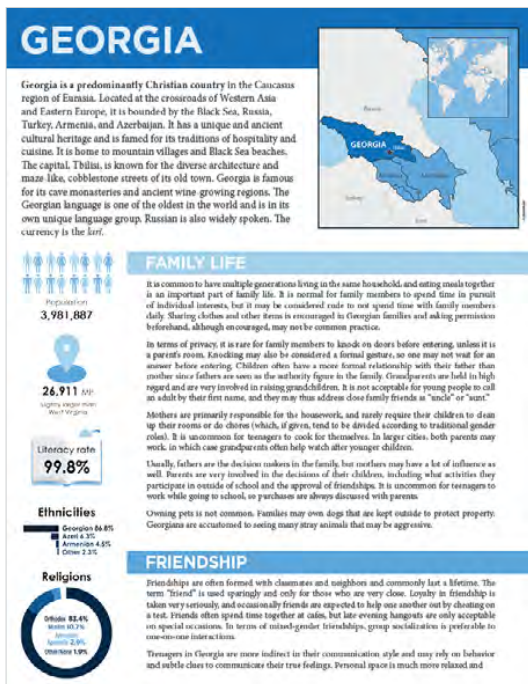
The FLEX program was created from former Senator Bill Bradley’s conviction that the best way to promote understanding between the United States and the countries of the former Soviet Union (Eurasia) is to help young people learn first-hand about the United States and Americans. The program has since expanded to include a total of 22 countries. Each country has its own rich history, language, culture, and religion, and students, like Americans, take great pride in their country. FLEX countries as shown on the map and below include the following. Countries in italics were part of the original program but have since withdrawn:



- | | | | | |
|------------------|--------------|--------------|-----------------|----------------|
| ■ Armenia | ■ Georgia | ■ Latvia | ■ Poland | ■ Tajikistan |
| ■ <i>Belarus</i> | ■ Greece | ■ Lithuania | ■ Romania | ■ Turkmenistan |
| ■ Azerbaijan | ■ Hungary | ■ Moldova | ■ <i>Russia</i> | ■ Ukraine |
| ■ Czech Republic | ■ Kazakhstan | ■ Mongolia | ■ Serbia | ■ Uzbekistan |
| ■ Estonia | ■ Kyrgyzstan | ■ Montenegro | ■ Slovakia | |



Most people think of the vast area of what used to be the Soviet Union as being only “Russia,” but the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) covered 8.6 million square miles, making it one of the largest territorially contiguous *empires (not a single country)* in history. Covering 11 time zones, it stretched from the Gulf of Finland to the Bering Strait and was home to more than 100 ethnic groups. The peoples and countries that made up the USSR each had their own history, language, culture, traditions and religion before there was a Soviet Union. While 74 years of Soviet culture has left its mark, FLEX students today were born and live in independent countries that emerged from the USSR’s fall in late 1991, and they take pride in their home country and want to be identified with that country.



American Councils produces informational two-page Country Profiles about each country with overviews on family life, friendship, school life, food, religion, and personal care in each country. You can request these from your PO's main office and are welcome to share them with host families and host schools.

The primary goal of FLEX is to improve mutual understanding between our countries. Specifically, students will:

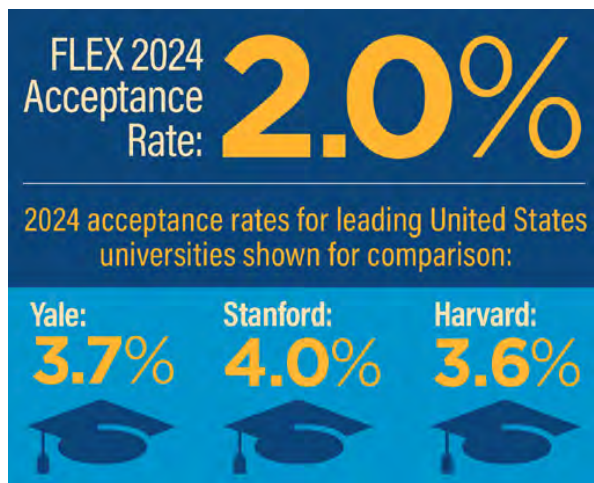
- Expand their knowledge of American culture, values, and traditions.
- Teach Americans about their home countries and cultures.
- Interact with Americans and generate enduring ties.
- Explore and acquire an understanding of the key elements of U.S. government.
- Share experience and knowledge through their networks and communities upon returning home.

Since the program began in 1993, more than 32,000 young people have

participated in FLEX, returning to their home countries with a new enthusiasm and desire to help others and share their newly acquired experiences and knowledge to benefit their home communities and countries.

What makes FLEX students different from other exchange students?

The purpose of the FLEX program is to increase mutual understanding between the United States and FLEX students' home countries. Unlike students who pay a fee to come to the United States on a private exchange, over 35,000 students a year take part in three rigorous rounds of competition to win one of the limited (approximately 750) FLEX scholarships so they can learn about life in the United States firsthand.



Enhancement activities

A major goal of the program is for participants to gain first-hand understanding of concepts such as student government, citizen engagement, and volunteerism so they can take these concepts back to their home communities. The Department of State also hopes that FLEX students will develop and maintain relationships with people in the United States communities where they are hosted. The federal grant awarded to your placement organization includes funds for enhancement activities that help students learn about the United States through visits to state and local government, participation in community service activities, and others. These funds can also be used for activities that enhance students' leadership, entrepreneurship

and diplomacy skills and enhance their understanding of U.S. government. Here are some suggestions to get you started thinking about creative enhancement activities for your students:

Leadership/citizenship:

Focus on the difference that both leaders and individuals can make in their communities and how to achieve leadership positions.

- Hold a leadership skills workshop.
- Interview Kiwanis Club members about being community leaders.
- Participate in debate competitions.
- Get involved in Model United Nations.

Democracy/government:

Focus either on the U.S. government or the more general concept of democracy. The participation of all citizens is fundamental to American society and typically a newer concept for FLEX students.

- Visit a state capital.
- Interview local government officials.
- Attend a city council or school board meeting.
- Shadow local police or firefighters.
- Meet with a local judge and observe a trial.
- Observe voter registration.

Market economy and entrepreneurship:

Focus on how individuals, groups, and businesses work in a market economy to create successful ventures. Many FLEX students do not have firsthand knowledge of this in their home countries, and a free market economy is an integral part of American life.

- Visit local business leaders and entrepreneurs who can show students how their businesses work and what skills it takes to run successful ventures.
- Tour a local grocery store to discuss their support of local businesses and their business model. Ask to speak with the manager or marketing

specialist. Or visit a “box store” to learn about and discuss the warehouse shopping model.

- Tour larger companies located near you. They often have community outreach programs to discuss how corporations operate worldwide.

American culture:

Students often admire, and are surprised by, the things they learn about American history and traditions.

- Visit a local monument or museum to learn about important American historical figures and events and their impact.
- Visit historical preservation societies or sites.

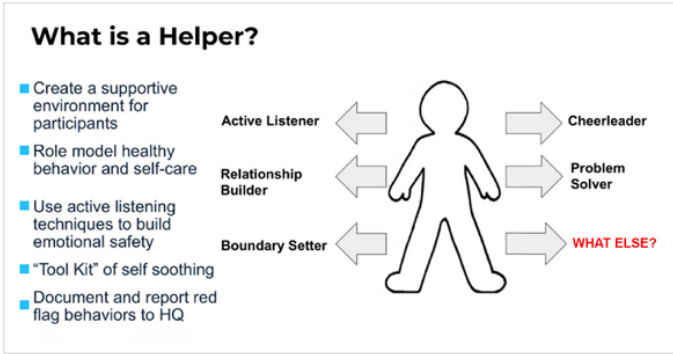
FLEX students are encouraged to experience each situation by thinking about what they might like to try at home, whether it would be suitable for their country, and how it would have to be adjusted to work in their country. The program’s goal of increased mutual understanding is achieved through every interaction the students you place have with Americans.

Your role as a FLEX Local Coordinator

As the student’s Local Coordinator, you play a vital part in the FLEX program. Regular contact is essential to developing a supportive and nurturing relationship with your student so that they feel comfortable talking to you about issues that may arise during the year. It is also important for you to keep in touch with the student’s host family and school on a regular basis. Should problems surface, you must inform your headquarters office and keep a detailed record of events for future reference. The QR code here links to a short video with helpful suggestions for having productive conversations with the teenagers you are supervising – scan it to find out more or contact your headquarters office for a link.

The FLEX grant requires three orientations that each student must attend: 1) a

post-arrival orientation; 2) a mid-year orientation and 3) a reentry and closure workshop. Your placement organization has received funding for each of these events and it is critical that your students participate. To alleviate scheduling problems, we suggest you prepare a calendar of events prior to the student’s arrival and you review the calendar with your student and their host family during post-arrival orientation.



Each placement organization’s main office is responsible for submitting quarterly reports to the ECA FLEX program office. These reports are reviewed carefully and are used as a tool to refine and improve the program. Your input into these reports is extremely important as a way for ECA to keep track of trends, issues, and successes.

As a Local Coordinator, you wear many hats. You may find that you serve as a counselor, teacher, mentor, trainer, and sometimes disciplinarian. The differences between the United States and 22 FLEX countries’ cultures are often the cause of misunderstandings and miscommunication. By spending quality time with your student and explaining how American families and schools function, you can ease the acculturation process and help your student succeed. Once the first cultural challenges are overcome, your students will most likely grow and flourish. They will gain a real understanding of concepts such as student government, debate, volunteerism, and community action that they can take back to their home communities. This is one of the greatest rewards of working with FLEX students and would not be possible without your active participation.

Responsibilities of FLEX students

Community service

Your organization has probably incorporated a community service component into the program for its FLEX students. Each year FLEX students perform over 36,000 hours of volunteer service in their host communities including at homeless shelters, senior citizens' centers, Special Olympics events, soup kitchens, charity races, libraries, local newspapers, and many more. Many students go beyond their PO's required minimum hours of community service:

20-100
hours: **59%**

100-150
hours: **37%**

150+
hours: **4%**

Participating in volunteer activities provides a way for FLEX students to give something back to their host communities. Volunteerism is still a fairly new concept in many countries, although over 30,000 FLEX alumni are very active in this sphere. Even though FLEX students learn about the American value of volunteering at their pre-departure orientation, and some may have been exposed to it through FLEX alumni initiatives in their home countries, new FLEX students are often unable to fully understand and appreciate it until they experience it firsthand. By the time Global Youth Service Day (GYSD) comes around in April, most students are excited to be involved and show enthusiastic creativity in the projects they choose to undertake.

Cultural presentations

FLEX students have been told to be prepared to give presentations about their home countries and to bring photos, national costumes, music, or other cultural items to support this kind of activity. They practice creating and delivering such presentations at their pre-departure orientations (PDOs), and many find that, once they've been in the U.S. for a while, they have a newfound appreciation for their home culture which they are very eager to share. ECA appreciates your help in nurturing this and encouraging your FLEX student to be an active presenter at



school and other appropriate venues in the community throughout the exchange year. FLEX students are required to make presentations during International Education Week in November. You may be able to assist your student in finding civic groups, schools, houses of worship, and other community organizations that would welcome such a presentation.

Special opportunities for FLEX students during the program year

In addition to fulfilling requirements such as community service and giving cultural presentations, FLEX students might have the opportunity to apply for special program opportunities throughout the year. Local coordinators should encourage students to participate in these events. For example, FLEX students may be invited to apply to participate in a special Civic Education Workshop (CEW) held in Washington, DC in early spring. Workshop participants will attend seminars and lectures, meet their Congressional representatives on Capitol Hill, and participate in a number of other exciting activities designed to expose them to the American democratic system of government and the elements of a civil society. Your student will receive information about how to apply for this and potentially other opportunities in the fall. ECA wants you to be aware of these possible opportunities so you can encourage your students to apply.

FLEX student recruitment and selection

American Councils is currently responsible for the recruitment and selection of FLEX students under a grant from the Department of State. American Councils manages this effort from its Washington, DC headquarters, while staff in its overseas field offices conducts on-the-ground operations in each country.

Recruitment of FLEX students is a large-scale effort that involves a comprehensive, three-phase, merit-based, open competition. American Councils field staff makes a tremendous effort to recruit students from hundreds of cities, towns, and villages across each of the 22 countries, ensuring a candidate pool that is representative of the country as a whole. Students with disabilities are also actively recruited to participate in the program. No special consideration is given to any candidate's financial status, which can range from working class to upper class. This is unprecedented in societies where bribes and connections were (and in some cases

still are) often used as ways to get ahead. FLEX has won a reputation for being a respectable and prestigious opportunity that is truly open to all applicants who meet the basic age and grade requirements.

At the start of recruitment, trained American Councils staff advertises the open competition throughout all 22 FLEX participating countries via social media posts, ads, and campaigns; newspapers, radio, and television; and local schools and Ministries of Education. Alumni and staff give presentations to schools



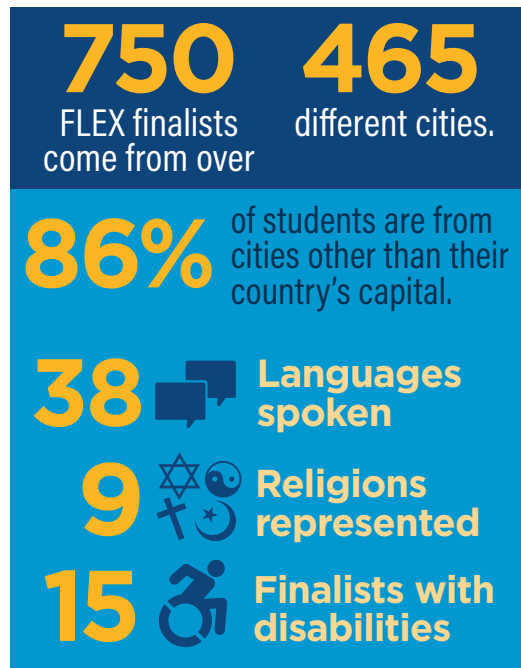
throughout each country. Students are invited to complete a preliminary online application that includes answering three timed essay prompts and uploading a birth certificate or passport to prove that they meet the eligibility requirements for their country. Students are invited to complete a preliminary online application that includes answering three timed essay prompts and uploading a birth certificate or passport to prove that they meet the eligibility requirements for their country. Please note that some students might graduate before coming on FLEX. To find out if this applies to any of your students, please see Appendix I, [Pre-Departure Orientation Agreement](#), and Appendix II, [Secondary School Systems in FLEX Countries](#).

Students who submit their essays (Round 1) are then invited to take a short, timed test of English (Round 2). Those with passing scores have their essays reviewed by a committee of trained scholarship screening panelists in American Councils' Washington, DC office to determine who will advance to Round 3 (the semifinalist phase) round of competition. Students who make it to round 3 have done so because they demonstrated in their essays that they possess the qualities necessary for inter-cultural adjustment. American Councils staff travel

to 130 cities to conduct Round 3, during which students write three more essays (proctored), receive the program application to complete within two weeks, take a comprehensive, secondary level English exam such as the ELTiS, and are individually interviewed by a team of American and local staff who have been specially trained to evaluate the students. Interviews are often conducted in both English and the student's native language. Applicants also participate in group activities that enable American Councils staff to observe candidates interacting with their peers.

After Round 3, the applications are sent to Washington, DC, where American Councils coordinates a committee of over 250 trained volunteers to evaluate the complete application materials and select the finalists. These evaluators volunteer because of their interest in and personal connections to international youth exchange and commitment to public diplomacy. They may have had experience in the field of international exchange, or they may have worked or traveled overseas. Before beginning the selection process, American Councils trains the evaluators, so that they will recognize the qualities and characteristics in a student that would be most indicative of a student's ability to have a successful exchange experience. Local coordinators are welcome to attend a training and evaluate applications – if you are interested, please contact volunteer@americancouncils.org.

FLEX 2024 Student Statistics



FLEX 2024 Competition Participation



FLEX Pre-Departure Orientations (PDO)

All students participate in an extensive pre-departure orientation (PDO) program in their home countries before they depart for the United States. PDOs are conducted by trained American Councils field office staff and take place approximately six weeks before the students leave for the United States. The goal of the PDO is to prepare the students for what to expect on program and how to have a successful experience. Therefore, the 12 interactive sessions (and a companion workbook, **Introduction to the USA**) focus largely on program information and cultural issues they are likely to encounter in the United States that will be different from what they are accustomed to:

- About the U.S. Department of State's FLEX Program, the Scholarship, and Tools for Success
- Placement Organizations, Chain of Communication, Problem Solving, Red Flags and Green Lights
- Rules and Expectations
- Culture and American Values
- You and Your Host Family
- Applying What You've Learned and Emotional Well-Being and Self-Care
- Adjusting to Living in Another Culture
- Money Matters and Making a Budget
- High School in America
- Concept of Friendships Across Cultures
- Succeeding in your new environment



An overview of each PDO session, including a standalone overview for the emotional well-being session, can be found in Appendix I, page 133. Students learn that they will need to use their flexibility, open-mindedness, friendliness, and interest in learning new things—referred to as the “tools” in their toolbox of resources and characteristics that will help them deal successfully with challenges

and get (and give) the most out of their exchange. Students also learn about program rules, such as the prohibition against alcohol, drugs, and driving; the non-negotiable requirement to return home at the end of the program year; and that their U.S. grade placement, courses, and whether they can earn a diploma are at the discretion of their U.S. host school and its policies, which students must respect.

When students are notified of their selection as finalists, they are also told which PO is responsible for them. The role of the PO is fully explained to students at the PDOs, and each student will receive a packet of informational materials provided by their PO that explains the PO's mission, rules, and regulations. As the Local Coordinator, you will be responsible for providing a welcome orientation to your students, shortly after their arrival to your community, to explain details of your organization's rules and responsibilities, schedule of activities, stipend disbursement, insurance, and other policies.

Organization of FLEX student travel

International and domestic travel for FLEX students is currently organized by American Councils. Because FLEX students are young, American Councils manages their chaperoned international travel to and from the United States in groups by home country for their safety and support. As a result, it is often difficult to accommodate individual student schedules. However, American Councils attempts to factor U.S. school start and end dates into students' arrival and departure travel plans whenever feasible. This is made challenging by the wide variations in school start and end dates throughout the U.S.

For U.S. inbound travel:

Country-specific flight dates are made available to PO national offices in the spring. POs select arrival dates based on the host family's schedule, the host school start date, and any other such pertinent factors. Since students hail from over 400 cities, towns, and villages, the majority of them will start traveling to their capital city 1-4

days before their U.S.-bound flight. Upon arrival to the United States, American Councils staff chaperone students to a nearby hotel for an overnight. The next day students depart for their host communities and can contact the program's travel emergency phone for assistance as needed (800-841-6460).

For U.S. departure travel:

POs will receive a timetable for departure travel in early winter. At the same time your students and their host families will receive a return travel information form listing the available country-specific departure dates from the United States. For larger countries, there may be two dates to choose from and in smaller countries, there might be one assigned date for the entire student cohort. Some FLEX students have to take exams in their home countries in late spring or early summer, and this is also taken into consideration when departure travel plans are being made. Students and host families are asked to select their preferred return travel date carefully and to sign and return the completed form to their placement organization's national office as soon as possible, since flight assignments are made on a first-come-first-served basis. **The form makes it very clear that a student's choice of a return travel date cannot be guaranteed.**

Changing travel arrangements can be complicated and costly so return travel dates will not be changed except in the most extreme circumstances. Unfortunately the program cannot make flight changes to accommodate prom, graduation, or any other year-end activity. Students and their natural parents signed the Parent/Student Agreement, part of the FLEX application, acknowledging their understanding and acceptance of this policy (see Appendices for a sample of this agreement): *"We understand that our son or daughter must return home at the end of the program on the date assigned by the responsible FLEX program organization. Changes to the assigned departure date will not be made to accommodate graduation, prom or other special school or family events that occur after the assigned date. We understand that the U.S. visa issued to our son or daughter will not be amended or extended beyond the program end date. No exceptions will be made to this policy."*

Similarly, the Host Family Handbook states that: *"Changing travel arrangements*

can be complicated and costly so return travel dates will not be changed except in the most extreme circumstances. Unfortunately we cannot make changes for prom, graduation, or any other year-end activity.”

Arranging FLEX travel is a complex process. It is important for you to ensure that host families understand this.

The Language Program (LP) and Moldova EFL Workshop

Most FLEX students will arrive to the United States, overnight in Washington, DC, and go directly to their host communities the following morning. However, a small number of students have been identified as needing one or both of the special pre-program components: the Language Program (LP), and the Moldova English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Workshop. Both the LP and the Moldova EFL Workshop are designed to improve the English language capabilities of students who demonstrated that they are strong candidates but need additional instruction in order to meet the language requirements for a U.S. high school.

The intensive, five-week long, all-English Moldova EFL Workshop is organized and conducted by American Councils and professional teaching staff at the American Language Center in Chisinau, Moldova. Approximately 30 FLEX students are designated to attend this workshop each year, which runs from early July through mid-August.

Typically about 10% of FLEX students are designated as needing LP. Once students are in the United States, each PO is responsible for arranging the English educational activities for its own LP students, ideally before the school start date, so the LP programming is different for students of different POs. For example, some POs arrange for their LP students to be tutored individually in their host communities. Others group their LP students in one location for a special English program, after which they will travel (as arranged by the PO) to their host communities.

The LP emphasizes conversational English, so that students will be better prepared to take part in classroom activities and discussions when school begins. If you think your LP student needs continued language tutoring in order to be successful in school, or if you have a non-LP student that you think is in need of additional English instruction, you should contact your PO's national office so they can make this request to American Councils, who administers the LP funds which are centralized, to account for exactly these types of student needs.

FLEX students: assets to U.S. schools and communities

FLEX students are bright, curious, and engaging. They and your community will have the unique opportunity to learn about each other's culture and values in depth, beyond what can be found online or in the media, during the exchange year.

In the early years of FLEX, the Cold War was slowly thawing. Prior to this, the media typically portrayed a very negative image of the Soviet Union and surrounding Eastern Bloc countries ("satellite" states that were under the hegemony of the USSR, including Poland, Romania, and countries of the former Yugoslavia) and peoples. Likewise, people in these countries had little or no opportunity to encounter anything but negative stereotypes of Americans. Opportunities to meet face-to-face and counter these negative images were extremely limited, and that is exactly what FLEX provides – the opportunity to learn what each other's lives are really like.

Although it has been decades since the Soviet Union dissolved and our nations began to forge new relationships, many of our impressions of one another remain informed by the negativism and stereotypes portrayed in mass media. True understanding comes only from personal interaction, making the FLEX program as valuable today, if not more so, as when it was created in 1992. The FLEX program offers an unprecedented opportunity for our people and countries to reach out to each other and bridge the divide.

As a Local Coordinator you offer your community a window into a region of the world that still remains a mystery for many Americans and in turn introduce students firsthand to community service and civil society, possibly for the first time. While Americans tend to take many of these concepts and values for granted, a FLEX student is likely to find student government and volunteer service in one's community to be new and very exciting experiences.

While in the United States, many FLEX students come also to more fully appreciate and feel pride in their home country. They learn what citizenship means and they return home motivated to make a positive difference.

Cultural influences on behavior

Teenagers around the world share certain characteristics, and you will naturally find some of these in your FLEX students, too. Some of their “stumbles” may be very familiar or even predictable to you, and others less so. Since the first FLEX students came on program in 1993 up through the present, administrators have identified some common cultural issues that arise for some students every year, often based on the different customs or beliefs in their home country and the United States. These issues are addressed extensively at PDO, and students are given suggestions for how to avoid or overcome them.

The following chart lists some of these behaviors along with an explanation (sometimes cultural) and suggestions for addressing these issues. Of course, not all FLEX students will exhibit these behaviors, and some FLEX students will not exhibit any. Each student's individual personality and background will influence how they adapt to American life. The purpose of this chart is not to imply that FLEX students will be “more problematic” than other foreign exchange students, but rather to increase your understanding of the possible cultural roots and influences that may play a part in the behavior of your FLEX student. These issues can often be resolved with open conversation – and the “**What is a Helper**” video can be a resource in these.

BEHAVIOR	POSSIBLE CULTURAL ROOT	STRATEGY TO HELP STUDENTS ADAPT
Persistence when told “no”	A legacy of complex bureaucracies endures in many FLEX countries. “No” meant “ask someone else” to avoid getting oneself in trouble for saying “yes.” Asking multiple times increases chances of getting a “yes.”	Remind student of rules and typical American attitude toward rules. Rules are to be respected, and exceptions are rare. Students learn at PDO that if one host parent says “no,” this does not mean to ask the other parent.
Transportation shock	Many students come from countries with reliable and affordable public transportation systems. It can be shocking to them that city buses in the United States, when available, come much less frequently and cost so much, and that school buses can take up to 1½ hours to get to school each day.	Explain the available public transportation options to your student. Help them find ways to wisely use their monthly allowance towards this. Encourage students to make friends who can sometimes give them rides. Help them understand that asking for a ride from a friend is common in the United States.
Cold meals	Often in FLEX countries, breakfast and lunch are hot meals prepared at home by a mother or grandmother. It can be a real adjustment for some students that they are expected to help themselves to a cold breakfast “to go,” and that a cold bagged lunch is typical fare for U.S. teens.	Students have demonstrated a readiness to open their minds, a desire to be more independent and curiosity about America. Point out that this type of self-sufficiency was explained at PDO (where some students actually prepared and ate bagged lunches!) as part of that process. This is a typical part of American life!
Reluctance to help with certain housework	This may be attributable to cultures that embrace more traditional parental roles.	Remind your student that housework and yard work in the United States is not “women’s work” or “men’s work,” it is just work and most American teens do chores.
Not able to manage money (spends too much or saves too much)	The student’s natural family may expect a student to bring money home. If student perceives him/herself as a guest, s/he may expect the host to pay. In most FLEX countries, parents do not give allowances; rather, parents buy what is needed.	Remind your student that the stipend is provided to help them to learn about American culture and participate in events with friends. Help them set up a basic budget using the template in <i>Introduction to the USA</i> . Learning to manage money is an important life skill.
Direct manner of speaking	Students may be more direct in saying what they mean (“I don’t want to see that movie, it’s boring”) without any of the polite phrases that are common in the United States (“I’m not sure about that movie, I heard it got a bad review...maybe we could see something else?”)	Remind the student that in the United States this directness can come across as rude, even if not intended that way. Suggest that the student might listen to how others respond in these situations, and explain that they can soften their approach by using polite phrases, while still expressing themselves.

If your FLEX student’s behavior becomes a problem, try to determine if it is due to a cultural influence. If it is, it can help to understand some of the cultural

roots of your student's behavior. Tell the student how the behavior is affecting others and explain how Americans behave in this situation. Be alert, as well, to aspects of American society that are likely to result in culture shock because they are so different from what the student is accustomed to. Your experience and this handbook (and the ***What is a Helper*** video) can help work through these types of problems or misunderstandings and help everyone get things back on track. Your organization can also contact American Councils directly for assistance as a resource for mediating culture clashes.

Sometimes, students have issues on program that cannot be resolved through the usual support and counseling avenues provided by you and your placement organization, or personal or health issues arise that require them to return home early. In these cases, the placement organization's main office would request approval from the Department of State (as the program funder) to send the student home early. When an early return is approved, American Councils makes their return travel arrangements. Tickets are usually arranged within a week of approval.

Only the Department of State can approve an early return request. Given this, it is not appropriate for disciplinary or warning letters to use language that indicates the PO would make this decision.

Whether or not your student experiences any of these issues, they have tremendous capacity for personal growth and self-reflection.

Electronic devices

Students are told at PDO that they are required to follow their host family, school and PO rules regarding electronic device (screen time) and Internet use, including the types of sites visited, and are warned of the dangers of sharing personal information online. Like many U.S. teens, FLEX students are tech-savvy and many if not most have a computer at home and some sort of mobile device. Many are active on social media, although in some FLEX countries there may be less

concern about online privacy, predators, and excessive screen time as there is in the United States. Accessing pornographic websites is inappropriate and downloading copyright-protected material is illegal and may result in dismissal from the program.

On the positive side, the advent of voice and messaging apps such as WhatsApp and FaceTime has greatly increased the reliability of communication between students and their natural parents, resulting in far fewer expensive phone bills. Regardless, there needs to be a balance in the amount of time the student spends communicating with home. Computer usage may become an issue for one of your students, as with American teens. While working with the host family to address this, please keep in mind that per program J-1 regulations, these FLEX exchange students must be provided with *“reasonable access to their natural parents and family by telephone and e-mail.”*

Religion

Exchange students and their host families frequently have very different ideas about religion. For some families, religious services and the other activities offered by their places of worship are important to their weekly routine. For others, religion is not an important part of their lives.

In cases where a host family does not attend religious services or observes a religion that is different from the student's, the student may need the help of a Local Coordinator to find an appropriate place of worship, if available.

Students are encouraged to join all host family activities. Attending religious services can be an opportunity for students to observe another aspect of American culture. It is their choice whether or not to attend services, and it is important to respect this choice by encouraging hosts not to apply pressure or react negatively if they choose not to participate.

In many areas of the United States, religious institutions are centers not only of

religious life, but also of musical, recreational, and social life. When religious beliefs make it impossible for students to attend services with their host family, they should be encouraged to take advantage of the many other social activities offered by most U.S. churches, synagogues, temples, mosques, etc. Students may find a much better opportunity for friendships and social activities than expected.

The role of a Local Coordinator is to ensure that both host families and students respect each other's rights to their own beliefs and that there is no pressure to influence or convert students while on program. If you have any concerns about this issue, please contact your Placement Organization.

Please note: J-1 visa regulations provide the following guidelines for host families in Appendix F, Family Activities (c): *“A host family may want the exchange visitor to attend one or more religious services or programs with the family. Students cannot be required to do so, but may decide to experience this facet of U.S. culture at their discretion.”*

High schools in FLEX countries

Your FLEX student will probably experience some culture shock when they first attend school in the United States since it will likely be very different from what they are accustomed to. Although each FLEX country has adopted and continues to modify its own educational standards, there are a few broad generalizations that can be made about the region. Usually, students of all ages study at the same, large “comprehensive” school from first grade through high school. Students do not change classes as frequently as American students and often cannot choose elective classes. It may take FLEX students a while to get used to having individual schedules and switching classes. A chart showing the different educational systems in each FLEX country can be found in Appendix II, page 138.

Many FLEX students are surprised that American schools have so many rules and regulations, such as hall passes and tardy slips. They find it paradoxical that our

system allows them to choose their own classes, a liberty that their schools do not offer, yet will not allow students to walk in the hallways without permission. The opportunity to select their own classes is something that FLEX students greatly enjoy and appreciate while in the United States. The curriculum in most Soviet-era schools concentrated heavily on math and science, and you will notice that many FLEX students will excel in these subjects at your school. The methods of teaching (and learning) tend to differ quite a bit from the American model. In American schools, students are usually encouraged to develop their own thoughts and theories individually and to defend them. In contrast, FLEX students more frequently work in groups and are expected to memorize and recite information, but not necessarily offer personal opinion or participate actively in the classroom. FLEX alumni often recall how impressed they were with the interactive atmosphere of American schools and the friendliness and support of American teachers.

Diplomas

Students are told before, during and after their PDO, including upon initial application to the program, that their U.S. school may or may not issue them a diploma, and that this decision is entirely up to the school. Further, students are told not to keep asking if a school says “no,” because this is not a negotiation but a matter of policy. It is sometimes surprising to FLEX students that, due to the United States decentralized school system, some students might be given diplomas and their friends may not. In most FLEX countries, there are nationwide educational policies and procedures that do not vary from region to region.

Some FLEX students and their parents feel that they need some sort of official document provided by the U.S. high school that proves to their home school that they were studying in America for one year. This can help them advance in their academic lives, both secondary and post-secondary, and sometimes even in their future careers. Many host schools issue certificates of participation or attendance in lieu of diplomas for FLEX students. A number of FLEX alumni have reported that these documents have been helpful, even though a diploma would have been

preferred. If it is against the policy of your school district to award diplomas to exchange students, perhaps you could help your FLEX student by encouraging the school to provide an official document recognizing their enrollment. The Department of State respects the policies and decision of your local school districts on this matter.

Similarly, some students may insist on being placed in 12th grade in their U.S. high school. The special status of the senior year in an American high school (prom, school trip, etc.) often appeals to FLEX students. Or perhaps the students are trying to ensure they will “graduate” and be awarded a diploma. Whatever the reason, if a student insists that they be placed in the 12th grade even though the host school has determined this is not appropriate, the student must be told firmly that “no” means “no.”

Returning home

At the end of the FLEX year, some students and host families wonder if it is possible to extend the program for a second year. This is not permitted due to the type of visa that the students hold, and ECA asks for your support in helping to enforce this important program regulation.

FLEX students, being academically bright and motivated, may be interested in attending a U.S. university. While some FLEX alumni may return to the United States for university at some point, all FLEX students **must** return to their home country at the end of the program, on their scheduled flight. Students may not stay in the United States even if they are accepted to university. In accepting the FLEX scholarship award, students have

14. I understand that my child must return home at the end of the Program on the date assigned by the Program Organization. Participants will not be allowed to remain in the United States after their assigned return-travel date. After which time, they will no longer be supported by the Program, will not have health benefits, and may be reported to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Changes to the assigned departure date will not be made to accommodate graduation, prom, or other special school or family events that occur after the assigned date.

promised (in Form 8: Parent/Student Agreement of the program application, and by signing their DS-2019 form at their U.S. visa interview – both documents can be found in Appendix I) to return to their home countries at the end of their exchange year to share the values, skills, experiences, and concepts they experienced during their exchange year. If they don't return home, it represents a loss to the FLEX program. What's more, foreign governments may perceive this as "brain drain" and aren't likely to allow a program that takes away their best and brightest young people to continue for very long. If your student begins to talk about possibly staying in the United States, ECA asks for your support in notifying your placement organization's main office, and encouraging the student to remember the commitment they made in accepting the FLEX scholarship. This may be another opportunity for you to help your FLEX student understand that in a democratic society such as the United States, citizens operate within the system and adhere to the rule of law. They keep their commitments and are accountable for their actions. In order to maintain the integrity of the program and of each individual participant, students must be encouraged to keep the commitment they made.

Going home at the end of the program year does not mean a student may never return to the United States. It is true that FLEX students are subject to the two-year home residency requirement of their J-1 exchange visitor visa because their program is sponsored by the federal government (an obligation generally not shared by private exchange students).

- The two-year home residency requirement requires participants in U.S. government-funded exchange programs return to their home country at the end of their program and live there for a total of two years before they are eligible to receive a U.S. immigrant or work visa.
- This two-year rule does NOT prevent participants in U. S. government-funded exchange programs from returning to the United States for tourism, university study, and other purposes (i.e., non-immigrant categories) that involve a temporary stay.

ECA regulations limit high school exchange visitors' stays in the United States

to one year. If a student does not return home on their assigned flight at the end of the year, they will be considered “off program.” This means that their health insurance will be canceled, and the Department of Homeland Security will be informed. Their status in the government’s centralized guest visitor computer system will be listed as terminated, which means that if they apply for another U.S. visa, the consular officer will see this note and it will decrease their chances of receiving another U.S. visa.

The re-entry experience

Like all exchange students, FLEX students experience some conflicting feelings when they return home. Some alumni feel as if they don’t recognize the country to which they have returned while others feel frustrated with a perceived lack of progress during their absence. Students may start to compare the conditions in their home country with conditions in America. Sometimes, the comparisons are negative. Some alumni have commented that people in their countries do not smile or say thank you as much as Americans do. On the other hand, many students find they have a new appreciation of and patriotism towards their homeland and culture.

Students also may have difficulty readjusting to life with their natural families. Traditionally, college-age students from these countries live with their families and do not move out until they have married and can afford to live on their own (although this is changing somewhat, especially in urban areas, where an increasing number of university students from remote areas have their own apartments). After a year of being separated from their natural parents, alumni, particularly young women, frequently have a difficult time getting their families to accept their new independence. Parents often are not prepared for the changes that have occurred in their children. Under the terms of their ECA grants, POs are required to conduct reentry training seminars for all FLEX students before they depart for their home countries. Your student’s reentry seminar will probably be conducted in the late spring. In addition, American Councils conducts reentry

seminars for returning FLEX alumni in their home country, which gives them a chance to share their experiences with each other and introduces them to the alumni community and its activities in their home cities and countries.

The alumni program

As your FLEX student prepares to go home, you should be aware that a vast network of organized alumni associations eagerly awaits returning FLEX alumni. American Councils coordinates alumni programming throughout the region. Alumni meet regularly to perform community service and other projects, have American “movie nights,” celebrate American holidays, and engage in debates, speaker nights, and professional development activities. Alumni also help with recruitment and orientation of future FLEX students. Alumni who live in cities where there are American Councils offices have the opportunity to meet more frequently, but all are invited, and alumni in other cities will often travel great distances to attend an alumni gathering, perhaps spending the night at the home of a fellow FLEX alum. In farther-flung regions, some alumni have formed their own associations or become city or university representatives. Alumni stay connected with each other through their in-country and regional networks, social media and the Bradley Herald (www.bradleyherald.org), which features news and articles about alumni accomplishments and initiatives, as well as available grant and professional development opportunities. In addition, they have the opportunity to register on an ECA alumni website at alumni.state.gov that will enable them to communicate with alumni from other State Department programs as well as FLEX; they may have already registered on this website while they’re in the United States. As you can see, FLEX alumni have numerous opportunities to stay connected, active, and engaged. Many alumni have been extremely successful both in school, their communities, and their careers.

If your FLEX student wants to learn more about participating in the alumni program, tell them to contact the nearest American Councils office after they return home.

APPENDIX I: Program Rules

Operational Guidelines

FLEX and YES

Operational Guidelines and J-1 Visa Regulations

Program Year 2025-26

These Operational Guidelines serve as a common reference for organizations implementing the U.S. Department of State's Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) and Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES) programs. These guidelines are developed under American Councils' Cooperative Agreements with the Department of State to clarify roles and responsibilities and provide detailed steps to ensure smooth collaboration and communication between American Councils, overseas partners, and the U.S. placement organizations for inbound students under these programs.

ECA provides funding annually for almost 2,000 academic-year and semester scholarships for secondary school students from over 50 countries to study in the United States and live with American host families.

Please direct all inquiries about these guidelines to your ECA Program Officer.

Note: The Operational Guidelines have been abridged for this publication. As such not all links may work. For information about a specific linked item, please contact your headquarters office.

This document is based on the Code of Federal Regulations (22 CFR Part 62.25). Please check the DOS website regularly for updates as it is subject to change:

j1visa.state.gov/sponsors/current/regulations-compliance.

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1. Roles and Contact Information

1.1. Grantor



Bureau of Educational
and Cultural Affairs

United States Department of State

Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA)

Office of Citizen Exchanges

Youth Programs Division

ECA/PE/C/PY

2200 C Street, NW

SA-5, 3rd Floor

Washington, DC 20522-0503

eca.state.gov, exchanges.state.gov

ROLE: U.S. government agency responsible for funding, design, and implementation of programs as legislated by the U.S. Congress. ECA sets overall direction, monitors, and oversees all aspects of program implementation, including on-program student support issues.

In general, "ECA" in these guidelines refers to ECA's Youth Programs Division staff. This Division is a J-1 designated Sponsor, has reporting responsibilities to ECA's Office of Private Sector Exchange (EC), and is subject to all J-1 visa regulations.

1.2. Administrative Components Organization



1828 L Street NW, Suite 1200

Washington, DC 20036-5136

www.americancouncils.org

www.discoverFLEX.org

www.YESprograms.org

ROLE: Oversight of recruitment and selection; PO student assignments; student notification packet production; international and U.S. domestic travel for 80% of the students; pre-departure orientations; program ID card production; placement data management; central database management (AIS – see Section 4 of this document); on-program support communications among ECA, Placement Organizations, Recruitment Organizations, and natural parents; SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitor

Information System) reporting requirements; production of DS-2019s and travel validation; Civic Education Workshop and Workshop for Youth Leaders in English Teaching (WYLET); publications; program websites and social media; disabilities component coordination; and alumni programming and reporting.

1.3. *Placement Organizations (POs)*

ROLE: Recruitment and selection of host families and schools, host family and secondary school placement, support, and monitoring. Implementation of program activities while in host communities.

1.4. *Mobility International USA (MIUSA)*

ROLE: MIUSA supports participating students with disabilities. Prior to the students' arrival, MIUSA prepares preliminary assessments for POs based on information gathered by American Councils during recruitment. Upon students' arrival, MIUSA conducts a workshop in Eugene, Oregon, to prepare students with disabilities for the exchange year ahead and gather additional information about each student's access needs, independent living skills, and interests. MIUSA provides the students' POs with detailed portfolios about the students they are hosting that include disability-related information, recommendations, and community-specific referrals to resources. MIUSA works with American Councils' designated Disabilities Coordinator to assist POs, host families, and schools to address the students' access needs within the reasonable accommodations framework. MIUSA also provides support to POs throughout the program year to assist with disability-related on-program support issues.

2. *Student Assignments to Placement Organizations*

2.1. *Procedure for Assigning Scholarship Finalists*

American Councils reviews student applications to ensure completeness and program eligibility prior to distributing and assigning to POs according to the following criteria:

1. PO student allocation based on cooperative agreement
2. Home country
3. Pre-assignment of spring semester students (YES Malaysians only)

4. Proportional allocation of students with disabilities and Language Program (FLEX only) designation
5. School grade level
6. Sex

POs may submit student requests (such as direct placements or country-specific requests) to Elena Fomenko.

2.2. *Delivery of Student Documents*

2.2.a. POs receive student applications and photographs. Applications are also available for viewing and downloading via the Applicant Information System (AIS) online database: ais.americancouncils.org/start. Each student application is assigned a unique identifying code that reflects the program year, citizenship country, and unique numerical ID. For example:

2025-010-123456: Here, “2025” refers to the program year; “010” refers to Kazakhstan; and 123456 is the student’s country-unique identifier. (For more, see “AIS ID Number Decoded” in AIS, under “AIS Instruction Manuals.”)

American Councils uses letters and numbers that denote “Test Centers,” which indicate the country (and, for American Councils-recruited countries, the city) where the student applied to the program. This is also shown on the application. Two letters indicate the country, and three numbers indicate the city or country in which testing took place. For example:

KZ-008: The “KZ” refers to Kazakhstan, and “008” refers to the city of Ust-Kamennogorsk.

EG-700: The “EG” and “700” both refer to Egypt.

FLEX only: Language Program component (LP) designated students are those identified by American Councils as needing additional English instruction in the United States (preferably prior to their U.S. school start date). Some LP students might also need to attend the MIUSA preparatory workshop if they have a disability (see 2.2.c, below), as indicated in AIS. See section 2.4.a of this document for guidance, or contact Valerie Frank or your ECA program officer. Students will be designated as LP if they score a 212 or lower on ELTiS version 1, or a 671 or lower on ELTiS version 2.

NOTE: A student’s LP status is subject to change after shipment of

the student applications to POs because of LP student declines and replacements and changes in LP program design. Affected POs will be notified in writing of any change to students' LP status.

- 2.2.b.** Students with a **disability** are designated by a Test Center that begins with a **9**. For example, **KZ-908** refers to a student from Ust-Kammenogorsk (**08**) who has a disability (**9**). ECA provides funding, administered by American Councils, to provide reasonable accommodation for students with disabilities. See section 2.4.b below for more information.
- 2.2.c.** Students with **health considerations** are designated by **800**. These considerations may be related to thyroid and other hormone conditions, asthma, diabetes, stutter, missing limbs, or prostheses, among others.
- 2.2.d.** To find your LP, 800 and/or 900 students in AIS, select your desired parameter in the *Participant Attributes* section, and click **Search**.

▼ Applicant attributes

Attributes

Every applicant has

All ▼

checked values present.

☐ 200522

☐ 400518

☐ 400560

☐ 400632

☐ Cost-Share

☐ DOS Priority Recruiting

☐ English Access Microscholarship Participant

☐ FLEX LP

☐ IDP

☐ Moldova EFL

☐ STEM Interest

☐ With Disabilities

☐ With Health Considerations

Search

2.3. *Procedure for Identifying Alternates to Replace Withdrawn or Canceled Finalists*

- 2.3.a.** When a finalist withdraws or is canceled from the program, American Councils assigns a replacement from a pool of alternates. The replacement will be the closest match to the withdrawn or canceled finalist in terms of citizenship country, region of citizenship country (where applicable), disability status, LP status (**FLEX only**), sex, school grade level, and age. Replacements will be sent to POs the following day. If there are no alternates available from the same country, American Councils consults ECA regarding selection.
- 2.3.b.** The **final date** for assigning replacement finalists is **May 30, 2025, and mid-November** for Malaysians. Finalists who withdraw or are canceled after May 30, 2025, will not be replaced.

2.4. *Administration of Language Program and Reasonable Accommodations Funds*

2.4.a. Language Program (FLEX only) Funds

Language Program (LP) funds are administered by American Councils. LP is the designation for students who are identified by American Councils as needing additional English instruction in the United States (preferably prior to their U.S. school start date).

The funds available for each PO's language program are based on \$1,500 per LP student assigned to the PO. Approximately 10% of the FLEX students assigned to each PO will be designated LP. POs should let American Councils know if they have a student(s) who is not initially identified as LP but who might greatly benefit from additional language support. American Councils can work with POs to see if LP support would be available.

Final LP numbers will be confirmed after the May 30 decline-replace deadline. To be reimbursed, POs will need to submit an invoice (not receipts). The LP requirements are as follows:

- LP students should be offered a minimum of 20 hours and a maximum of 60 hours of intensive tutoring within the first three months of their arrival to the United States.
- In general, language program tutoring should be continued as long as the student and tutor feel it is necessary for the student

to succeed on the program. Note that some students may need the full 60 hours of tutoring.

- **Acceptable** instruction methods include one-on-one professional tutoring and PO-designed programs (such as a group LP, in or outside the host community) conducted by trained professionals. The curriculum should focus on oral/aural proficiency, including conversation practice, comprehension, pronunciation, vocabulary development, and sentence patterns. Less emphasis should be placed on grammar, as the English curriculum of schools in the sending countries is primarily grammar-based.
- **Unacceptable** instruction methods include language tapes, online courses, and other self-directed forms of study.
- Any funds unspent during the pre-program period may be used during the year as needed, including for tutoring.
- If a host parent is to provide tutoring to their own student and will be compensated using LP (i.e. grant) funds, then the PO must determine that the host parent meets the qualifications listed above and keep a record on file of this review and determination.
- If a PO finds that one of their students initially identified as LP no longer needs additional language tutoring, the PO should submit written documentation from the language tutor explaining this and the student's progress in school, to American Councils and their ECA program officer. If approved by ECA, American Councils will update the student's LP designation in AIS.

2.4.b. Reasonable Accommodations Funds

Accommodation funds for FLEX and YES students with disabilities are administered by American Councils.

Funding is limited and can be provided only for services or equipment that are **essential** to the student's successful completion of the FLEX or YES program. Durable items purchased with funds costing over \$500 per unit must be returned to American Councils at the end of the program year.

The funds are available for either payment or reimbursement, depending on the type of request and the preference of the PO. Below are the steps for requesting accommodation funds:

1. PO submits an accommodation request form (see Appendix 10)

to the American Councils Disability Coordinator, copying Jenny Webb and Valerie Frank.

2. The form can be used to request multiple services/equipment.
3. If the request is approved, American Councils will purchase equipment or services from an organization or business, OR will reimburse the party designated on the request form (PO, Host Family, or LC). American Councils cannot pay an individual directly for a service provided. American Councils can reimburse the PO for these types of expenses.

If the equipment/services have already been paid for, POs must provide receipts or invoices to American Councils in order to process the request.

For expenses over \$100, POs must submit the accommodation request form *before* the equipment/service is purchased/contracted.

3. *Securing Host School and Family Placements*

Per Section (f) (7) of the J-1 visa regulations, once a finalist's DS-2019 has been issued, the assigned PO bears responsibility for placing that student unless the student withdraws or fails to receive a U.S. visa. See pages 36-38 for definitions of terms.

3.1. *Host School Placement Requirements*

Sections (c) (1) and (f) (1) through (6) of the J-1 visa regulations require POs to secure, from the principal or authorized administrator, prior written acceptance of school enrollment for the student. If tuition arrangements are made or waived, a note to that effect is required and should be sent to the appropriate American Councils on-program support person. POs may not charge a student for private school tuition. POs are required to keep copies of these acceptances and arrangements on file for three years and provide them to the Department of State upon request. **It is strictly prohibited to facilitate entry into the United States for an ECA student who does not have a written school placement agreement prior to their home country departure** (see Section 5.2 and 5.3 for placement deadlines).

Schools make their own determination of student grade placement,

which is made clear to the students during recruitment and PDO and to the host schools in the School Administrator Handbook (Available in AIS under “Downloads,” then “Program Publications, Youth Programs”). POs should alert ECA to any situation in which a participant challenges their placement so that ECA may effectively address it before it becomes a burden to the school and risks future placements.

When entering confirmed school enrollment information into AIS (see Section 4), POs must also indicate the school's start and end dates.

Schools must be provided with a written English summary of the student's complete academic coursework prior to starting the host school. Students are required to complete the written summary prior to departing their home country and bring it with them to the United States to give to the U.S. school; if needed earlier, American Councils can assist. POs must inform the prospective host school of students who have completed secondary school in their home country; this information is available to POs **in Appendix VIII of the Operational Guidelines** and, later, via AIS, in the Pre-Departure Orientation Student Agreement.

By regulation, the sponsor, which is ECA, may not enroll more than five exchange students in one school unless requested by the school in writing. Because multiple POs may place students in a single school, for any school that hosts more than five ECA-funded students, ECA will request assistance from the PO with the largest cohort in that school in obtaining the required letter from the school administration.

3.1.a. Non-Traditional School Placement

ECA tracks all non-traditional school placements. ECA approval is required only for the following non-traditional school types:

- Religious schools
- Private schools requiring payment of tuition with ECA funds
- Boarding schools

Placements in schools with a religious affiliation must also be approved by natural parents and students. In these cases, American Councils contacts the appropriate overseas office or consortium member to ascertain natural parent and student concurrence. POs should submit these requests, with the following information, to American Councils, and American Councils will send it to the appropriate ECA program officer to approve or disapprove:

1. Confirmation that the school is fully accredited, including the name of the accrediting body
2. Number of students enrolled in the school and in the grade the student will be placed in
3. Impact on housing: dormitory, with host family (HF), or with HF on weekends only
4. Impact on programming: Will the placement interfere with participation in regular program enhancement activities?
5. If this is a religious school, what faith? Are there religious coursework and/or activity requirements? Is daily worship mandatory? Do students of other or mixed faiths attend the school?
6. Is the school all girls or all boys?
7. Synopsis of available electives and extracurricular school-organized activities
8. Cost arrangement: Will all costs be waived or donated? Note that the Department of State does not generally provide grant funds for tuition.

For schools that do not require ECA approval, POs should send their ECA program officer the student's name and school name, location, and type of school.

3.2. *Host Family Placement Requirements*

Per Section (l) (i), POs must secure a **permanent** or **temporary** host family for the student prior to the student's departure from their home country. Per Section (f) (1), POs must secure written acceptance for the enrollment of any exchange student in a United States public or private secondary school. **It is strictly prohibited to facilitate entry into the United States for a student who does not have a host family and school secured.** See Section 5 of this document, Student Travel, for more information.

3.2.a. Host Family Recruitment

Per Section (m), POs must ensure promotional materials represent their purposes and activities professionally, accurately, and ethically. In recruiting host families, POs may not appeal to public pity or guilt, imply that an exchange student will not be able to come if a host family is not found, or identify photos of students with an appeal for immediate placement. The privacy and security of participants, families, and schools must not be compromised. POs

are not to include personal student data, contact information, or photographs of the student on websites or in promotional materials. Access to such information should only be made available to potential host families who have been vetted and selected to participate. If such information is shared online, it must be password-protected.

3.2.b. Host Family Screening and Monitoring Requirements

POs must screen and select all host families, **whether permanent, temporary, OR repeat hosts**, according to criteria established in Section (j). Potential host families must be provided with program details and what is expected of them. Screening is to include an application that contains a) all required fields as described in the J-1 visa regulations; b) a description of the home including photographs of the interior and exterior of the home; c) information about family composition; and d) a statement about how information collected about income will be used. Families receiving government subsidies for food and/or housing are not eligible to host.

Screening also includes an in-person interview with all who live in the host family home, during which time the PO should also confirm that the family is capable of providing a comfortable and nurturing environment and that the home is maintained in a sanitary condition. The family must be able to provide a separate bed (inflatable beds or convertible sofas are not acceptable; a murphy bed is acceptable only if it is in a space where it can be permanently “down” in the bed position and the space still usable) for the student, storage for personal belongings, study space, and access to an exit in case of urgent need. The student may share a room with one host sibling of the same sex and similar age. POs must also collect two independent character references (i.e., from persons not affiliated with the PO or related by blood or marriage to the applying host family). An exchange student **may not** live with their relatives. All documentation must be made available promptly upon request by ECA or American Councils.

In the event that the PO becomes aware that the host family is going through a life-changing event (e.g., divorce, job loss), the PO should re-evaluate the host family's ability to provide a safe and nurturing environment for the student and email ECA and American Councils with its assessment of the situation and its

decision.

A criminal background check (CBC) and check of the national sex offender registry must be run on all host family members who live in the home (including those present in the home at the beginning of the placement and any who move in later) and are 18 years of age and older or who will turn 18 while the exchange student is in the home. CBC dates must be uploaded into the AIS database. ECA requires POs to analyze the results of CBCs with the goal of ensuring there are no findings that could adversely affect the health or safety of the student. The PO is responsible for making justified, valid, informed decisions about whether a potential host family is considered to have “passed” the CBC. POs should follow established industry practices and guidelines when reviewing CBC results.

In addition, ECA requires that the following people undergo a CBC:

1. Anyone 18 years or older who spends a significant amount of time (whether they overnight or **not**) in the host family home, including but not limited to a nanny, boyfriend, girlfriend, grandparents, and family friends.
2. Anyone who assumes responsibility for the student in the absence of the host family, such as a neighbor who cares for the student if the host family goes on vacation without the student.

POs must maintain records of all screening documentation and ensure that CBCs are renewed each year a family hosts. POs must inform American Councils of any changes to the host family composition by emailing to the American Councils on-program support person and updating the student's record in AIS.

See section 4.5.b of this document for requirements for placement in a host family consisting of a single adult with no children in the home.

ECA requires that a full-time permanent employee or official designate of the PO's headquarters conduct site visits to the homes of at least 20% of their students in order to see the students firsthand in their host environments. These site visits should be conducted in close coordination with ECA to complement its program site visits and ensure maximum coverage. POs should enter site visit plans into AIS so that ECA participant monitors can coordinate their own

site visits accordingly, although ECA reserves the right to visit the same locations. For instructions on how to enter the site visit plans into AIS, follow the “AIS Instruction Manuals” link in AIS and select “Host Site Visit Planning Tool.”

Downloads

▼ AIS Instruction Manuals

Name
AIS Overview and Login Information (v.2023)
Searching and Viewing Applicant Records in AIS (v.2023)
AIS ID Number Decoded (v.2023)
Placement Organizations, Secondary School Programs - General Instructions (v.2017-09)
Placement Organizations - How to Cancel a Placement
Placement Organizations, Secondary School Programs - Host Site Visit Planning Tool

Deadlines for entering site visit plans into AIS are as follows:

- **October 1, 2025:** For October – December site visits
- **December 31, 2025:** For January – June site visits

3.2.c. Host Family Orientation Requirements

Per Section (d) (9), POs must conduct a host family orientation after the family has been vetted and accepted. Per Section (k), at this orientation POs must provide to the host family the philosophy, rules, and regulations that govern ECA exchange programs as well as “best practices”; a copy of the Department’s letter of appreciation to host families (**see Appendix IX**); and a copy of the J-1 visa regulations, 22 CFR 62.25 (**see Appendix III**). POs must provide host families with strategies to aid the student’s cultural adaptation, which may be done through workshops to familiarize host families with cultural differences. POs must advise the host family of their responsibility to inform the PO of any material changes to their or their student’s status, including but not limited to change of address, finances, employment, and criminal arrests. POs should remind host families of their crucial role in delivering program goals and that hosting is much more than simply providing a bed and housing. Host students should be seen as a member of the family, and care and support should be provided at all times to participants.

3.3. Emergency Placements

If, in an emergency, a PO must immediately remove a student from the assigned host family home, the PO is responsible for placing the student with another host family that has already been screened according to the criteria described in Section (j) prior to placement. Within 24 hours, the PO must update AIS and notify the American Councils on-program support person.

4. Reporting Placements and Placement Changes: Applicant Information System (AIS)

American Councils administers the Applicant Information System (AIS), which stores and allows secure sharing of participants' information among authorized users. POs must designate appropriate staff members to access and use AIS. To request a login name and password, contact AIS Operations (aisoperations@americancouncils.org). Through AIS, POs will:

- Receive, review, and download applicant (finalist) profiles, applications, medical information (including immunization records), English test scores, transcripts, and other relevant data.
- Input host family and host school data, including addresses and contact information.
- Enter planned host family and student site visit dates per deadlines noted in Section 3.2.b of this document.

4.1. How and Where to Report Placements and Placement Changes

POs' timely reporting of complete and accurate host family and school placement information is critical to ensuring proper natural family notification, administration of the SEVIS system, travel administration, Department of State reporting, administration of on-program support functions, school certificate generation, and handling of emergency or early return situations.

Per Section (l) (2), POs must inform the student of the host family composition and background and whether a placement is permanent or temporary, confirm CBCs, and obtain required approvals for single-person or double placements. Report placements and placement changes via AIS at: ais.americancouncils.org/start.

- Log into the AIS website. The information you submit will be available for immediate viewing and confirmation. The placement report will be emailed to the PO email address you enter in the online report. The PO is responsible for reviewing this email confirmation and promptly correcting the information in the database if there are any discrepancies; corrections can be accomplished by submitting another online placement report.
- Placement information will be automatically emailed to the appropriate overseas office, which will in turn share it with the student and natural family.

The AIS placement report allows for the entry of two separate types of a) host family addresses, b) local coordinator addresses, and c) host school addresses:

1. Physical address: **required**
2. Mailing address: required IF USPS mail cannot be delivered to the physical address, for example, if USPS mail can only be delivered to a P.O. Box, Rural Route (RR), or Highway Contract (HC) route.

You must ALWAYS enter a physical address, even if this is not the mailing address. A physical location address is required per SEVIS regulations. The Department of State and American Councils also need this address for overnight delivery services.

A functional mailing address ensures that USPS mailing labels are generated with the correct mailing address (American Councils will use this address to distribute return travel information).

If an address that you enter fails to validate, contact aisoperations@americancouncils.org for assistance.

4.2. *When to Enter Placement Reports*

All placements and placement changes should be entered into AIS no later than two business days after being secured.

4.2.a. Initial Placement

Enter the host family and/or school information into AIS once you confirm that the necessary, required documentation has been secured. Ensure correct spelling and proper use of both upper and lower case in all fields.

4.2.b. Technical Changes

If you discover any errors, correct the data in AIS by submitting a new placement report.

4.2.c. Cancellation of Host Family (pre-arrival ONLY)

A placement may be canceled in AIS without a replacement ONLY prior to a student's departure for the United States. The AIS cancellation function will automatically become unavailable one day prior to the student's home-country departure date. In the unlikely event that a placement is canceled without a replacement within that window, you must email or call 202-833-7522:

FLEX: ops@americancouncils.org

YES: yessupport@americancouncils.org

Per Section (n) (2), American Councils creates a final placement report for the upcoming academic year based on data POs entered into AIS, including host family and school placement information. American Councils will submit this report to ECA. The placement deadline for academic year students is August 31 and for Malaysian semester students is January 15. In years when this date falls on a weekend or holiday, the Office of Private Sector Exchange will advise on the new deadline.

4.2.d. Host Family Change

Per Section (l) (3), in the event that circumstances necessitate a host family placement change, POs must document the reason for the change. Per Section (n) (3), POs must provide ECA with a summation of all situations that resulted in the placement of exchange students with more than one host family or school placement (the Change of Placement report). POs are responsible for entering this information into AIS and for ensuring it is **complete and accurate**. American Councils is responsible for generating the Change of Placement report based on data POs have entered and submitting the report to the Office of Private Sector Exchange by the deadline of July 31 for the previous academic year.

When entering a placement change, POs must:

1. Update AIS with all new placement, contact, and local coordinator information and complete the "Reason for

Placement Change" information by selecting the most fitting reason, below; you can click a hyperlink directly from the placement report in AIS to see full descriptions of the reasons, also listed below, and

2. Notify the appropriate American Councils on-program support person via email of the change and provide a brief description of the reason for the change. This will be shared with overseas offices and natural parents in tandem with the web-based report.
3. **NOTE:** You can choose the reason "Information Update **WITHOUT** Host Family Change" for updates to existing placement information that DO NOT involve a host family change, e.g., correcting a typographical error, address change, or adding or changing host family members. Explain the reason briefly in the description section.

4.2.e. Temporary Change of Host Family



If the student is going to spend more than 48 hours in the care of a screened and vetted family other than their host family and their host family is not going to be in the community, AIS needs to be updated. Sleepovers do not count. When the student returns to the host family home, AIS needs to be updated to reflect that return to the normal placement.

NOTE:

It is unacceptable to write "see emails" or to repeat the name of the reason in the description field. The description field must address the issues DOS describes in their guidance for using the change reasons, below.

If a student changes host families while on program, the Placement Organization is responsible for travel related to the change in placement.

POs may choose to share additional details about a host family (e.g., portions of the host family application) to the student and/or natural family; however, they may not share host family members' medical history, financial disclosures, or personal references collected during the vetting process.

CATEGORY	EXAMPLES OF WHAT TO WRITE:	 DON'T WRITE: 
B: Student Behavior Issues	Student not following rules, negative attitude towards HF	See emails.
S: Change of School	Moved to school that is a better fit for the student.	Changed schools
T: Temporary Family	Student was with a temp emergency HF and has now moved to a new perm family.	Move from temp to perm

View of Placement Report Explanation in AIS:

TYPE OF PLACEMENT

- Choose -

Is this a double placement?

No

If yes, is the other host student on a U.S. government-sponsored program?

- Choose -

Reason for placement change:

- Choose -

Enter explanation here:

Show Explanations for Placement Change Reasons

Department of State Host Family Change Reason Categories:

The table below contains the “Reasons for Change of Placement” Codes as provided by the U.S. Department of State Office of Designation in their Change of Placement Report Guidance. EV = Exchange Visitor; OPA = Office of Private Sector Exchange Program Administration

Please remember that all cases and Incident Reports should be submitted to the appropriate Youth Programs Division OPS mailbox, rather than directly to OPA. As the sponsor of these programs, the Youth Programs Division will notify OPA as needed.

A	Alleged inappropriate host family behavior	Behaviors, not incompatibility between family and EV; need not be sexual; could include drug or behavior problems of natural children; excessive alcohol use of host parents, arrest of family member; physical altercations. For any instances that required an Incident Report to be submitted to OPA, please provide the case number and the date when the report was submitted.
B	Student behavior issue	EV breaks rules, lies, consistent poor grades, mental health concerns, dating host siblings, uses drugs or alcohol; not incompatibility

C	Personal change of host family circumstances	Change of family composition; divorce; separation; host siblings/relatives moving back in; new baby; host family problems that increase stress (e.g., change of jobs not resulting in financial inability, but nevertheless stress-creating). This could also be defined as host families who simply lose interest and do not want to host anymore (yet are still compatible with EV)
D	Death or illness or injury	Of EV or family member that affects the ability of the family to continue to host
E	Not sufficiently engaged	The EV does not participate with family events (overreliance on technology) or the host family does not provide sufficient transportation, support, opportunities, interaction, or generally have busy work schedules
F	Financial circumstances	Evidence that the family was not initially financially able to host; loss or change of job resulting in change in financial circumstances
G	Geographic reasons	EV not satisfied with, e.g., rural location; distances from activity locations make transportation a problem
H	Host family composition	EV wants two parents or host siblings their own age; host parents too young or too old
I	General incompatibility	Cultural differences, personality differences, food preferences, or a possible host family misunderstanding of what the program is about (i.e. excessive chores/babysitting). Different expectations.
L	Language barriers	EV lacks sufficient English language sufficiency
M	Move or travel	Family moves out of the district, or family has travel plans and cannot take EV with them
N	Natural disaster	Home becomes unlivable due to natural disaster
O	Other	Reason is not listed here
P	Duration of placement commitment ended	Family committed to host for a specific duration (e.g., a semester) and that period has ended; not a welcome family
Q	Quality of home	Unsuitable room or living space; cleanliness of home; problematic pets; insufficient food; smoking; allergies

S	Change of school	Enrollment issues, EV being bullied, school not offering specific courses, personal preference, EV moved with family to new district (in which case the host family name would not change, but their address would). NOTE: If EV move to new host family required change of school, use code that describes family change, not “S.”
W	Welcome family	Family was never intended to be permanent.
T	Temporary family	EV removed from one home and did not have a permanent family; stayed with temporary family while permanent family was identified; not a welcome family.
U	Orientation family	EV attended orientation or otherwise stayed with family not identified on the Placement Report.

*In case of large-scale natural disasters (hurricanes, tornados, wildfires, earthquakes, etc.), POs must ensure students are safe and must notify ECA and American Councils on-program support contacts immediately of any evacuations/relocations as follows:

1. If you know you have no ECA students in the affected areas, send a short message to that effect.
2. If students have been evacuated, inform ECA and American Councils where they are as soon as possible and provide updates on students' whereabouts.
3. In cases where the natural disaster happens during an orientation or other gathering, describe what preparations are being made to ensure the students' safety.
4. If natural disasters or major political disruptions occur overseas, check on your students from the affected countries in case they need support.

Common Reasons for Placement Change and Corresponding Category:

When entering a change of placement, the category and explanation for the change should explain why the participant left the previous HF or school placement. Below are some common circumstances for changes in placement and the corresponding category from the above table.

EXPLANATION OF PLACEMENT CHANGE	CATEGORY
Student arrived on program to a temporary HF and is now moving to a permanent HF.	W – Welcome Family
Student is staying with a temporary HF while their permanent HF is out of town.	M – Move or Travel

EXPLANATION OF PLACEMENT CHANGE	CATEGORY
Student was staying with a temp HF while their permanent HF was traveling and the original HF has returned.	P – Duration of placement commitment ended
Student had to be moved immediately and was staying with a temp HF while a new HF was sought and now has a new permanent HF.	T – Temporary family
The student is now attending a school closer to the HF's home.	S – Change of school

4.2.f. Host Family Composition Change

If the host family composition changes, including but not limited to the departure or arrival of a host family member, AIS must be updated to reflect this change, and a brief explanation emailed to the American Councils on-program support person. In addition, the PO must interview and run a criminal background check on the new person, if aged 18 or older.

The name of every person who lives in the home and their relationship to the host family must be indicated in the “Other People Living in the Home” section of AIS. This includes any other exchange and long-term visitor who lives in the home.

4.2.g. Change to Local Coordinator (LC) or to LC Contact Information

Current local coordinator information is required for each participant. LC assignments or contact information changes must be updated in AIS within 5 calendar days.

4.3. *Contacting Natural Families and Students in their Home Countries*

Natural families expect to be notified of placements by the local in-country program representative.

4.3.a. For Initial Placements: POs should advise their staff and their host families not to contact students until after receiving the “OK to Contact” email from American Councils staff. This will ensure that host families do not call, email, post on social media, or otherwise prematurely alert students who have not yet been notified of their finalist status.

4.3.b. For Placement Changes: Please wait 5 business days after entering a placement change before you or the host family attempt to contact the natural family or student in their home country. This allows sufficient time for field staff to notify the student and natural family of the change in placement.

4.4. *Permanent versus Temporary Host Families*

POs are required to screen temporary families according to the same criteria outlined in Section (j). You must enter host family placements in AIS as permanent or temporary, according to the following definitions:

- 1. Permanent**, if the host family is accepting the student for the full academic year or the remainder of the academic year (i.e., if the student changes host families), or
- 2. Temporary**, if the host family is accepting the student for only part of the exchange year.

NOTE: HFs should be referred to as permanent or temporary in communications with students. “Welcome family” should be avoided as students do not understand this terminology.


4.5. *Special Placements*

4.5.a. Double Placement

Per Section (l) (1) (ii), POs shall not place more than one exchange student with a host family without prior written consent of the host family, the natural parents, and the students being placed.

IMPORTANT

DOUBLE PLACEMENT: By signing this item, my parents or legal guardian and I agree to a host family placement with another high school exchange student. Once the double placement is made my placement organization will provide an update. If I do not sign this statement (which is optional), my PO may still propose a double placement.



LEGAL GUARDIAN SIGNATURE

STUDENT SIGNATURE

Students indicated on the *Placement Information* form of their program application whether or not they and their natural parents consent to the student being in a Double Placement (DP):

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- If a student **does not** consent in general to a DP, their PO may *still* offer them a DP, in which case American Councils will present this to the student and NPs to decide whether or not to consent at that time.
- If a student **does** consent to a DP, the PO can proceed with placing the student in a DP and no further paperwork is needed.

Some POs may want the student and NP to sign the PO's own DP form for their internal record-keeping purposes, which American Councils can facilitate. In these cases, POs should **omit any personally identifying information (PII) about the other student** (e.g., last name), to help ensure student privacy and confidentiality. Requests may include the student's first name, country, and some information about the other student's personality and interests to be shared, so long as this information cannot be used to identify the other student prior to both students and their natural parents accepting the placement.

Under no circumstances may **more** than two high school exchange students, regardless of the visa on which they come, be placed in one host family home, **or** in the home of a local coordinator, regional coordinator, or volunteer. POs may not place students from the same countries or with the same native languages in the same home. **ECA does not allow double placements if both students share a common language (here defined as being able to converse freely) other than English.** The purpose of this limitation is to avoid placements where the two students' skills in a non-English language are so advanced that they are likely to use that language instead of English, thus weakening their bonds with the host family.

If an emergency necessitates a student's immediate removal from their host family and their placement with a screened and vetted host family that is already hosting a student from the same country or with whom a native language is shared, the PO must submit an Incident Report to ECA with a request for a waiver to the Double Placement policy. ECA will determine whether a waiver can be granted on a case-by-case basis.

POs must keep copies of the signed, approved double placement forms. In addition, there are two fields in AIS where POs will be prompted to enter the double placement information:

1. In the section entitled “Type of Placement,” one of the questions is “Is this a double placement?” See below:

TYPE OF PLACEMENT

- Choose - ▼

Is this a double placement? - Choose - ▼

If yes, is the other host student on a U.S. government-sponsored program? - Choose - ▼

2. In the section entitled “Other People Living in Home,” you may select either:

- a. **Double Placement (Approved) if the student and their parents agreed to a DP on their program application; or**
- b. **Double Placement (Pending)** if they did not, and you have thus asked American Councils to send them the DP form for their consideration and signature.

In the “relationship” field, identify the other exchange student as a double placement, rather than as a “host sibling.” See below:

OTHER PEOPLE LIVING IN HOME

First	Last	Age	Gender	Relationship	Date of Criminal Background Check	Cleared Criminal Background
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	- Choose - ▼	- Choose - ▼	<input type="text"/> (Hint: 31 Oct 2020)	Not answered ▼
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	- Choose - ▼	- Choose - ▼	<input type="text"/> (Hint: 31 Oct 2020)	Not answered ▼

Add a person

4.5.b. Single Parent Placement with No Children

Per section (j) (9), POs must obtain the written agreement of the student and the student’s natural parents in the case that the host family is composed of one adult with no children living in the home. A one-adult host family with no children in the home must also undergo a secondary level of review by a PO representative other than the person who recruited and selected the applicant. A single parent placement with no children in the host home could also include:

- one primary host parent and an unrelated boarder.
- two single, un-related adults.
- a single parent with one or more children who do not live in the home full time.

In these cases, the home should be treated as a single person placement and applicable written consent obtained.

As with double placements, there is an additional field in AIS where POs

will be prompted to enter the single person placement information. In the section entitled “Host Family Information,” you must answer whether the placement is a “Single Person Placement.” You may select “No,” “Yes, pending student confirmation,” or “Yes, student confirmed.” See below:

HOST FAMILY INFORMATION	<i>Single Person Placement?</i>	No
	Remove <i>HOST PARENT</i>	No
	<i>First, Middle, Last name</i>	Yes, pending student confirmation
	<i>Occupation</i>	Yes, student confirmed

ALL host family and school placements must be entered into AIS BEFORE students depart their home countries. See section 5 for the deferral schedule for incomplete placements.

ais.americancouncils.org/start

5. Student Travel

5.1. Travel Administration

Student travel is administered by American Councils, AFS, and overseas partners. This includes domestic travel in the home country, international travel to and from the United States, U.S. domestic travel between the gateway airport and host community; end-of-program workshop, and travel back to home countries.

NOTE: The Placement Organization is responsible for travel related to the change in host family placement.

Travel arrangements for all students share some commonalities, as listed in Section 5.1.a, and in 5.6 through 5.10. However, travel arrangements vary somewhat for each program as described in Sections 5.2 and 5.4 for FLEX students and Sections 5.3 and 5.5 for YES students. Students in need of assistance while traveling should call the following travel emergency phone numbers; see section 5.3 for information on which YES organizations recruit in each YES country:

FLEX students:	800.841.6460
YES students recruited by American Councils, AMIDEAST, iEARN and IRIS:	855.KLYES.00 (855.559.3700)
YES students recruited by AFS:	800.237.4636, x2230

5.1.a. Travel Commonalities for FLEX and YES

Students...	FLEX	YES (recruited by American Councils, AMIDEAST, IRIS & iEARN)	YES (recruited by AFS)
... cannot depart for the United States unless a school placement and host family placement have been secured and entered in AIS. POs are responsible for informing ECA and American Councils if a student does not have a school or host family placement one week prior to their scheduled arrival to the United States.	X	X	X
...with disabilities all arrive to the United States the week of August 11, 2025 (YES on August 12, FLEX on August 14) in order to fly to Oregon on August 15 and attend the MIUSA workshop from August 16-19 together. Students fly to their HF's on August 20.	X	X	X
... travel in groups of approximately 10-60 with trained adult flight leaders.	X	X	X
... are assisted during both inbound and return travel by program staff at Dulles (IAD), New York City (JFK and EWR; YES only), Denver (DEN; FLEX and YES-AC only), and Chicago (ORD) airports.	X	X	X

Students...	FLEX	YES (recruited by American Councils, AMIDEAST, IRIS & iEARN)	YES (recruited by AFS)
...are assisted by overseas program staff with all inbound and return in-country travel arrangements including any necessary overnights and with international check-in.	X	X	X
...fly into any U.S. airport designated by the PO that has regular, commercial airline connections to/from the student's U.S. gateway airport, except BWI, DCA, and other regional airports in the DC metro area for IAD arrivals; LGA, JFK, HPN, BDL, ISP, and other regional airports in the NYC area for NYC arrivals; and SJC, SMF for SFO arrivals.	X	X	X
...may arrive or depart from a nearby (within 50 miles), alternative airport if cost-effective. If the alternative arrival airport is more than 50 miles from the PO-designated host community airport, American Councils or AFS will confer with the PO about the change.	X	X	X
...who need ground transportation to and from the student's host community airport are the responsibility of the PO and/or the student's host family.	X	X	X

5.2. *International Travel Logistics to the United States for FLEX*

American Councils administers travel for FLEX. Students arrive at Washington-Dulles International Airport (IAD). Students travel in country-specific groups. For larger countries, there are typically at least two dates to select from per country, while smaller countries will often have only one travel date. POs select their preferred travel dates in AIS for countries with date options.

FLEX Travel to the United States

5.2.a. FLEX Students with Disabilities

On August 15 this cohort will travel to Eugene, Oregon to attend the August 16-19 MIUSA workshop, before flying to their HF on August 20.

5.2.b. General Travel for FLEX Students

August 4-29 (deferrals are September 8 and 9, 2025).

All FLEX students, except those whose final destination is IAD, overnight at an airport hotel upon arrival to the United States, and travel to their host communities the following day. **The dates visible to POs in AIS are the dates that students arrive in their host community.**

Host families and PO representatives who pick up students whose final destination is IAD should identify themselves to American Councils airport staff at IAD before departing with their students so staff can ensure the students have been united with the correct host families or representatives. Students' I-94 Arrival/Departure record can be accessed and printed by visiting www.cbp.gov/i94.

5.2.c. Host School and Host Family Placement Deadlines for FLEX

If no school and host family placement information has been entered by **5:00 PM EST on Monday** before the student's scheduled travel week, the student will be moved to a flight either during the week of August 25 (if possible), or to a flight on September 8 or 9, 2025. The placement deadlines are as follows:

- | | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Monday, July 28: | Placement deadline for students arriving week of August 4 |
| Monday, August 4: | Placement deadline for students arriving week of August 11 |
| Monday, August 11: | Placement deadline for students arriving week of August 18 |

- Monday, August 18:** Placement deadline for students arriving week of **August 25**
- Tuesday, Sept 2:** Final placement deadline for students arriving on **September 8 or 9**

5.2.d. U.S. Host Community Arrival Dates and Airport Codes for FLEX

POs enter preferred airport codes and dates in AIS. The timetable for data entry follows. After the travel date and airport code deadlines, the respective fields will be locked and changes may be made **only by special request via email to Ariane Nguyenduy and Ashley Lane**. Requests for regional airports in the Washington, DC area other than Dulles (e.g. BWI, DCA) cannot be accommodated.

ITEM	DATE
POs start entering preferred travel dates and airport codes in AIS	Spring 2025
POs complete entry into AIS of preferred travel dates	June 2, 2025
Assigned travel dates appear for POs in AIS	June 13, 2025
POs complete preferred airport code entry into AIS	June 27, 2025

5.2.e. International and Domestic Itineraries for FLEX

Beginning in June 2025, POs may access their FLEX students' international travel itineraries by going to www.sthr.eu, and using their assigned logins and passwords. Domestic itineraries will begin to appear as POs provide airport codes in AIS. All itineraries will be posted at least 1 week prior to the student's departure from their home country.

5.2.f. Travel Date and Airport Code Changes for FLEX

POs may make changes in AIS in their FLEX students' travel dates through June 2 and to airport codes through June 27, 2025. After these dates, the fields will be locked and changes may be made by special request **only via email** to Ariane Nguyenduy and Ashley Lane.

5.3. *International Travel Logistics to the United States for YES*

American Councils and AFS administer travel for YES. Each organization's

procedures vary slightly, and each uses its own database to store and share travel information. Students are assigned to international group flights by country. All country groups travel on dates set by the American Councils and AFS. Students' I-94 Arrival/Departure record can be accessed and printed by visiting www.cbp.gov/I94.

5.3.a. YES Students with Disabilities

This cohort will fly to Washington, DC, or Newark, NJ (depending on which organization organizes their travel; see below) on August 12, 2025. On August 15, the students will travel to Eugene, Oregon to attend the August 16-19 MIUSA workshop, before flying to their HF's on August 20.

5.3.b. General Travel for YES Students

All students will arrive in August. American Councils and AFS schedules are as follows:

Travel Administered by American Councils

- **Tuesdays, August 5, 12, 19, and 26, 2025:** Amideast, iEARN and IRIS recruited students whose travel is administered by American Councils arrive to Washington-Dulles Airport (IAD) and attend a three-day orientation.
- **Wednesdays, August 13 and 20, 2025:** American Councils recruited students arrive to Washington-Dulles Airport (IAD) and attend a two-day orientation.
- **Friday, August 8, 15, 22, and 29:** All students travel to their host families.

American Councils administers travel for students from:

Albania	Jordan	Morocco	Suriname
Bahrain	Kosovo	Nigeria	Tanzania
Bangladesh	Kuwait	North Macedonia	Tunisia
Bosnia-Herzegovina	Lebanon	Pakistan	West Bank
Bulgaria	Liberia	Saudi Arabia	
Cameroon	Libya	Senegal	
Israel (Arab communities)	Mali	Sierra Leone	

Travel Administered by AFS

Students whose travel is administered by AFS arrive in the United States in two groups (see 5.3.c) on August 5 (Group 1a) and August 19 (Group 1b). Students will attend a two-day orientation in Newark, NJ. Students arrive to their host families on August 7 or August 21. AFS administers travel for students from:

Egypt	India	Kenya	Mozambique	South Africa
Ghana	Indonesia	Malaysia*	Thailand	Türkiye

*Students from Malaysia will arrive to the U.S. for a semester program in January 2026.

5.3.c. Host Family and School Placement Deadlines for YES Students

Travel Administered by American Councils

If no school and host family placement information has been entered by 5:00 PM EDT on the Monday before the student's scheduled travel week, the student will be moved to a later travel date. All other students on all four travel dates will be rescheduled to travel on September 9 (*tentative*). Placement deadlines are at **5:00 PM EDT** as follows:

- Monday, July 28:** Placement deadline for students arriving **August 5**
- Monday, August 4:** Placement deadline for students arriving **August 12**
- Monday, August 11:** Placement deadline for students arriving **August 19**
- Monday, August 18:** Placement deadline for students arriving **August 26**
- Tuesday, Sept 2:** Final placement deadline for students **arriving on September 9** and **traveling to HF's on September 12.**

Travel Administered by AFS

If no school and host family placement information has been entered by 5:00 PM EDT on the dates listed below, the student will be moved to the deferrals travel week in September. Placement deadlines are as follows:

- **Wednesday, July 23 (Group 1A):** For students from Egypt, Ghana, Indonesia, Mozambique, South Africa who are scheduled to travel to the U.S. on Aug 5 and to HFs on Aug. 7.
- **Monday, August 11 (Group 1b):** For students from India, Kenya, Thailand, Türkiye who are scheduled to travel to the U.S. on Aug. 19 and to HFs on Aug. 21.
- **Tuesday, September 2 (Deferral Group):** For students scheduled to travel to the U.S. on Sept. 9 and to HFs on September 11.

5.3.d. Selection of Airport Codes and Assignment of Travel Dates for YES

POs enter preferred airport codes in AIS. After the airport code deadline, the field will be locked, and changes may be requested **only via email to Preston Fausett**.

Requests for regional airports in the Washington, DC area other than Dulles (e.g. BWI, DCA) cannot be accommodated for American Councils-organized travel. For AFS, airport such as LGA, JFK, HPN, BDL, ISP and other regional airports in the NYC area for NYC arrivals cannot be accommodated; nor can SJC or SMF be accommodated for SFO arrivals.

ITEM	DATE
POs start entering preferred airport codes in AIS	Spring 2025
Assigned travel dates appear for POs in AIS	mid-May 2025
POs complete preferred airport code entry into AIS	June 27, 2025

5.3.e. YES International and Domestic Itineraries

Beginning in June 2025, POs may use their assigned logins and passwords to access their YES students' **international travel itineraries** here: www.sthr.eu.

Domestic itineraries begin to appear as POs provide airport codes in AIS. All itineraries for placed students will be posted at least one week prior to the student's departure from their home.

All students attend a pre-program orientation in Washington, DC, traveling to their host families two or three days later. **The dates visible to POs in AIS is the date that students arrive in their host community.**

5.3.f. YES Airport Code Changes

POs may make changes in AIS to arrival airport codes through June 27, 2025. After this date, the airport code field will be locked. Any missing codes and/or code change requests for YES students should be sent by special request via email to Preston Fausett pfausett@americancouncils.org.

5.4. *Logistics of Return Travel to Home Countries for FLEX*

5.4.a. Travel Window for FLEX

All FLEX students will return home between approximately May 7 and June 20, 2026 (estimated, subject to change). American Councils administers a three-day year-end event for approximately 100-200 FLEX students in May or June. Details will be forthcoming in December 2025.

5.4.b. Assigning Return Flight Dates for FLEX

American Councils endeavors to assign all students to return flights on the date they and their host families' request. It cannot be guaranteed, however, that all requested dates will be honored because of several considerations. Flight assignments are made based upon whether students must take end-of-school exams in their home countries, the order in which return travel date requests are entered to AIS (first come, first served), and seat availability, as well as the ability to ensure student safety while travelling. American Councils reviews travel request patterns from year to year and attempts to block ranges of dates and quantities of seats that accommodate the patterns of demand.

As per ECA policy, the *Host Family Handbook*, and the *Parent/Student Agreement* form of the program application, year-end activities such as prom and graduation are not considered when assigning return flight dates. In addition, per the *Parent/Student Agreement*, the student must return home at the end of the program on the assigned travel date. The program end date on the DS-2019 will not be amended or extended. No exceptions will be made.

5.4.c. Exam Documentation for FLEX

Natural parents of students with academic exam obligations in their home countries must submit documentation of the exams

directly to the overseas offices. Field staff enters the dates into AIS for POs to review when entering students' requested travel dates. American Councils DC staff use these dates to determine final return date assignments.

5.4.d. Return Travel Request Form for FLEX

American Councils emails a Department of State-produced return travel request form to all students and their host families in late November or early December 2025. The form is to be returned to the students' POs by January 9, 2026. POs will enter the requested date into AIS. American Councils will make the final date assignments. Students and their host families will use this form to request a preferred departure date based on the available international flight schedule. Students and their host families are **strongly encouraged** to consult with natural parents during this process to confirm whether or not the student has exam obligations in the home country. If a student and the host family do not return the form to their PO, American Councils will assign the student a return date after all students who did submit a request form have been assigned a date.

5.4.e. Return Travel Date Assignment and Change Requests for FLEX

Return travel date assignments will be available via the travel report in AIS for POs to share with students by February 5, 2026. Requests for changes may be made through mid-March 2026, and will be accommodated **pending confirmation of exam status and seat availability**. If a student or host family requests to their PO that the student's return date be changed, the host family must provide signed documentation to the PO confirming that they agree to the change, and this must be emailed to American Councils. If American Councils receives requests for date changes from its field offices, American Councils will, if the requested date is available, ask the appropriate PO to confirm that the new date is acceptable to the student and host family before making any changes.

5.4.f. Itineraries and Tickets for FLEX

POs can view their students' detailed return travel itineraries on the www.sthr.eu website. POs may contact Ariane Nguyenduy and Ashley Lane to request login information if needed. Transatlantic itineraries are visible on the site beginning in March 2026 and

finalized, complete itineraries will be posted by the second week of April 2026. Plane tickets will be issued in late March-early April 2026. E-ticket links and return travel memos will be emailed directly to students starting in mid-April 2026. POs will receive copies of all the return travel memos sent to students.

5.5. **Logistics of Return Travel to Home Countries for YES**

5.5.a. YES Travel Window

All YES students will travel to Washington, DC in June 2026 to take part in one of three end-of-program workshops. American Councils administers two of the workshops for students recruited by American Councils, AMIDEAST, iEARN and IRIS. AFS administers one workshop for AFS-recruited students:

- **June 2 –4 (June 3 DOS event, AC-organized travel):** Albania, Bahrain, Cameroon, Israel Arab Communities, Kosovo, Kuwait, Lebanon, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria, Pakistan (Islamabad), Saudi Arabia, Sierra Leone.
- **June 2 –4 (June 3 DOS event, AFS-organized travel):** Ghana, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Malaysia, Mozambique, South Africa, Thailand, and Türkiye.
- **June 10 –12 (June 11 Capitol Hill event, AC-organized travel):** Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, N. Macedonia, Pakistan (Karachi), Senegal, Suriname, Tanzania, Tunisia, Palestine – West Bank.

5.5.b. Assigning Return Flight Dates for YES

As per ECA policy and the *Parent/Student Agreement* of the YES application (**Appendix V, point 14**), year-end activities such as prom and graduation are not taken into consideration when assigning return flight dates. In addition, per the *Parent/Student Agreement*, the student must return home at the end of the program on the date assigned by the YES consortium. The program end date on the DS-2019 will not be amended or extended. No exceptions will be made to this policy.

5.5.c. Exam Documentation for YES

Natural parents of students with academic exam obligations in their home countries must submit documentation of the exams

to YES overseas offices. Recruitment Organization staff will communicate the dates to American Councils to arrange return travel on an earlier date on a case-by-case basis, with approval from ECA.

5.5.d. YES Return Travel Timeline

ITEM	DATE
Assigned travel dates appear for POs in AIS	Winter 2025-26
DEADLINE for POs to make changes to preferred departure airport codes in AIS*	February 2, 2026
Tickets are issued and uploaded on www.sthr.eu (for all students)	March 2026
Tickets and return travel packets shared with POs	At least three weeks prior to the students' departure dates.

*POs may make changes in AIS to departure airport codes through February 2, 2026. After this date, the airport code field will be locked, and changes will be made by special request only via email to Preston Fausett (pfausett@americancouncils.org).

5.5.e. Return Travel Date Assignments for YES

Return travel date assignments will be available via the travel report in AIS for POs to share with students by March 2026. All YES students' return travel dates are assigned by American Councils and AFS, and countries are assigned as noted above in 5.5.a.

5.5.f. Itineraries and Tickets for YES

POs may contact Preston Fausett to request login information in order to view their students' detailed return travel itineraries at www.sthr.eu.

International itineraries will be visible beginning in March 2026, and finalized, complete itineraries will be posted by April 2026 at the latest. Tickets and return travel packets will be shared with POs starting in mid-April 2026. POs will receive all tickets and return travel information packets to share with their students at least three weeks prior to their students' departure dates.

5.6. *Potential Non>Returns*

If a participant mentions not returning to their home country, requests a change in immigration status, or mentions seeking asylum in the United States, contact your ECA program officer as soon as possible to request protocols.

5.7. *Emergency 24-hour PO Contact Information*

On days when students are traveling, American Councils and AFS convey any itinerary deviations or changes to POs. Current, 24-hour, “live” contact information for each PO (i.e., not voice mail or an answering service) is required in order to communicate last-minute changes in travel plans and changes, including unscheduled overnights, while students are enroute. POs must provide this information to the following staff by July 25, 2025 for inbound travel and by May 1, 2026 for return travel:

FLEX: Ariane Nguyenduy and Ashley Lane
YES: Preston Fausett

American Councils and AFS inform POs of unscheduled overnights due to airline delays or other disruptions in travel. The PO is responsible for notifying its local representatives and host families of changes in itinerary for inbound students. In time-sensitive cases, American Councils or AFS may contact host families directly prior to notifying the PO.

5.8. *Student Travel Resources*

American Councils and AFS distribute a booklet to all students during arrival orientations describing travel procedures and security and safety measures. Students are required to follow these procedures while in transit to or from their host families. Students must wear their program T-shirts and ensure that their luggage is checked to its final destination. In cases of missed flights, cancellations, or other unexpected itinerary changes, students must inform staff by calling the designated travel emergency numbers.

FLEX students:	800.841.6460
YES students recruited by American Councils, AMIDEAST, iEARN, or IRIS	855.KLYES.00 (855.559.3700)
YES students recruited by AFS	800.237.4636 x2230

American Councils or AFS airport staff remain on duty until all students have been accounted for.

5.9. *Luggage Information*

TYPE OF TRAVEL	FLEX AND YES POLICY
Departure from home country to U.S.:	First checked bag is free. Programs will not pay any additional or excess baggage fees
Departure from U.S. port of entry to HF:	Programs will not pay any additional or excess baggage fees, but will pay for first checked bag if student is travelling on a separate domestic ticket
Travel to and from Civic Education Workshop:	Programs pay roundtrip domestic first checked bag fee
Travel to DC for year-end events:	Program provides \$100 travel allowance for use in host community and covers the same value at check in from port of departure to home country.
Early Returns:	First checked bag is free. Programs will reimburse a U.S. party up to the value of the travel allowance
FLEX POLICY ONLY: Travel from U.S. to home country, not attending the year-end event: First checked bag is free. Program provides a \$100 travel allowance.	

5.10. *Visa and Travel Document Definitions and Issues*

5.10.a. DS-2019

This two-page form is issued by a designated program sponsor, in this case ECA, for use by an applicant to obtain a U.S. J-1 visa. The student presents it to the consular officer at their U.S. visa interview.

- The DS-2019 defines the period of time that the holder may be in the United States.
- American Councils overseas staff scan DS-2019s once the forms are signed by the approving consular officer and upload these into AIS.
- As long as students have a valid U.S. visa, they may enter the United States up to 30 days before or 30 days after the program start date listed on the DS-2019 form.

5.10.c. I-94 Record

The I-94 Arrival/Departure record is updated when the student presents their U.S. visa and DS-2019 to the CBP officer upon arrival to the U.S. The record can be retrieved at i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94/#/history-search.

When the Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) officer admits the student into the U.S., the officer will update the electronic I-94 record noting the date of entry and "D/S," meaning Duration of Status, which allows the holder to remain in the United States for the duration of the program dates indicated on the DS-2019.

5.10.d. Lost, Damaged, or Expired Passport

U.S.-based consulates of foreign countries typically do not issue new international passports for exchange students who lose or damage theirs, or whose passport expires, while they are in the United States. In case of a lost, stolen, expired, or irreparably damaged passport, inform American Councils at:

FLEX: ops@americancouncils.org

YES: yessupport@americancouncils.org

At the same time, contact the student's respective consular district office (which may not be in Washington, DC) and follow the guidelines on obtaining a certificate of return or other valid travel document. Many consulates require the following documentation to issue a new travel document and will only issue it 15-30 days prior to the student's travel date:

1. Completed application form requesting a new passport or travel document
2. Police report (in case of lost or stolen passport)
3. Two (2) passport-size photographs
4. Non-refundable application fee (usually a money order issued to the embassy)
5. Photocopy of lost/stolen passport (American Councils can provide)
6. Pre-paid, self-addressed FedEx/UPS envelope the consulate will use to send the certificate of return to the student)

Consult the embassy for specific documents required in advance to allow ample time to collect and mail all necessary documents to the embassy or consulate once the student's return travel date is finalized.

5.11. *Student Travel on Program*

Travel requests are reviewed on a case-by-case basis using the following guidelines. In all cases, POs must ensure the student's safety to the greatest extent possible. Absences from school due to travel should be approved by the school (in writing is recommended). Confirmation of school approval should be maintained by the PO and made available upon request.

5.11.a. Domestic Travel

Domestic travel is, in most cases, approved independently by each PO according to its own rules governing such travel, in addition to the mandatory ECA program rules, specifically:

Independent Travel: If the student is traveling outside the host community *without* a host parent(s), school official, local coordinator, or other responsible, vetted and trusted adult, the student must obtain written approval from their PO *and* their natural parent(s) or guardian(s). To request natural parent

agreement, contact ops@americancouncils.org for FLEX, and yessupport@americancouncils.org for YES. Staff will work with overseas staff to request the approval.

NOTE: If a student engages in unauthorized independent travel, the student may be considered off-program, which means that the student would be reported to Department of Homeland Security, marked in violation of J visa status in SEVIS, no longer covered by program insurance, no longer under the care of their placement organization or ECA, and responsible for any future travel.

5.11.b. International Travel

POs must ensure that all students conform to both the *program requirements* and the customs and border requirements outlined below. Remember:

- As with all international travel, the destination country is the sole authority in determining entry and exit requirements. Therefore, host families must consult with the relevant Embassy for the most current requirements. It is the host family's responsibility to ensure requirements are met. Please note that travel to U.S. Territories (e.g., Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands) is considered domestic travel. POs should ensure that students' health coverage remains in effect during international travel and procure supplementary insurance if needed.
- The Department of State strongly recommends that prior to any consideration of travel outside the United States, host parents review the Department of State's website (travel.state.gov) for current travel information, safety tips, warnings, and alerts.
- **NOTE:** Travel requests to countries designated under the Department of State Travel Advisories as "Level 4 – Do not travel" is prohibited. Travel requests to countries designated as Level 1, Level 2, or Level 3 according to State Department Travel Advisories will be considered on a case-by-case basis: travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories.html

5.11.b.1. *Program Requirements*

All requests for proposed travel outside the United States must be reviewed and approved by

American Councils with ECA concurrence. At least two weeks in advance, and prior to tickets being purchased:

- Email the complete international travel request to FLEX at ops@americancouncils.org or to YES at yessupport@americancouncils.org.
- If the travel is approved, American Councils will print a scanned copy of the student's DS-2019 form from AIS, sign the Travel Authorization section, and then email the validated DS-2019 directly to the student, copying the host family and PO. **Students must print out the validated DS-2019 and staple it to their original DS-2019, and bring BOTH DS-2019 forms with them during their international travel.**

A **complete** international travel request includes:

NAME	The student's first and last name.
RESPONSIBLE PARTY	The name, position/title/relationship, and contact information (phone if possible) of the person the student will be travelling with.
DESTINATION AND MODE OF TRAVEL	Where the student will be traveling to.
	All modes of travel (plane, car, train, ship, other).
	Routing information.
	If traveling by car outside of the United States, include the <u>exact</u> route the student will take.
	If taking a cruise, include cruise ship details and all ports of call.
ACCOMODATIONS	Accommodation details.
DATES	Exact dates of the student's travel.
SCHOOL	Whether or not the student will be absent from school, and if so, whether the school has approved the absence (<i>ideally in writing</i>).

INSURANCE	Insurance coverage for the duration of the planned travel. If the PO's student insurance policy does not cover travel outside of the United States, the host parent or other responsible party must purchase supplemental travel insurance that covers the student for the duration of the planned international travel. The PO should later send a confirmation email once any supplemental insurance has been obtained.
NP PERMISSION	Natural parent(s) permission. To request natural parent agreement, contact ops@americancouncils.org for FLEX or yessupport@americancouncils.org for YES. Staff will work with overseas offices to request the approval. Natural parents should be informed of State Department Travel Advisories for the travel destination(s).
CANADA	For students living near the Canadian border who expect to make frequent trips to Canada, the natural parent consent form must list specific dates of each anticipated trip, or state that the natural parents are aware that the participant will be traveling to Canada regularly and may do so without the parents' express consent for each trip.
DOCUMENTS	Confirmation that the host family has determined what travel documents (e.g., destination country visa) are needed, keeping in mind that requirements for the student may be different from the requirement for U.S. citizens Confirmation of the student's U.S. visa type (single or multiple-entry) and expiration date.

American Councils will forward all travel requests to ECA for concurrence with special attention if any of the following conditions apply:

- Student will travel with someone other than a host parent(s), school official, local coordinator, or other responsible, vetted, and trusted adult.
- Destination country has a Level 2 or Level 3 travel warning.
- Trip is to the student's home country.
- AC recommends disapproving the request for any reason.

5.11.b.2. Customs and Border Patrol Requirements

- **DS-2019 Validation:** Students must obtain DS-2019 travel validation endorsed by American Councils on behalf of the sponsor. Contact ops@americancouncils.org (FLEX) or yessupport@americancouncils.org (YES) for instructions.
- **Natural Parent Consent:** Some countries, including Mexico and Canada, have recently required letters from natural parents or guardians authorizing their minor child to cross the border into those countries with an adult(s) other than the natural parent or legal guardian (i.e., host parent(s)). Without these letters and/or other required documentation, students may be turned back at the border. Please note that in some cases, countries have required that permission letters be notarized originals, include specific information about the student and travel, and be accompanied by another form of identification, such as copy of natural parent passport/internal ID or original birth certificate.
- **Valid Passport:** Students must hold a valid passport. Check the destination country's passport validity requirement to confirm compliance.
- **Destination Country Visa:** Host families and students must check if the student needs a visa. Contact the appropriate country's U.S. embassy or consulate for visa application forms and fees.
- **U.S. Visa:** Students must hold a valid, multiple-entry, U.S. visa or they will not be allowed back into the United States. Automatic revalidation procedures apply only for Canada, Mexico, and adjacent islands (not including Cuba). See below.
- **Canada, Mexico, and Adjacent Islands (excluding Cuba):** These locations are considered bordering countries to the United States. This means that students, including those with a single-entry or expired U.S. visa, may travel to these countries and then re-enter the United States, as long as: 1) all other customs and border conditions are met; 2) the conditions below are met; and 3) students confirm the below conditions with the respective consulate or embassy.
 1. The trip is less than 30 days long.
 2. The student's legal visitor status was electronically validated upon arrival to the United States. Go to www.cbp.gov/194 to access their CBP arrival/departure record information online.
 3. The Mexican, Canadian, or other relevant consulate agrees to issue a visa despite the expired status of the U.S. visa. Some consulates will not do this.

4. Student is not a citizen of a country that is a state sponsor of terrorism. The list of such countries can be found at: state.gov/state-sponsors-of-terrorism
5. Student does not apply for a new U.S. visa while in Mexico, Canada, or adjacent island.
6. Student does not require a waiver of ineligibility under INA 212(d) (3). This type of waiver is requested for someone seeking admission to the United States for a short stay after having been previously deported.

More information about automatic revalidation can be found here: help.cbp.gov/s/article/Article-1446

Additional general information about travel can be found here:

- travel.state.gov
- ice.gov/sevis
- cbp.gov/travel/us-citizens/canada-mexico-travel
- <https://fam.state.gov/fam/09FAM/09FAM040309.html>

5.12. *Temporary Program Absence*

It is possible to allow a student to take a temporary leave from a student's placement for a short time, typically not to exceed two weeks, in exigent circumstances, such as in the case of the death or critical illness of a member of the student's immediate family. Temporary absences to the home country are dependent on the following:

1. ECA approval
2. Availability of funding for travel (which in some cases may be the PO-provided program insurance or the natural family).

When notifying American Councils of a student who reports the death of a parent or sibling, please:

- Indicate the student's wishes.
- Indicate whether or not your organization's program insurance covers a temporary return home under the circumstances.

Your FLEX or YES OPS point of contact will then ask the overseas office to determine whether the parent(s) would like for their child to return home for up to two weeks. Many parents do not wish to see their child's program interrupted, even when the student may initially wish to do so, but others do.

6. Pre-Program Preparation

6.1. Overview

All students attend a pre-departure orientation (PDO) in their home country prior to departure for the United States. An overview of the PDO and the corresponding workbook can be found on AIS, in the *Program Publications* section. In addition, all YES students attend an arrival orientation in Washington, DC, coordinated either by American Councils or AFS. Certain PO-specific information is provided at these orientations, as described in section 6.3 below.

Students with disabilities typically attend a MIUSA introductory workshop in Oregon (see section 1.3) before traveling to their host families. In addition, FLEX students whose English is substantially weaker than their peers' typically attend American Councils' five-week Moldova EFL (English as a Foreign Language) intensive immersive workshop led by professional instructors. The workshop includes students both with and without disabilities. Students take the ELTiS when they arrive at the workshop and again at the end of the program, and results are conveyed to POs.

6.2. Printed Materials

A variety of printed publications are provided to FLEX and YES participants and administrators. Those followed by “AIS” are available for download in AIS in the *Program Publications* section.

For Students and Natural Families: Pre-program materials for students and natural parents provide basic information and cross-cultural preparation for an academic-year program in the United States.

- Student Handbook (AIS)
The Handbook is distributed to all finalists and alternates at notification. The handbook serves as a general-purpose guide for students as they prepare to depart for the United States, as well as while they are on program. It covers topics as varied as what to pack for the year, how to read an airline ticket, how to obtain help when needed, program policies for student behavior, and much more.
- Introduction to the U.S.A. Workbook (AIS)
The Workbook is distributed to finalists at PDO orientations. The workbook serves as the core orientation textbook to prepare the students for their time in United States, host families, U.S. high school,

and U.S. culture and as a resource for them while on program in the United States.

- Natural Parent Information Guide
This Guide is distributed to finalists. It is available in several languages and helps answer many of the questions and concerns that natural parents have as they prepare for their child's departure. An English-language version is available to POs upon request.

For U.S. Host Families: The following orientation materials are designed to enhance host families' knowledge of the students' backgrounds. They are intended to complement core host family materials used by each PO.

- FLEX Country Cultural Guides (AIS)
These English-language one-pagers contain information about FLEX countries.
- YES Country Cultural Guides (AIS)
These English language publications contain information about YES countries.

For POs: The Department of State has several program-specific publications available for distribution. Please direct requests for electronic or hard copies of these materials to Phil Raino (praino@americancouncils.org).

- Local Coordinator Handbook (AIS)
The Local Coordinator Handbook contains an overview of the programs, specific information about cultural adjustment issues, travel, recruitment and selection, re-entry, and alumni programs.
- School Administrator Handbook (AIS)
The School Administrator Handbook helps schools understand the unique features of ECA-sponsored programs' participants.
- Host Family Handbook (AIS)
This Host Family Handbook assists host families in understanding ECA-sponsored program goals, policies, and procedures, as well as general cultural issues commonly faced by students.
- FLEX "Promoting Peace" Informational Brochure (AIS)
This general information brochure about FLEX is designed for use with any audience.
- YES "Building Bridges" Brochure
This general information brochure about YES is designed for use with any audience.

6.3. *PO Materials and Mailings*

POs must provide electronic copies of their insurance and other general program materials ("PO Information Packets") to American Councils for distribution to FLEX and YES students prior to departure from their home countries. Materials must be emailed to American Councils by May 9, 2025.

7. *Health and Immunizations*

7.1. *Overview*

To ensure students are in acceptable health to participate in ECA-sponsored programs and to enroll in American high schools, American Councils oversees a medical review process of each student's health records during the selection process. This review is completed by U.S. medical doctors contracted by American Councils. For FLEX students, health follow-up requests are made as needed by American Councils to students; for YES students, follow-up requests are made by American Councils to students via YES consortium members and YES overseas offices.

7.2. *Implications for POs*

7.2.a. Finalist Elimination

A U.S. medical consultant may recommend to American Councils cancellation of a student due to significant medical concerns. Concerns may include, but are not limited to, conditions that would require significant follow-up or ongoing care in the United States and/or would not be covered by medical insurance, or that might endanger the student's life or well-being if he or she traveled to the United States. If ECA approves the cancellation, the student's PO will be notified, and a replacement finalist will be assigned according to the criteria outlined in section 2.3 above.

7.2.b. Immunization Records

Students are required to provide evidence of immunization on the health certificate submitted as part of their scholarship application. Those with an incomplete series of the following immunizations are asked during the health review process to obtain the necessary immunizations prior to departing for the United States. These include:

1. Poliomyelitis
2. Diphtheria, pertussis, and tetanus (DPT)
3. Measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR)

These students are instructed to obtain the required documentation of immunization and deliver a copy to their local program office, where staff will upload the results into AIS for PO access.

Some vaccines commonly available in the United States (e.g., pertussis, rubella, and hepatitis B) are not readily available or are cost prohibitive in some students' home countries or might not be universally required by U.S. school districts. Therefore, incomplete immunization records prior to departure WILL NOT be considered grounds for cancellation from the program. See below for immunization follow-up procedures.

In order to check the status of students' required immunizations, POs may run the "Health List" report from AIS. The resulting chart can be downloaded into Excel and represents the results of the American Councils' medical reviewers' requirements.

7.2.c. Tuberculosis Testing

All students are required to provide evidence that they do not have active TB by submitting a recent skin test, blood test, and/or chest x-ray prior to departing for the United States. Those with incomplete records will be asked during the health review process to obtain the necessary tests (whether skin test, blood test, chest x-ray, or other, depending on availability in-country) and provide documentation of the tests prior to departing for the United States. Students must deliver a copy to their local program office where staff will upload the results, along with an English translation, into AIS for American Councils' medical team to review. Results will be made available to POs via AIS. If a chest x-ray was required, the radiologist's report will be uploaded in AIS and accessible to the PO. Incomplete testing or evidence of abnormal TB test results prior to departure may be grounds for a health cancellation from the program.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) accepted norms state that a skin test size of 10mm or less is considered healthy. Students will be requested to obtain a chest

X-ray only if their skin test result is 10mm or above.

Latent TB is not uncommon in many FLEX and YES countries. According to the CDC, latent TB is not communicable and presents a threat only to the host. Ideally treatment for latent TB is begun before departure for the United States, but the programs cannot mandate this due to limited availability and the high cost of this course of treatment. Since individuals with latent TB do not pose a risk to others, they may be cleared for program participation.

7.2.d. Vaccination Availability and Schedules

Certain vaccinations are not widely available or affordable in some FLEX or YES countries. Further, some countries will not administer vaccinations to people over a certain age. Therefore, some students will require these vaccinations upon arrival in the host community in the United States. The following are some known vaccination scarcity issues. American Councils staff will share updates as they become aware of them.

4. Rubella (this component only)
5. Pertussis (this component only; this means the Tdap booster is not available, and most students will have tD)
6. Hepatitis B: While numerous U.S. school districts now require hepatitis B vaccination for enrollment in school, this vaccine is often scarce or cost-prohibitive in students' home countries.

7.2.e. Immunizations in Host Community

7.2.e.1. *Arranging for Immunizations*

If a student is required to obtain additional immunizations upon arrival in his or her host community, the PO or host family should arrange for the student to be immunized. If authorization from natural parents is required, contact your FLEX or YES on-program support person for assistance.

7.2.e.2. *Reimbursement for Immunizations*

POs should reimburse host families for students' immunizations, if required by the school system, using emergency funds. If the cost is over \$300, POs should consult their ECA program officer about the use of emergency funds.

8. On-Program Support (OPS)

8.1. Overview

As on-program support (OPS) issues or problems with a student arise, communications between POs and natural parents are routed through American Councils. In elevated cases (as described in this section), the ECA Participant Monitoring Unit, as outlined in section 1.1, is included as well.

OPS concerns can originate from any party, and all parties' concerns must be duly considered. Students learn at their pre-departure orientations (PDOs) about the "chain of communication" they should use to solve problems on-program, but in cases where they are reluctant to address concerns with designated U.S.-based support staff, students sometimes express concerns directly to natural parents or to others outside of the standard chain of communication. Overseas staff work closely with natural parents and encourage them to share any concerns that they hear from their child. When natural parents share concerns with overseas staff, American Councils shares these with the PO.

Standard chain of communication:



Students also learn about who to contact in serious or urgent situations if the chain of communication is not working. This includes their PO's emergency line, the American Councils 24/7 emergency line, Department of State's J-1 hotline, various email addresses, and, starting in program year 2024-2025, a WhatsApp 'warm line' (one for FLEX, one for YES) staffed by American Councils. Students can use the WhatsApp lines to raise non-urgent but elevated concerns about their program experience if they feel these are not being addressed through standard existing communication channels. Any concerns raised through WhatsApp will then be addressed following the standard OPS practices described in this section.

Alternative “links” in the chain of communication:

Phone: 1-800-621-9559	American Councils FLEX and YES administrative office in Washington, DC staff this line 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
Emails: ops@americancouncils.org yessupport@americancouncils.org	Managed by American Councils on-program support staff.
Phone: 866-283-9090 Email: jvisas@state.gov	The U.S. Department of State's secondary school exchange student helpline.
WhatsApp: FLEX (+1-202-845-3018) YES (+1-202-845-3144)	Managed by American Councils on-program support staff. WhatsApp is intended for non-urgent situations. These lines are monitored Monday-Friday from 9:00 AM-5:00 PM Washington, DC (Eastern) time, from August through June. Messages will be responded to within an hour of receipt, during the times above. For true emergencies, for messages sent outside of these hours, an automated message will direct the caller to call 1-800-621-9559 for immediate assistance.

ECA and American Councils share information about on-program support. ECA may, at its discretion, contact students directly or ask American Councils to do so. In particularly sensitive cases, ECA will update the U.S. embassy in the relevant country. Such cases may include, but are not limited to, those in which a student has broken a U.S. law, has been arrested or charged with an offense, faces a life-threatening medical condition, or threatens to complain about the program to the press or embassy. In these and other high-level cases, ECA staff may contact POs directly by email or by phone to discuss the issues, for expediency, keeping American Councils informed.

In addition, the ECA Participant Monitoring Unit may meet with participants in person on site visits or during participant workshops. Site visits consist of scheduled trips to host communities during the Participant Monitor's main responsibility is to speak with students about their program experiences and evaluate the suitability of the students' environment (ex. host school, host home, host community). ECA site visits are planned either in coordination with the PO or independently by ECA. ECA Participant Monitors primarily interview students at their host schools and often meet with school administrators to share certificates of appreciation. The ECA Participant Monitors make all efforts to ensure limited overlapping site visits with PO site visits but, in some cases, may need to meet with the same students or travel to the same host communities.

8.1.a. Roles

8.1.a.1. **ECA**

ECA's Participant Monitoring Unit will collaboratively manage elevated OPS issues with POs via the following support accounts:

FLEX: OPS-FLEX@state.gov

YES: YES-OPS@state.gov

Please refer to "OPS Reporting Guidelines" (**Appendix XII**) for a complete description of which types of OPS issues should be shared with ECA.

The standard report format for ECA in situations that include *but are not limited to* any alleged or actual J-1 visa infringements, medical emergencies (including mental health issues), and illegal or otherwise dangerous behavior is the **Incident Report form (IR)**, included in **Appendix XI**. POs must provide the IR in such cases to the ECA Participant Monitoring Unit, copying American Councils.

The IR is the principal means for POs to convey up-to-date information about an OPS case to staff at ECA. While an immediate initial email alerting ECA of a serious case is acceptable, **an IR must be submitted within the appropriate timeframe for addressing and responding to OPS issues (See Section 8.2)**. POs must update the IR with new developments and information as well as actions taken throughout the active case and resubmit to ECA each time. The form should also be revised and resubmitted if information in it is found to be inaccurate.

ECA Program Officers oversee program management and

cooperative agreement monitoring, and all related questions and issues should be addressed to your respective Program Officer. Use the **OPS email boxes for OPS issues only**.

ECA Program Officers also review emergency funds requests over \$300. Each PO has \$100 per student in the emergency expense line item of their program budget. These funds are for small emergency expenses (e.g., eyeglasses, minor dental problems). For emergency expenditures over \$300, POs must get approval from their ECA Program Officer/Grants Officer Representative (PO/GOR), who will review and pass it on to the PO's Grant Officer (GO) for approval. The GO has the final say on whether the expense is approved for emergency fund use or not. POs should email requests and supporting documentation to their ECA PO/GOR.

8.1.a.2. American Councils

POs must report any OPS issues to American Councils support staff at ops@americancouncils.org for FLEX or to yessupport@americancouncils.org for YES. American Councils will maintain a complete set of records of student support issues and will work with overseas colleagues and recruiting partners to convey the issue to natural parents.

American Councils DC staff and overseas program staff and partners are available to provide cultural and logistical support to POs and natural parents of ECA-sponsored students. To fulfill this role, American Councils has on-program support teams in DC who are in regular contact with each PO's national office. Experienced and trained American Councils' and YES Consortium Partners' overseas representatives remain in contact with natural parents throughout the year to resolve placement or support issues that students face while on program.

Overseas staff are trained to avoid communicating directly with the PO staff, students, and host families. Likewise, PO local representatives and HFs are advised to avoid solving student problems through direct communication with natural families. The complexities of language differences, poor phone connections, cultural differences, and a lack of understanding overseas about the various players in ECA-sponsored programs necessitate a single, structured communication channel such as American Councils provides.

American Councils is available upon PO or ECA request to conduct or facilitate student support calls in a number of native languages. POs should provide the following information when requesting a call:

1. 2-3 days' advance notice (await confirmation from American Councils before informing student);
2. Three date/time pairings when the student is available;
3. The best telephone number to reach the student; and
4. A list of the issues to cover and overall goal(s) of the call.

Please note that the purpose of these calls is to discuss program issues only; they are not for psychological counseling or assessment.

If a student expresses thoughts or intentions of hurting himself or others or displays behavior suggesting a risk to their own or others' safety (including self-harm), the student MUST be taken to a medical professional for assessment immediately. See the *emergency on-program support issues* section below.

8.2. *Types of On-Program Support Issues and Response Times*

American Councils has established priorities for addressing on-program support issues according to their urgency. Response time will vary depending on the nature of the issue, natural and host family's availability, and means of communication available in-country. Below are expected response times to typical and emergency issues that can arise.

While many other on-program support issues are resolved between the student, host family, and PO, American Councils requests that POs provide documentation to American Councils of any significant OPS issues that arise, **even** in cases where American Councils assistance is not requested. Even relatively minor OPS issues can escalate, and it is helpful for overseas staff who work with natural parents to be aware of an issue from the start to ensure no one is taken by surprise should the issue escalate.

In every OPS case, it is important to be as prompt and attentive as possible. Upon receipt of an OPS email, please immediately acknowledge receipt even if requested information is not immediately available.

High Priority (same day or maximum 1-day response) Life-threatening emergency, allegations of abuse, or other significant event, including:	Intermediate Priority (maximum 2-3 day response) Non-life-threatening issue requiring prompt attention, including:	Standard Priority (maximum 5-day response) Basic paperwork and permissions, including:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any issue concerning possible violation of a J-1 visa regulation, including but not limited to allegation of sexual abuse or harassment Student suicidal ideation or attempt Early return for violation of a U.S. law Police involvement, arrest, court summons, or any other involvement with the legal system Change of host family and/or LC, if emergency move Host family requests the student's immediate removal from the home Any bodily harm to student that requires medical attention (car accident, broken bones, knee damage, root canals, other) Suspension or expulsion from U.S. high school Natural disaster that directly affects student and host family Death in natural family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Change in host family composition Temporary change in who is responsible for the student (e.g. if host family goes out of town) Change of local coordinator (standard move) Any significant or elevated OPS issue, often accompanied by a warning or probation letter, that could result in an early return (to ensure natural parents are not taken by surprise) Issues concerning religion/church attendance. (Students cannot be forced to attend church, although the program supports optional church attendance as a gateway to cultural learning. This is explained to students at their pre-departure orientation. Host families and students must respect each other's beliefs, and attempts to influence or convert are strictly prohibited.) Non-life-threatening mental health issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General adjustment or behavioral issues Single person and double placement forms (except when placement is time-sensitive and requires faster turnaround) Natural parent permissions for travel or non-emergency medical procedures Follow-up on documents or school-related permissions Explanation of program components, policies, and cultural differences Sharing warning and probation letters with natural parents Additional health or placement-related follow-up information on finalists Non-traditional school placements (see 3.1.a.)

For a list of program rules, see the Parent/Student Agreement in **Appendix V**.

8.3. *Emergency On-Program Support Issues*

If a critical issue, medical emergency, or other urgent matter as outlined below arises, call Brian Peterson for FLEX or Jenny Webb for YES directly, whether it is during the working day or after-hours:

- **Business hours:** 202-833-7522. This is the American Councils main line.
- **After hours:** 1-800-621-9559. This is the American Councils 24-hour emergency phone; the duty officer will have the appropriate program contact you within 15 minutes.

Follow up with an email to ops@americancouncils.org or yessupport@americancouncils.org indicating the nature of the emergency in the subject line. American Councils will notify ECA immediately and an **Incident Report** form must be submitted to ECA within 24 hours.

8.3.a. Sexual Harassment, Abuse, and Neglect

Per Section (n)(1), POs must immediately report to ECA and American Councils any incident or allegation involving the actual or alleged sexual exploitation, abuse, or neglect of a student. ECA, as sponsor, will report those cases to the ECA's Office of Private Sector Exchange. POs must also report to the appropriate authorities as required by local or state statute or regulation.

When an accusation or concern arises in which a host parent is the alleged perpetrator, the student must **immediately** (the same day) be removed from the home. American Councils and ECA must be notified immediately. To protect the student, the PO should not inform the host family of the reason for the move until the student has been removed from the situation and must be careful about what and how reasons are communicated. After assuring the student's removal and safety, in accordance with Section (n)(1), the PO must file an **Incident Report** via the ECA support emails and, as required, report the incident to local authorities.

A student who is the alleged perpetrator in a case of sexual harassment or engaged in inappropriate behavior of a sexual nature will be considered for program dismissal. The PO must report any such case to American Councils and ECA immediately.

POs offering support to a student who has suffered sexual harassment or abuse may wish to refer to information and resources available from RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) at www.rainn.org.

8.3.b. Medical Emergencies

This includes any life-threatening medical concerns and/or emergency hospital admissions. POs should notify American Councils and ECA within several hours of the event to ensure that the natural parents, overseas partner, and embassy can be made aware of the issue. POs are asked to do so even if the student and the host family contact the natural parents directly, as the appropriate parties must be notified. It is important for American Councils and overseas staff to have information regarding the student's condition so they can have informed discussions with the natural parents.

In the event of a student's death, notify American Councils and ECA immediately by phone. Generally, in these cases the first responders and hospital will guide you through the steps of selecting a funeral home that will prepare the body and liaise with all necessary authorities (including your insurance provider, the medical examiner, the embassy of the student's home country, and so forth) to obtain all necessary repatriation documentation. It is likely that a natural family member will be brought to the United States to attend to matters in the student's host community, such as meeting with the host family, PO, and friends, as well as collecting the student's belongings. The overseas partner organization will work with the family and the U.S. embassy to get visas.

The paperwork for repatriation of remains usually takes 2-4 weeks to complete. Non-cremated remains are conveyed by air carriers as cargo, which makes it unrealistic to schedule natural parent travel concurrently with the student's remains, as cargo schedules can be changed and delayed unexpectedly.

8.3.c. Mental Health Crises

While mental issues including depression and anxiety have unfortunately become more common among teens, some mental health problems are crises that require urgent attention. If a student expresses thoughts or intentions of self-harm or harm to others, or exhibits signs of possible eating disorders, the student should be seen by a medical professional urgently. If the student displays behavior suggesting a more imminent risk to their own or others' safety, the student **MUST** be taken to an appropriate facility such as an emergency room to be seen by a medical professional for

assessment immediately. **Refer to the FLEX and YES mental health guidelines in Appendix XIV.**

We recommend POs review the 2021 U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on Protecting Youth Mental Health, which has useful information and resources:

hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/priorities/youth-mental-health.

While ECA's Youth Programs Division cannot officially endorse the following resources, we encourage POs to:

- Learn more about training opportunities in Mental Health First Aid: mentalhealthfirstaid.org.
- Share with their staff the National Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: 988
- Refer to these additional mental health resources:
 - i. **The Science of Well-being for Teens** – a course taught by Dr. Laurie Santos, a Cognitive Psychologist at Yale University, at drlauriesantos.com/science-well-being-teens.
 - ii. Vibrant Emotional Health's **Safe Space** site at safespace.vibrant.org offers simple, guided tools to help patients with coping, relaxation, distraction and positive thinking.

American Councils contracted with P3 Mental Health Advisors to develop an emotional well-being session for Pre-Departure Orientations and YES Arrival Orientations. As part of this, P3 Mental Health Advisors created the **What is a Helper?** video (QR code link on page 16 of this document), which may be another helpful resource for LCs and others supporting students.

8.3.d. Legal Issues

If a student is arrested, accused of a crime by the police or a school resource officer, or otherwise taken into the U.S. legal system, POs must contact Brian Peterson (FLEX) or Jenny Webb (YES) at American Councils immediately, by phone and email.

Every student deserves the presumption of innocence and should have the opportunity to explain the situation from their point of view. We cannot assume that a student is guilty, and we should reserve judgment until the facts have been examined. POs must support their students in any interactions with law enforcement as follows:

- Request that legal officials provide an interpreter for the student. Even students with good English are not prepared for this kind of

interaction and vocabulary.

- The PO's local representative should immediately introduce themselves to the investigating officer (or other appropriate representative of the legal system) as the main point of contact for updates about the investigation. FLEX and YES students are often minors and need assistance in interacting with the police in a way that protects their rights.
- The student will need support from an adult in the community who can provide general guidance or insight into the student's particular situation and the legal ramifications. POs should help the student identify a legal or other representative that can perform this function. POs may contact American Councils for assistance with identifying someone to help with this. **Note:** ECA funds cannot be used for legal support services.
- If the student is held in detention, the local representative must regularly visit the student and advocate for their needs.
- POs must update American Councils and ECA regularly on the situation.

Please keep in mind the following:

- A student who is the subject of an investigation, is detained, or is accused of a crime is still considered to be on program and thus remains the PO's responsibility, regardless of the nature of the investigation or accusation.
- PO staff should not ask the student for a statement; this is part of the police investigation and thus must be left to that agency.
- The Department of State cannot provide students with legal representation.

8.4. *On-Program Support Documentation*

8.4.a. Email

POs must outline the nature of the OPS issue in a timely and detailed manner when contacting American Councils. Include the student's last and first name, program year, home country, PO, host city and state, and the subject, in the "subject" line of the email.

Example: SMITH, John (2025/France/American Councils/ Washington, DC): HF asked to remove student

POs should specifically define the action that they would like American Councils to take (e.g., notify the natural parents, obtain

information, advise about cultural differences, speak to the student), as well as express the PO's goal for the interaction.

Anytime a PO is communicating about a student with a disability, the PO should write to Laura Segovia (lsegovia@americancouncils.org) and copy OPS staff at ECA and American Councils accordingly. Due to the volume of OPS communication, POs should **be as concise and thorough as possible when composing messages**. Include dates and specific examples of problematic behavior or events since natural parents frequently request such information. The more direct, clear, and objective the information provided by the PO, the faster the information will be conveyed. POs should not forward a lengthy string of emails to ECA or American Councils.

Here are some tips for using “plain language” when sharing OPS information that provides clear information which in turn expedites the communication process. These were adapted from the *Federal Plain Language Guidelines* which were developed in 2011 by a group of federal employees who were committed to the idea that “citizens deserve clear communications from government.”

The goal of using plain language is to help the reader **easily** find and understand the information they need to know. When composing an email about a student OPS case, ask yourself: what does my audience already know? What do they need to know? What questions will they have?

Organize your information as follows:

- General and most important information first – start by stating your purpose and the bottom line
- Write short sections with bolded informative headings
 - Bolding = roadmap for the reader
 - Shorter sections are easier to comprehend
- Include background information (when necessary), expectations, and other details towards the conclusion

Other helpful practices include:

- Avoid filler and unnecessary content
- Avoid jargon
- Write short sentences and short paragraphs
- One topic per paragraph

- Start paragraphs with a topic sentence.
- Quantity DOES NOT equal quality, as in the example below:

Filler version: There is no escaping the fact that it is considered very important to note that a number of various available applicable studies ipso facto have generally identified the fact that additional appropriate nocturnal employment could usually keep juvenile adolescents off thoroughfares during the night hours, including but not limited to the time prior to midnight on weeknights and/or 2 a.m. on weekends.

Plain language version: More night jobs would keep youths off the streets.

8.4.b. Warning and Other PO-Generated Letters

PO-generated documents completed or signed by students (such as a warning or probation letter) must contain the following:

- The student's official first and last name (as shown on their passport),
- The program name (FLEX or YES),
- The student's PO, home country, and host city and state.
- If documents refer to the PO potentially requesting the student's early return, it must also clearly state that such decisions are made by the U.S. Department of State.

Other suggested practices for PO-generated letters:

- Use clear and direct language.
- Use language and tone that is respectful and supportive while also holding the student accountable as needed.
- Avoid inferring that the PO will send the student home if the student does not improve their behavior, as such a decision rests with ECA.
- Keep in mind that letters are often shared with natural parents and consider avoiding language that may come across as excessively harsh or punitive, or including personal sensitive information about the student (e.g. sexual orientation).

ECA considers it best practice for students to have the opportunity to include a written statement responding to PO-generated letters if disciplinary in nature. ECA's Participant Monitoring Team may also request the PO provide the student's perspective and/or

reaction following disciplinary conversations with the PO.

POs should make all attempts to resolve issues that are egregious and should adopt a three-strike warning type system, to give students the opportunity to improve, where appropriate. For those cases involving more urgent and escalated concerns that must be addressed immediately, a three-strike warning type system may be bypassed.

8.5. *Placement Organization Support Staff*

In accordance with Section (d) of the J-1 visa regulations, POs must ensure that all of their staff, agents, volunteers, and others affiliated with the program are adequately trained in the criteria used to screen host families; conflict resolution; child safety standards and sexual conduct codes; and procedures for handling and reporting emergencies, including allegations of abuse, neglect, or sexual misconduct; and have completed the Office of Private Sector Exchange's (EC) mandated Local Coordinator Training Module prior to assumption of duties.

POs must ensure these staff or agents are adequately supervised and have been vetted through a national criminal background check including a search of the national sex offender registry.

Federal regulations govern the placement of international exchange students. No student shall be placed more than 120 miles away from their assigned local representative, and each assigned local representative must maintain, at a minimum, monthly contact with the student (first contact must be in person) *and* with the host family (to include at least two in-person visits per exchange year). Within the first or second month of the student's arrival in the host family home, a PO representative, other than the representative who screened and selected the host family, must visit the home.

POs may not provide host families with monetary payment or other incentives. POs must ensure that the school has contact information for both the local representative and the main PO office and must adhere to all provisions of the J-1 visa regulations. POs must provide students with reasonable access to their natural families via phone and email and must ensure that students' official papers such as passport and DS-2019 are not removed from the student's possession.

Also, in accordance with Section (d), POs must ensure their staff, agents, volunteers, and others affiliated with the program refrain from acting as:

1. Both a host family and a coordinator or supervisor for the same student;
2. A host family for one PO and a local coordinator for another PO;
3. A local coordinator for any student over whom the person has a position of authority or trust (e.g., school teacher or principal).

8.5.a. Additional Support Contacts

POs must provide the student with direct contact information for a PO support staff member at its national headquarters, in addition to the student's local representative or coordinator, in any of the following cases:

1. The student's host parent also acts as one of the PO's local representatives or coordinators.
2. The HF is related to the local coordinator by blood or marriage.
3. The LC's spouse is also the LC's supervisor.

Students often find it difficult to confide in a local representative whom they perceive to be first and foremost a colleague of their host parent. Providing a support staff person from the PO's national headquarters, who is clearly removed from the situation, ensures the student has access to appropriate support outlets.

If a member of PO national headquarters staff or senior PO regional staff are hosting a current participant with an on-program support concern, that staff member should not be included in OPS communications for the duration they are hosting that student, due to conflict of interest.

8.6. *Early Return Requests and Procedures*

8.6.a. Types of Early Returns (ERs)

Some students return home prior to completion of their program on either a voluntary or an involuntary basis. Early returns fall into two categories:

8.6.a.1. *Voluntary*

Some students may choose to return home voluntarily due to homesickness, natural family's request, or academic concerns, among other reasons.

1. Student Initiated

If a student decides to terminate their program **voluntarily**, they must present the PO with a written statement outlining the reasons for the early return. This is then shared with natural parents to determine whether they concur. Upon natural parent concurrence, the PO must submit the early return request and an IR to ECA for approval, copying American Councils.

2. *Natural Parent Initiated*

If the natural parents request their child's early return, they will be asked to present their written request to the overseas program office. American Councils will forward their request to ECA and the PO. The PO should convey this information to the student, provide a brief written statement from the student, the IR, and any other comments the student may have and request the early return from Department of State **promptly**. If a student disagrees with their natural parents but cannot change their decision, the early return must proceed.

8.6.a.2. ***Involuntary***

Involuntary early returns are initiated by the PO based on well-documented and unresolvable on-program support issues. For involuntary early return cases, a statement from the student is required to process the ER request. In cases where there is no student statement provided or insufficient information on the student's perspective, ECA may follow up directly to get the student's perspective. For involuntary ER requests involving mental health, medical concerns, legal proceedings, or circumstances where the student is under considerable stress or incapacitated, this requirement may be waived out of concern for causing undue stress to the student. In all early return cases, the PO must request concurrence for an early return from ECA. The PO is not authorized to make a decision regarding an early return request, nor is American Councils or any YES consortium member. As the program sponsor, only ECA can make that

determination. American Councils provides natural parent input for ECA's consideration. ECA can approve the early return request only when the natural parents have confirmed they are able to receive the student upon their return.

In all early return cases, students **may not** choose an end date for their program. Weekend travel is avoided for ERs except in case of emergency.

8.6.b. Requesting an Early Return

All on-program support channels should be exhausted before requesting concurrence for an early return from ECA's Participant Monitoring Unit via ops-flex@state.gov for FLEX and yes-ops@state.gov for YES. It is vital that an official in-country program representative keep natural parents informed of developing problems as they are happening and before parents are notified of final early return decisions in order to minimize the possibility of damage to the program. In sending an ER request to ECA, POs do not need to select the category of ER; ECA will designate the category.

Please note that returning home early generally does not affect a student's alumni status. Early returned students are welcome to approach their field office to find out what alumni activities they can contribute to. ECA will determine the alumni status of each student.

8.6.c. Early Return Documentation

Early return requests should adhere to ECA's "Early Return Procedures" guidelines (**see Appendix XVI**) and must be accompanied by an Incident Report that includes a description of the nature of the problem(s), the student's perspective, a brief chronology of events, dates and descriptions of interventions taken by the PO to resolve the issues (including but not limited to warnings, probation letters, student counseling), outcomes of these interventions, related correspondence with natural family, and perspectives of the respective partner organizations, where relevant. Student issues that might warrant an early return include sustained or extremely inappropriate behavior, illegal behavior, severe adjustment difficulties, family concerns, medical issues that

warrant home treatment, and academic concerns.

In the event a student is accused of committing a crime or facing criminal charges, supporting documentation, such as an expulsion letter from the American high school and a transcript or a copy of the police report must be included with the request. The ER may be approved pending the student's conclusion of any obligation to the U.S. legal system, only after which the student may leave the country.

Following are guidelines for submitting an early return request and arranging early return travel:

Step 1: POs must send a written request for the student's ER using the Incident Report Form to ECA via the appropriate program OPS email address and copy the corresponding FLEX or YES support team at American Councils. The request should include an up-to-date synopsis of the situation and timeline and dates of interventions and efforts made to prevent an ER. In the case of a voluntary ER, attach a written request from the student and confirmation from the natural family. In the case of a request for an involuntary ER, a statement from the student may or **may not** be requested by ECA

Step 2: Upon receipt of the PO's ER request, ECA reviews the request with the PO and American Councils staff in Washington, DC, prior to making a determination and issuing a written concurrence or non-concurrence. ECA will email its decision to the PO and American Councils. ER requests are considered on a case-by-case basis. The decision regarding approval is usually made within several days of receiving the request, depending on the nature of the situation and availability of evidence documenting the problem.

NOTE: When approving an ER, it is at ECA's discretion whether to approve the use of an escort for the student. If the PO feels that an escort is medically or otherwise advisable, an explanation and documentation (such as a note from a doctor) should also be included in the request. Arranging for an escort is complicated and costly and thus reserved for extreme situations.

Step 3: Upon receipt of final concurrence from ECA, American Councils will ask the PO to confirm the student's airport code in order to begin making travel arrangements for the student. **Please note that early return tickets cannot be booked without written**

early return concurrence from ECA. American Councils coordinates the return date with field staff to ensure sufficient time to notify the natural parents and make domestic travel arrangements in the home country. All efforts are made to avoid weekend departure or arrival of students in their home countries. Exceptions may be made in emergency cases, such as death or life-threatening illness in a natural family and criminal acts, when a student's immediate departure is deemed crucial. Students typically depart within a week from the date the ER request was approved, but this also depends on flight availability. Due to security concerns in some countries, return travel may sometimes take longer to arrange.

1. Standard ER travel procedure for students recruited by American Councils, AMIDEAST, iEARN, and IRIS: Under normal ER circumstances, the student travel emergency phones are turned on the day before scheduled travel and remain on until the student has arrived in their home country. Early return students who travel home via Frankfurt are met and assisted in that airport by staff of American Councils' travel agent, Travel House. Those who transit through other European hubs are provided with airline Meet and Assist Service (MAAS) arranged by Travel House. Students are not assisted at Dulles or other U.S. international departure points. POs are asked to remind ER students to wear their program T-shirt to facilitate the MAAS, and to remind them of the correct toll-free numbers to call for travel assistance if they experience travel problems:

FLEX: 800-841-6460

YES: 855-559-3700 (non-AFS)

2. Standard ER travel procedure for YES students recruited by AFS: During office hours, inquiries from students who are traveling can be directed to the AFS travel number, 800-237-4636, ext. 2230. Outside of business hours, the number is 800-237-4636, dial 9 at the prompt. The need for travel assistance at the U.S. gateway or in transit is determined on a case-by-case basis depending on the timing and complexity of the routing and the nature of the support situation that led to the early return.

8.7. *Religious Advisors*

8.7.a. Purpose of Muslim Religious Advisors

The YES and FLEX programs work with multiple Muslim consultants to provide religious or spiritual advising for students on program. Participants of all faiths are welcome to use these services.

8.7.b. Scheduling a Counseling Call with a Religious Advisor

To request religious or spiritual counseling services for a student, POs should make a request to American Councils via email to yessupport@americancouncils.org (YES) or ops@americancouncils.org (FLEX).

PO should include:

1. An explanation of the reason for the call;
2. At least three possible dates/times for the call; and
3. The best phone number to reach the student.

For calls requiring emergency counseling by a religious advisor, please call American Councils at 202-833-7522 during business hours or at 800-621-9559 after hours.

POs should indicate if the student has a preference for a specific religious advisor; otherwise, a religious advisor will be assigned by American Councils. American Councils will then arrange the call directly with the religious advisor and will coordinate timing with the PO.

NOTE: If a Placement Organization would like to request that a religious advisor attend an annual meeting or conference, American Councils can assist in initiating communication. Program funds will not cover the cost of attendance.

9. Recruitment and Selection

9.1. Overview

American Councils and, in the case of YES, consortium members select program finalists. Finalists are secondary school students who have not completed more than 11 years of primary or secondary education in their home countries, or are generally at least 15 and no older than 18 years, 6 months at the start of their program*; whose applications reflect the characteristics necessary to succeed and thrive on program; and who have not previously attended school in the United States on a J-1 or F-1 visa or participated in an academic or semester exchange program to the United States. Some students may have completed 12 years of education in their home countries as long as they are no older than 18 ½ at the start of their program.

*NOTE: Precise age criteria are set in each country and vary in minimum and maximum ages, but do not extend beyond the 15 years to 18 years, 6 months range.

Recruitment is open to all secondary school students who meet established eligibility requirements. American Councils administers recruitment for FLEX. YES consortium members administer recruitment for YES. Because of the large number of applicants (over 7,000 semi-finalists across programs), the selection process takes place in several phases over the course of many months.

For FLEX, selection begins overseas and ends in the United States, where an American selection panel is convened to designate finalist and alternate candidates, according to guidelines established by American Councils.

For YES, recruitment procedures vary from country to country.

9.2. Selection Criteria

9.2.a. English Language Proficiency

This is measured by using the English Language Test for International Students (ELTiS) standardized English language test; version 1.0 is administered in-person, and version 2.0 is administered online. The test is designed to measure the listening and reading comprehension skills of high school age English language learners. For more information, see eltitest.com/home/about.php.

9.2.b. Personal Interview

Semifinalist candidates are interviewed to evaluate their suitability for the program. Prior to being interviewed, most applicants also participate in a small-group activity observed by recruiting staff to assess their ability to interact with peers.

9.2.c. Student Motivation, Maturity, and Readiness for Exchange

These are the primary factors evaluated in the selection of ECA-sponsored students. These factors are measured through evaluation of proctored essays and essays included in the take-home application and also are explored in the interview. Students must demonstrate strong motivation, appropriate purpose, sufficient flexibility, and a balanced sense of self to be selected.

9.2.d. Letter of Recommendation

An academic reference is required.

9.2.e. Academic Performance

Students are required to submit a full academic transcript for the current and two previous school years. Generally, students with less than a “B” average are eliminated from consideration.

9.2.f. Health

Medical professionals evaluate each finalist's and alternate's health status to ascertain fitness to participate in the program and enroll in a U.S. high school (see section 7).

9.3. *Selection and Follow-up*

9.3.a. The Department of State establishes a target number of placements for each program country. A corresponding number of finalists is selected, along with an appropriate number of alternate candidates, to ensure that all scholarship positions can be filled.

9.3.b. Finalists and alternates and their natural parents are provided with detailed program information (see section 6.2 of this document) along with notification letters and information about the U.S. hosting context to assist their making an informed decision about program participation.

9.3.c. Once students are notified, participation in the program depends

upon their ability to:

1. successfully obtain an international passport and exit visa, where required;
2. successfully obtain a J-1 visa; and
3. meet any health follow-up requirements.

9.3.d. Before accepting the program placement, students are asked to:

1. obtain academic leave from their home school for the following year; and
2. determine whether a year in the United States would complicate future academic plans or, for older boys (as applicable), make them subject to military draft upon return.

9.3.e. Upon being notified, finalists are informed that they are required to attend a pre-departure orientation (PDO) conducted in their home country. Per Section (g), the PDO provides students with a summary of program rules, policies, and travel arrangements; a copy of ECA's welcome letter; information on how to identify and report sexual abuse; and profiles of their host family, community, and school if finalized by the PO at the time of student notification. Prior to departing for the United States, students receive an ID card that lists the student's name, host family name, and contact information that provide immediate contact with both the PO and ECA. An updated copy is also provided to the students upon entry to the United States.

9.3.f. Per Section (h), at PDO, students are advised that they may only participate in school-sanctioned extracurricular and athletic activities as long as this is authorized by the local school district and, if applicable, the State authority responsible for determining athletic eligibility and with the understanding that program sponsors will not knowingly be party to any placement based on athletic abilities. Per Section (i), students are also informed that they, as J-1 visa holders, are not allowed to be employed on a full or part-time basis but may accept such work as babysitting or yard work.

9.4. *Selection of Students with Disabilities*

Finalists with disabilities are selected from a pool of applicants recruited by overseas program offices. POs will be provided with supplementary information for each student with a disability to assist with placement, as

follows:

Students recruited by American Councils:

1. Applicant Registration Form for Students with a Disability
2. Applicant Observation Form for Students with a Disability (completed by the recruitment team or country office)
3. Natural Parent Comment Sheet

Students recruited by all other recruiting organizations:

1. ES Staff Observation Form, completed by the recruitment team or country office
2. Disability Checklist (filled out together with the student)

These forms are completed during recruitment and are sent to POs along with the student's complete application. MIUSA also receives copies of the complete application and these forms.

In April and May, when FLEX students attend notification meetings, American Councils collects and provides to POs the following additional health forms for FLEX students:

1. Staff Observation Form
2. Vision, Hearing, and/or Physical Impairment Checklist (completed by staff and student)

In addition, the MIUSA workshop waivers and agreement forms are provided to MIUSA at this time.

In April and May, in countries where American Councils recruits, program staff conducts in-depth phone calls with each student who has a disability and shares the write-ups from these calls with POs and the disability components administrator.

Any student who took a modified English language test will undergo additional English language assessment. Students with disabilities undergo the same health review process as other students.


10. *Spring Workshop Opportunities*

The Department of State's Civic Education Workshops (CEW) for FLEX and YES students will take place in spring 2026. Information about whether WYLET (Workshop for Youth Leaders in English Teaching) will be offered in 2026 will be forthcoming.

In mid-September, POs receive information from ECA and the CEW coordinators with details, dates, and guidance to students and host families on application processes and deadlines. Following selection, the workshop coordinators arrange transportation and coordinate directly with POs and ensure that POs have necessary and timely information prior to and during each workshop.


CEWs are week-long programs in Washington, DC, conducted by American Councils for 100-200 FLEX and 100-200 YES students. The workshops provide an opportunity for participants to learn firsthand about the U.S. federal system of government, leadership, and other important concepts through seminar discussions, briefings, and meetings on Capitol Hill.

J-1 Visa Regulations



Code of Federal Regulations

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Title 22

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ENHANCED CONTENT - CONTENT TOOLS

§ 62.25 Secondary school students.

URL: <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-22/section-62.25>

Citation: 22 CFR 62.25

§ 62.25 Secondary school students.

- (a) **Purpose.** *This section governs Department of State designated exchange visitor programs under which foreign secondary school students are afforded the opportunity to study in the United States at accredited public or private secondary schools for an academic semester or an academic year, while living with American host families or residing at accredited U.S. boarding schools.*
- (b) **Program sponsor eligibility.** *Eligibility for designation as a secondary school student exchange visitor program sponsor is limited to organizations:*
- (1) With tax-exempt status as conferred by the Internal Revenue Service pursuant to section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code; and
 - (2) Which are United States citizens as such term is defined in [§ 62.2](#).
- (c) **Program eligibility.** *Secondary school student exchange visitor programs designated by the Department of State must:*
- (1) Require all exchange students to be enrolled and participating in a full course of study at an accredited academic institution;
 - (2) Allow entry of exchange students for not less than one academic semester

(or quarter equivalency) and not more than two academic semesters (or quarter equivalency) duration; and

(3) Ensure that the program is conducted on a U.S. academic calendar year basis, except for students from countries whose academic year is opposite that of the United States. Exchange students may begin an exchange program in the second semester of a U.S. academic year only if specifically permitted to do so, in writing, by the school in which the exchange student is enrolled. In all cases, sponsors must notify both the host family and school prior to the exchange student's arrival in the United States whether the placement is for an academic semester, an academic year, or a calendar year.

(d) ***Program administration.*** *Sponsors must ensure that all organizational officers, employees, representatives, agents, and volunteers acting on their behalf:*

(1) Are adequately trained. Sponsors must administer training for local coordinators that specifically includes, at a minimum, instruction in: Conflict resolution; procedures for handling and reporting emergency situations; awareness or knowledge of child safety standards; information on sexual conduct codes; procedures for handling and reporting allegations of sexual misconduct or any other allegations of abuse or neglect; and the criteria to be used to screen potential host families and exercise good judgment when identifying what constitutes suitable host family placements. In addition to their own training, sponsors must ensure that all local coordinators complete the Department of State mandated training module prior to their appointment as a local coordinator or assumption of duties. The Department of State training module will include instruction designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Exchange Visitor Program; its public diplomacy objectives; and the Secondary School Student category rules and regulations. Sponsors must demonstrate the individual's successful completion of all initial training requirements and that annual refresher training is also successfully completed.

(2) Are adequately supervised. Sponsors must create and implement organization-specific standard operating procedures for the supervision of local coordinators designed to prevent or deter fraud, abuse, or misconduct in the performance of the duties of these employees/agents/volunteers. They must also have sufficient internal controls to ensure that such employees/agents/volunteers comply with such standard operating procedures.

(3) Have been vetted annually through a criminal background check (which must

include a search of the Department of Justice’s National Sex Offender Public Registry);

- (4) Place no exchange student with his or her relatives;
- (5) Make no exchange student placement beyond 120 miles of the home of the local coordinator authorized to act on the sponsor’s behalf in both routine and emergency matters arising from that exchange student’s participation in the Exchange Visitor Program;
- (6) Make no monetary payments or other incentives to host families;
- (7) Provide exchange students with reasonable access to their natural parents and family by telephone and e-mail;
- (8) Make certain that the exchange student’s government issued documents (*i.e.*, passports, Forms DS–2019) are not removed from his/her possession;
- (9) Conduct the host family orientation after the host family has been fully vetted and accepted;
- (10) Refrain, without exception, from acting as:
 - (i) Both a host family and a local coordinator or area supervisor for an exchange student;
 - (ii) A host family for one sponsor and a local coordinator for another sponsor; or
 - (iii) A local coordinator for any exchange student over whom he/she has a position of trust or authority such as the student’s teacher or principal. This requirement is not applicable to a boarding school placement.
- (11) Maintain, at minimum, a monthly schedule of personal contact with the exchange student. The first monthly contact between the local coordinator and the exchange student must be in person. All other contacts may take place in-person, on the phone, or via electronic mail and must be properly documented. The sponsor is responsible for ensuring that issues raised through such contacts are promptly and appropriately addressed.
- (12) That a sponsor representative other than the local coordinator who recruited, screened and selected the host family visit the exchange student/host family home within the first or second month following the student’s placement in the home.
- (13) Maintain, at a minimum, a monthly schedule of personal contact with the host

family. At least once during the fall semester and at least once during the spring semester, (*i.e.*, twice during the academic year) the contact by the local coordinator with the host family must be in person. All other contacts may take place in person, on the phone, or via electronic mail and must be properly documented. The sponsor is responsible for ensuring the issues raised through such contacts are promptly and appropriately addressed.

(14) That host schools are provided contact information for the local organizational representative (including name, direct phone number, and e-mail address), the program sponsor, and the Department's Office of Designation; and

(15) Adhere to all regulatory provisions set forth in this part and all additional terms and conditions governing program administration that the Department may impose.

(e) ***Student selection.*** *In addition to satisfying the requirements of § 62.10(a), sponsors must ensure that all participants in a designated secondary school student exchange visitor program:*

(1) Are secondary school students in their home countries who have not completed more than 11 years of primary and secondary study, exclusive of kindergarten; or are at least 15 years of age, but not more than 18 years and six months of age as of the program start date;

(2) Demonstrate maturity, good character, and scholastic aptitude; and

(3) Have not previously participated in an academic year or semester secondary school student exchange program in the United States or attended school in the United States in either F-1 or J-1 visa status.

(f) ***Student enrollment.***

(1) Sponsors must secure prior written acceptance for the enrollment of any exchange student in a United States public or private secondary school. Such prior acceptance must:

(i) Be secured from the school principal or other authorized school administrator of the school or school system that the exchange student will attend; and

(ii) Include written arrangements concerning the payment of tuition or waiver thereof if applicable.

(2) Under no circumstance may a sponsor facilitate the entry into the United States of an exchange student for whom a written school placement has not been secured.

(3) Under no circumstance may a sponsor charge a student private school tuition if such arrangements are not finalized in writing prior to the issuance of Form DS–2019.

(4) Sponsors must maintain copies of all written acceptances for a minimum of three years and make such documents available for Department of State inspection upon request.

(5) Sponsors must provide the school with a translated “written English language summary” of the exchange student’s complete academic course work prior to commencement of school, in addition to any additional documents the school may require. Sponsors must inform the prospective host school of any student who has completed secondary school in his/her home country.

(6) Sponsors may not facilitate the enrollment of more than five exchange students in one school unless the school itself has requested, in writing, the placement of more than five students from the sponsor.

(7) Upon issuance of a Form DS–2019 to a prospective participant, the sponsor accepts full responsibility for securing a school and host family placement for the student, except in cases of voluntary student withdrawal or visa denial.

(g) ***Student orientation.*** *In addition to the orientation requirements set forth at [§ 62.10](#), all sponsors must provide exchange students, prior to their departure from their home countries, with the following information:*

(1) A summary of all operating procedures, rules, and regulations governing student participation in the exchange visitor program along with a detailed summary of travel arrangements;

(2) A copy of the Department’s welcome letter to exchange students;

(3) Age and language appropriate information on how to identify and report sexual abuse or exploitation;

(4) A detailed profile of the host family with whom the exchange student will be placed. The profile must state whether the host family is either a permanent placement or a temporary-arrival family;

(5) A detailed profile of the school and community in which the exchange student will be placed. The profile must state whether the student will pay tuition; and

(6) An identification card, that lists the exchange student’s name, United States host family placement address and telephone numbers (landline and cellular), sponsor

name and main office and emergency telephone numbers, name and telephone numbers (landline and cellular) of the local coordinator and area representative, the telephone number of Department's Office of Designation, and the Secondary School Student program toll free emergency telephone number. The identification card must also contain the name of the health insurance provider and policy number. Such cards must be corrected, reprinted, and reissued to the student if changes in contact information occur due to a change in the student's placement.

- (h) ***Student extra-curricular activities.*** *Exchange students may participate in school sanctioned and sponsored extra-curricular activities, including athletics, if such participation is:*
 - (1) Authorized by the local school district in which the student is enrolled; and
 - (2) Authorized by the state authority responsible for determination of athletic eligibility, if applicable. Sponsors shall not knowingly be party to a placement (inclusive of direct placements) based on athletic abilities, whether initiated by a student, a natural or host family, a school, or any other interested party.
 - (3) Any placement in which either the student or the sending organization in the foreign country is party to an arrangement with any other party, including receiving school personnel, whereby the student will attend a particular school or live with a particular host family must be reported to the particular school and the National Federation of State High School Associations prior to the first day of classes.
- (i) ***Student employment.*** *Exchange students may not be employed on either a full or part-time basis but may accept sporadic or intermittent employment such as babysitting or yard work.*
- (j) ***Host family application and selection.*** *Sponsors must adequately screen and select all potential host families and at a minimum must:*
 - (1) Provide potential host families with a detailed summary of the Exchange Visitor Program and of their requirements, obligations and commitment to host;
 - (2) Utilize a standard application form developed by the sponsor that includes, at a minimum, all data fields provided in **Appendix F, "Information to be Collected on Secondary School Student Host Family Applications"**. The form must include a statement stating that: "The income data collected will be used solely for the purposes of determining that the basic needs of the exchange student can be met, including three quality meals and transportation to and from school activities." Such

application form must be signed and dated at the time of application by all potential host family applicants. The host family application must be designed to provide a detailed summary and profile of the host family, the physical home environment (to include photographs of the host family home's exterior and grounds, kitchen, student's bedroom, bathroom, and family or living room), family composition, and community environment. Exchange students are not permitted to reside with their relatives.

- (3) Conduct an in-person interview with all family members residing in the home where the student will be living;
- (4) Ensure that the host family is capable of providing a comfortable and nurturing home environment and that the home is clean and sanitary; that the exchange student's bedroom contains a separate bed for the student that is neither convertible nor inflatable in nature; and that the student has adequate storage space for clothes and personal belongings, reasonable access to bathroom facilities, study space if not otherwise available in the house and reasonable, unimpeded access to the outside of the house in the event of a fire or similar emergency. An exchange student may share a bedroom, but with no more than one other individual of the same sex.
- (5) Ensure that the host family has a good reputation and character by securing two personal references from within the community from individuals who are not relatives of the potential host family or representatives of the sponsor (*i.e.*, field staff or volunteers), attesting to the host family's good reputation and character;
- (6) Ensure that the host family has adequate financial resources to undertake hosting obligations and is not receiving needs-based government subsidies for food or housing;
- (7) Verify that each member of the host family household 18 years of age and older, as well as any new adult member added to the household, or any member of the host family household who will turn eighteen years of age during the exchange student's stay in that household, has undergone a criminal background check (which must include a search of the Department of Justice's National Sex Offender Public Registry);
- (8) Maintain a record of all documentation on a student's exchange program, including but not limited to application forms, background checks, evaluations, and interviews, for all selected host families for a period of three years following program completion; and
- (9) Ensure that a potential single adult host parent without a child in the home

undergoes a secondary level review by an organizational representative other than the individual who recruited and selected the applicant. Such secondary review should include demonstrated evidence of the individual's friends or family who can provide an additional support network for the exchange student and evidence of the individual's ties to his/her community. Both the exchange student and his or her natural parents must agree in writing in advance of the student's placement with a single adult host parent without a child in the home.

(k) ***Host family orientation.*** *In addition to the orientation requirements set forth in [§ 62.10](#), sponsors must:*

- (1) Inform all host families of the philosophy, rules, and regulations governing the sponsor's exchange visitor program, including examples of "best practices" developed by the exchange community;
- (2) Provide all selected host families with a copy of the Department's letter of appreciation to host families;
- (3) Provide all selected host families with a copy of Department of State-promulgated Exchange Visitor Program regulations;
- (4) Advise all selected host families of strategies for cross-cultural interaction and conduct workshops to familiarize host families with cultural differences and practices; and
- (5) Advise host families of their responsibility to inform the sponsor of any and all material changes in the status of the host family or student, including, but not limited to, changes in address, finances, employment and criminal arrests.

(l) ***Host family placement.***

- (1) Sponsors must secure, prior to the student's departure from his or her home country, a permanent or arrival host family placement for each exchange student participant. Sponsors may not:
 - (i) Facilitate the entry into the United States of an exchange student for whom a host family placement has not been secured;
 - (ii) Place more than one exchange student with a host family without the express prior written consent of the host family, the natural parents, and the students being placed. Under no circumstance may more than two exchange students be placed with a host family, or in the home of a local coordinator, regional coordinator, or volunteer. Sponsors may not place students from the same countries or with the

same native languages in a single home.

(2) Prior to the student's departure from his or her home country, sponsors must advise both the exchange student and host family, in writing, of the respective family compositions and backgrounds of each, whether the host family placement is a permanent or arrival placement, and facilitate and encourage the exchange of correspondence between the two.

(3) In the event of unforeseen circumstances that necessitate a change of host family placement, the sponsor must document the reason(s) necessitating such change and provide the Department of State with an annual statistical summary reflecting the number and reason(s) for such change in host family placement in the program's annual report.

(m) ***Advertising and marketing for the recruitment of host families.*** *In addition to the requirements set forth in [§ 62.9](#) in advertising and promoting for host family recruiting, sponsors must:*

(1) Utilize only promotional materials that professionally, ethically, and accurately reflect the sponsor's purposes, activities, and sponsorship;

(2) Not publicize the need for host families via any public media with announcements, notices, advertisements, etc. that are not sufficiently in advance of the exchange student's arrival, appeal to public pity or guilt, imply in any way that an exchange student will be denied participation if a host family is not found immediately, or identify photos of individual exchange students and include an appeal for an immediate family;

(3) Not promote or recruit for their programs in any way that compromises the privacy, safety or security of participants, families, or schools. Specifically, sponsors shall not include personal student data or contact information (including addresses, phone numbers or email addresses) or photographs of the student on Web sites or in other promotional materials; and

(4) Ensure that access to exchange student photographs and personally identifying information, either online or in print form, is only made available to potential host families who have been fully vetted and selected for program participation. Such information, if available online, must also be password protected.

(n) ***Reporting requirements.*** *Along with the annual report required by regulations set forth at [§ 62.15](#), sponsors must file with the Department of State the following*

information:

(1) Sponsors must immediately report to the Department any incident or allegation involving the actual or alleged sexual exploitation or any other allegations of abuse or neglect of an exchange student. Sponsors must also report such allegations as required by local or state statute or regulation. Failure to report such incidents to the Department and, as required by state law or regulation, to local law enforcement authorities shall be grounds for the suspension and revocation of the sponsor's Exchange Visitor Program designation;

(2) A report of all final academic year and semester program participant placements by August 31 for the upcoming academic year or January 15 for the Spring semester and calendar year. The report must be in the format directed by the Department and must include at a minimum, the exchange student's full name, Form DS-2019 number (SEVIS ID #), host family placement (current U.S. address), school (site of activity) address, the local coordinator's name and zip code, and other information the Department may request; and

(3) A report of all situations which resulted in the placement of an exchange student with more than one host family or in more than one school. The report must be in a format directed by the Department and include, at a minimum, the exchange student's full name, Form DS-2019 number (SEVIS ID #), host family placements (current U.S. address), schools (site of activity address), the reason for the change in placement, and the date of the move. This report is due by July 31 for the previous academic school year.

[[75 FR 65981](#), Oct. 27, 2010]

Two-Year Home Residency Requirement

J-1 exchange visitors who participate in programs financed in whole or in part by an agency of the U.S. Government are expected to return to their home countries to utilize the experience and skills they have acquired while in the United States after completing their program and are subject to a two-year home residency requirement, known technically as section 212(e) of the Immigration and Naturalization Act (INA). Under the terms of this requirement, they must reside in their home country physically for two years – cumulative, not successive – before they may become eligible to apply for an immigrant/residence or temporary worker (H-1) visa. Eligibility for “F” (student), J-1, tourist, or other type of non-immigrant visa to the United States are not impacted by the two-year requirement and obtaining such visas is always at the discretion of U.S. Embassy or consulate where application is made. For additional information about waivers of the exchange visitor two-year home-country physical presence requirement, visit the Department of State website at travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/study/exchange/waiver-of-the-exchange-visitor.html

The Department of State and the staff and volunteers of the program implementing organizations will not facilitate any scholarship student’s efforts to remain in the United States and change visa status. POs may wish to remind students that they (students) agreed to these terms when they signed their DS-2019 form and received their U.S. visa; that the goal of program is to share what they have learned; and that they can visit the nearest Educational Advising Center in their home country to research other educational opportunities.

A visa is the written permission granted by a consular officer at an American embassy or consulate overseas and stamped or attached in the applicant’s passport for a foreign citizen to seek admission to the United States at a port of entry. It is the responsibility of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement department (ICE) to interview arriving foreign visitors and approve or reject their admission to the country. If admitted, the ICE official attaches an I-94 to the visa page and indicates the date on which the visitor must exit the United States. For J-1 visa holders, the customary length of stay is indicated by the initials “DS” on the I-94, meaning “Duration of Status,” which is generally calculated as the program end date, as indicated on the DS2019, plus 30 days. Visas may be issued for single or multiple entries. Once a visitor is admitted to the United States, it is irrelevant if the visa expires. The ICE official may require a visitor to register at a regional ICE office following arrival.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR AND CERTIFICATION BY THE ALIEN BENEFICIARY NAMED ON PAGE 1 OF THIS FORM:

Read this page and sign the Exchange Visitor Certification block on the bottom of page 1 and prior to presentation to a United States Consular or Immigration Official.

1. I understand that the following conditions are applicable to exchange visitors:

(a) **TWO-YEAR HOME-COUNTRY PHYSICAL PRESENCE REQUIREMENT (SECTION 212(e) OF THE IMMIGRATION AND NATIONALITY ACT AND PL 94-484, AS AMENDED):**

RULE: Exchange visitors whose programs are financed in whole or in part, directly or indirectly by either their government or by the U.S. Government, are required to reside in their home-country for 2 years following completion of their program before they are eligible for immigrant status, temporary worker (*H*) status, or intracompany transferee (*L*) status.

Likewise, if exchange visitors are acquiring a skill that is in short supply in their home country (*these skills appear on the "Exchange Visitor Skills List"*) they will be subject to the same two-year home-country residence requirement. The requirement also is applicable to alien physicians entering the United States to receive graduate medical education or training. The U.S. Department of State reserves the right to make the final determination regarding 212(e).

NOTE: MARRIAGE TO A U.S. CITIZEN OR LEGAL PERMANENT RESIDENT. OR BIRTH OF A CHILD IN THE UNITED STATES DOES NOT REMOVE THIS REQUIREMENT.

(b) **Extension of Stay/Program Transfers:** A completed Form DS-2019 is required in order to apply for a program extension or program transfer, and must be obtained from or with the assistance of the sponsor.

(c) **Limitation of Stay:** **STUDENTS** – as long as they pursue a full course of study towards a degree, or if engaged full-time in a non-degree program, up to 24 months. Students for whom the sponsor recommends academic training may be permitted to remain for an additional period of up to 18 months after receiving their degree or certificate; post-doctoral academic training may be approved by the sponsor for a period not to exceed 36 months; **SECONDARY STUDENTS** – up to 1 academic year; **TRAINEES** – 18 months; **TEACHERS** – 3 years; **PROFESSORS** and **RESEARCH SCHOLARS** – 5 years; **SHORT-TERM SCHOLARS** – 6 months; **SPECIALISTS** – 1 year; **INTERNATIONAL VISITORS** – 1 year; **ALIEN PHYSICIAN** – the time typically required to complete the medical specialty involved but limited to 7 years with the possibility of extension if approved by the U.S. Department of State; **GOVERNMENT VISITOR** – up to 18 months; **CAMP COUNSELOR** – up to 4 months; **SUMMER WORK/TRAVEL** – up to 4 months; **AU PAIR** – 1 year; **INTERN** – up to 12 months. For details, see 22 CFR Part 62.

(d) **Documentation Required for Admission/Readmission as an Exchange Visitor:** To be eligible for admission to the United States, an exchange visitor must present the following at the port of entry: (1) a valid nonimmigrant visa, unless exempt from nonimmigrant visa requirements; (2) a passport valid for 6 months beyond the anticipated period of admission,

unless exempt from passport requirements; **(3)** a properly executed Form DS-2019 which must be retained by the exchange visitor for readmission within the period of previously authorized stay. Exchange visitors are permitted to travel abroad and maintain status (e.g., *obtain a new visa*) under duration of the program as indicated by the dates on this form (*see item 3 on page 1 of this form*).

- (e) Change of Visa Status:** Exchange visitors (and their spouses and dependents) are expected to leave the United States upon completion of their program objective. Exchange visitors who are subject to the two-year home-country physical presence requirement are not eligible to change their status while in the United States to any other nonimmigrant category except, if applicable, that of official or employee of a foreign government **(A)** or an international organization **(G)** or member of the family or attendant of either of these types of officials or employees.
- (f) Insurance:** Exchange visitors are required to have medical insurance in effect of themselves for the duration of their exchange program, and for accompanying spouse and dependents while they are in United States during the exchange visitor's program. Exchange visitors are required to have: **(1)** medical benefits of at least \$100,000 per accident or illness; **(2)** repatriation of remains in the amount of U.S. \$25,000; and **(3)** expenses associated with medical evacuation in the amount of U.S. \$50,000. A policy secured to fulfill the insurance requirements shall not have a deductible that exceeds U.S. \$500 per accident or illness, and must meet other standards specified in the Exchange Visitor Program regulations, 22 CFR Part 62.14. For details, consult your program's Responsible Officer or Alternate Responsible Officer (*see item 7 on page 1 of this form*).

2. EXCHANGE VISITOR (J-NON-IMMIGRANT) CERTIFICATION: I have read and agreed to comply with the terms and conditions of my admission and those of any extension of stay. I certify under penalty of perjury for violating U.S. laws (18 U.S. Code §1621 – Perjury generally); or (18 U.S. Code §1001 – False Statement) that all information provided on this form refers specifically to me and is true and correct to the best of my knowledge. I certify that I seek to enter or remain in the United States temporarily, and solely for the purpose of pursuing an exchange program facilitated by the designated sponsor named above, or for an accompanying spouse and dependent(s). I also authorize the named sponsor to release any information from my records needed by DHS pursuant to 8 CFR 214.3(g) to determine my non-immigrant status. I agree that I will maintain compliance with insurance regulations as specified in 22 CFR 62.14 for myself for the duration of my exchange program and for my J-2 spouse and dependents while they are present in the United States during my exchange program. For the purposes of 20 U.S.C. 1232g and 22 CFR 62, I authorize U.S. Department of State designated sponsors and any educational institution named on Form DS-2019 to release information to the Department of State relating to compliance with the Exchange Visitor Program regulations. Signatures: The J-1 exchange visitor should sign the J-1 form under Signature of Applicant. The J-2 spouse or dependent should sign the J-2 form under Signature of Applicant. Parent or guardian must sign the J-1 form if exchange visitor is under 16. Parent or guardian must sign the J-2 form if accompanying minor is under 16.

NOTICE TO ALL EXCHANGE VISITORS

To facilitate your readmission to the United States after a visit in another country other than a contiguous territory or adjacent islands, you should have the Responsible Officer or Alternate Responsible Officer of your sponsoring organization indicate on the TRAVEL VALIDATION BY RESPONSIBLE OFFICER or Alternate Responsible Officer section of the Form DS-2019 that you continue to be in good standing.

The signature of the Responsible Officer or the Alternate Responsible Officer on the Form DS-2019 is valid for up to one year* or until the end date in item 3 on page 1 of this Form, or to the validation date authorized by the Responsible Officer, whichever occurs sooner.

* **EXCEPT:** Maximum validation period is up to 6 months for Short-term Scholars and 4 months for Camp Counselors and Summer Work/Travel.

PAPERWORK REDUCTION ACT STATEMENT: Under the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961, as amended, the U.S. Department of State has been delegated the authority to designate Exchange Visitor Programs for U.S. Government agencies, and for public and private educational and cultural exchange organizations. The information is used by Exchange Visitor Program sponsors to appropriately identify an individual seeking to enter the United States as an exchange visitor and by the U.S. Department of State for exchange visitor program administration purposes. The completed form is sent to the prospective exchange visitor abroad, who takes it to the U.S. Consulate (*Embassy*) to secure an exchange visitor (*J-1, J-2*) visa. Responses are mandatory. An Agency or organization may not conduct or sponsor, and the respondent is not required to respond, to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 45 minutes per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, researching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to: U.S. Department of State, ECA/EC, Washington, D.C. 20522-0505.

CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT: INA Section 222 (*f*) provides that visa issuance and refusal records shall be considered confidential and shall be used only for the formulation, amendment, administration, or enforcement of the immigration, nationality, and other laws of the United States. Certified copies of visa records may be made available to a court which certifies that the information contained in such records is need in a case pending before the court.

FLEX Program Parent/Student Agreement



FLEX Parent/Student Agreement 2025-26

INSTRUCTIONS: Carefully review this important information with your parents. This form must be signed by you and one of your parents indicating you agree to the terms and conditions of participating in the program. Return the form to your American Councils program office with your application. Your parents should keep a copy of this document for their reference.

A. PURPOSE

The Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) program (referred to below as “the Program”), sponsored by the U.S. Government, promotes friendship between the United States and your country, and provides participants personal development through living with a U.S. host family and studying in the United States.

The U.S. Department of State implements the Program with the assistance of private, not-for-profit organizations (referred to as “Program Organizations”). While in the United States, participants are in the care of “Placement Organizations” that identify and arrange host families and schools and provide support and guidance for them during the exchange Program. Participants attend a U.S. school, share in American family life, learn about the United States, increase their sensitivity to cultural differences and similarities, and develop a deepened awareness of shared human values and interests. Participants are required to return to their home country after their Program, where they are expected to share their experiences in the United States.

This document must be signed by a natural parent or legal guardian of the participating student (referred to as the “Parent”).

B. PARENT AGREEMENT General Program Policies

1. I give my child permission to participate in this Program. I and my child will obey the policies described in the Program Handbook and Program Organization guidelines. I understand that the original English-language version of this document represents the final authoritative wording of policies and guidelines.
2. I understand that if I or any other immediate family member has applied at any time to emigrate to the United States or if I or any other immediate adult family member (whether estranged or not) is a U.S. citizen or green card holder, it may negatively affect my child’s eligibility for the Program.
3. I understand that if another member of my immediate family will be living in the United States at the same time my child would be participating in the Program, it may affect my child’s eligibility for the Program.
4. I affirm that my child has not stayed in the United States for more than ninety (90) days in total during the past five (5) years.
5. I understand that my child must meet the Program age and grade (class) country eligibility requirements, be a citizen of the country in which they are applying, be able to obtain a passport from their country of citizenship, and be able to obtain a J-1 visa for entry into the United States.
6. I understand that participants in an exchange visitor program funded by the U.S. Government are required, under Section 212(e) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, to reside in their home country for a minimum of two (2) years after completing their exchange program in the United States before they are eligible for an immigrant visa, U.S. permanent residence, or a non-immigrant H or L visa.
7. I understand that if my child is selected to receive a scholarship, final acceptance will depend on fulfillment of the medical, placement, and academic requirements of the Program, and on the ability of the placement partner to secure an appropriate family and school placement.
8. I understand that I may not visit my child during their time on Program in the United States unless I obtain prior written approval from the Placement Organization.
9. I agree to release and discharge the Program Organizations and their employees and agents; host families; Program representatives; school representatives; and the U. S. Department of State and its employees, agents, and instrumentalities from any legal liability, claim, or demand in connection with:
 - a. any emergency, accident, illness, injury, or other consequences or events arising from the actions or

participation of my child in the Program.

- b. any cause, event, or occurrence beyond the control of the Program Organizations or the Department of State, including, but not limited to, natural disasters, war, terrorism, civil disturbances, and the negligence of parties not subject to the control of the Program Organizations.
- c. any actions or negligence of commercial airlines, trains, buses, restaurants, hotels, and other entities engaged for travel-related services, including, but not limited to, lost baggage, uncomfortable accommodations, and travel delays.

Travel Policies

- 10. I agree that my child will travel to and from the United States in strict accordance with the travel plans made by the Program.
- 11. I will not encourage or permit my child to travel outside the host community during participation in the Program except in strict accordance with the following requirements:
 - a. If my child desires to travel outside the host community **with and under the supervision** of their host parent(s), school official, or other responsible adult, my child must first obtain written approval from the Placement Organization.
 - b. If my child desires to travel outside the host community unaccompanied by their host parent(s), school official, or other responsible adult, my child must first obtain written approval from the Placement Organization and me, the child's Parent. Some Placement Organizations may not allow such travel.
 - c. My child's safety must be assured to the greatest extent possible.
 - d. The travel must not interfere with school attendance.
 - e. *International* travel requires prior authorization by the U.S. Department of State, and the participant must have a multiple-entry U.S. visa.
 - f. I understand that many Placement Organizations limit, discourage, or do not allow visits with natural family members or friends from the home country even if they live in the United States. Such visits interrupt the continuity of the relationship with the host family and may diminish the exchange experience for the student and host family. Policies vary by Placement Organization. I agree to follow all Placement Organization's rules concerning visits.
 - g. I understand that visits to my child's home country while on program are not allowed. Exceptions may be made in the case of the death or imminent death of an immediate family member (mother, father, brother,

sister) contingent upon identification of funding to cover the costs and Program approval. An unauthorized visit will result in my child's dismissal from the Program. Such non-emergency trips break the continuity of the relationship with the host family and may diminish the exchange experience for the student and host family. Any requests for exceptions must be presented to the Placement Organization and approved by the U.S. Department of State.

- 12. I understand that my child will be responsible for paying any fees incurred for carrying baggage in excess of the baggage limits set by the airlines used for Program travel. I understand that this provision applies to both international and domestic travel within both the United States and our country.
- 13. I understand that in making travel arrangements for my child, the Program Organizations contract with or use commercial airlines, trains, buses, restaurants, hotels, and other entities whose performance and services cannot be controlled by the Program. I agree that the Program Organizations reserve the right to change or alter travel, lodging, or other arrangements if they believe such change or alteration to be in the best interest of the participants.
- 14. I understand that my child must return home at the end of the Program on the date assigned by the Program Organization. Participants will not be allowed to remain in the United States after their assigned return-travel date. After which time, they will no longer be supported by the Program, will not have health benefits, and may be reported to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Changes to the assigned departure date will not be made to accommodate graduation, prom, or other special school or family events that occur after the assigned date.

School and Host Family Placement

- 15. I authorize the Placement Organizations and their employees and representatives to change the place of residence or school designated for my child when they believe such change to be in our child's best interest. I understand that I will be notified of any such changes.
- 16. I recognize that schools in the United States may impose academic standards or other requirements in determining grade level placement that differ from those at the school my child now attends. I acknowledge and accept that participation in the Program does not guarantee credit or graduation from the school my child now attends or from the

U.S. school my child will attend while participating in the Program. I and my child will accept the grade placement assigned by the U.S. school. I understand that it is my responsibility to arrange with the school my child now attends to receive credit or to take exams upon completion of the Program; or to arrange for permission for academic absence from any institute or university to be attended upon return.

17. I understand that my child must attend school and complete required coursework. Non-attendance may result in dismissal from the Program. Allowing for an initial period of adjustment, participants must achieve and maintain adequate academic results. After a reasonable period of time, poor motivation, underachievement, or inappropriate behavior may be cause for dismissal from the Program. If a student is expelled from school, it will likely result in Program dismissal.
18. I am aware that there is no single living experience that is typical in the United States. I understand that placements are made based on criteria designed to determine suitability of host families.
19. I understand that participants and parents cannot choose host families, school, grade placement, or location of placement. Placement organizations will request participant and parent agreement if your child will be 1) placed in a home with another exchange student [a double placement]; 2) placed with a single host parent without children in the home; or 3) enrolled in a school run by a religious organization. I understand that if I or my child decline a valid placement, my child may be disqualified from the program.
20. I understand that my child cannot be hosted by our family members.
21. I understand there are strict laws restricting smoking and vaping by people under the age of 21 in the United States. I understand that the host family may have objections to smoking and vaping in their home and that schools forbid smoking and vaping or the possession of tobacco and e-cigarette products. I and my child agree to honor all U.S. laws and host family, school, and Placement Organization restrictions.
22. I understand that the programs prohibit students from recruiting their own host families via social media or other online means due to the dangers of sharing personal information online, with strangers, or otherwise outside of the host family vetting process.

Health/Medical Issues

23. I understand that before a participant arrives in the United States, the Program must receive written permission from Parents to obtain emergency medical

attention if needed (see Permission for Care of My Child). My child will receive medical attention in case of an accident or emergency. The insurance provider is determined by each Placement Organization. Each insurance provider has specific policies and restrictions governing the types of expenses it will reimburse. Placement Organizations, their representatives and host families are not responsible for any medical bills not covered by insurance regardless of who signs the hospital admission form. The Program is not responsible for any negative results because of medical treatment.

24. I confirm the information stated in the Student Health Certificate is accurate and contains no material omissions of which I am aware. **I understand that omitting information on the Student Health Certificate could endanger the health of my child and may be grounds for dismissal from the Program.** I will immediately inform the Program Organization of any change in information. I understand that any physical or mental health condition requiring a significant and sustained level of care or monitoring of my child may require reconsideration of my child's participation in the Program. In the event my child has a recurrence of any previous illness or any condition contracted before leaving home or in the United States that is not covered by insurance provided by the Program, I authorize the Program Organization to release my child to my care in our home country. I will not hold the Program Organizations and their employees and agents; host families; Program representatives; school representatives; or the U.S. Department of State and its employees, agents, and instrumentalities responsible for any debts incurred in connection with this permission. I understand that treatment will be provided for injuries sustained by my child while on Program, but the extent of coverage is subject to the Program's insurance or health benefits providers' rules and policies.
25. I confirm I have provided a full and complete medical and immunization history for my child. I understand that U.S. schools require immunizations and I agree to allow the Program Organizations to arrange for all immunizations required for my child. I understand that such immunizations will be administered according to U.S. medical standards and at no expense to me or my child.

GENERAL POLICIES

26. **Internet:** Participants are required to follow all rules regarding use of computers, tablets, cell phones, and the Internet as determined by their Placement Organization, host family, and/or host school.

Participants who place private (contact information, pictures, etc.) or other information on the Internet in violation of the rules established by their Placement Organization, host family, and/or host school may be dismissed from the Program. These Placement Organization rules are intended to protect students' safety. Students who in any way put the safety of themselves or others in jeopardy by misusing the Internet may be dismissed from the Program and may be subject to prosecution for any violation of law.

27. Dangerous/Risky Activities: All health benefit or insurance plans consider certain activities risky and will not cover treatment for injuries sustained while participating in them. Such activities may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **bungee jumping**
- **downhill skiing**
- **handling or using a firearm or other weapon**
- **horseback riding**
- **jet skiing**
(operation or passenger of)
- **motorcycle/motor scooter riding**
(operation or passenger of)
- **operation or passenger of an all-terrain vehicle (ATV) or motocross bike**
- **parachuting**
- **parasailing**
- **rock climbing**
(indoor/outdoor)
- **scuba diving**
- **skateboarding**
- **snowboarding**
- **snowmobiling**
(operation or passenger of)
- **spelunking**
- **wakeboard riding**
- **water skiing**
- **windsurfing**

Participants are not permitted to engage in any activities not covered by a health benefit plan or insurance. In addition, participants are not permitted to engage in any activities prohibited by their Placement Organization even if the activity is covered by insurance.

28. Driving Motorized Vehicles: Participants are not permitted to drive any motorized vehicle (such as a car, motorcycle, all-terrain vehicle, etc.) or pilot any aircraft under any circumstances while in the United States. Violators of this policy will be considered for Program dismissal. Exceptions may be granted for farm equipment if allowed by the participant's Parent and Placement Organization. If authorized, the participant must observe precautions regarding safety and legal limitations.

29. Employment: The J-1 visa status permitting participants to stay in the United States restricts employment. Participants may not be employed on either a full or part-time basis but may accept informal employment such as babysitting or yard work.

30. Marriage and Pregnancy: Participants who marry either while a participant or prior to the becoming a

participant will be considered for dismissal from the Program. Participants who are discovered to be pregnant or to have caused a pregnancy must return home.

31. Participant Expenses: The Program provides orientations, travel arrangements, host family and school placements, allowances, and insurance. In addition, the Program provides the Form DS-2019 required to apply for a J-1 visa at a U.S. embassy or consulate. The Program is not responsible for additional student expenses beyond the incidentals allowance, monthly pocket allowance, and official Program activities and travel. The host family is responsible for providing three meals a day for the participant and must provide either lunch money or a bag lunch. All other expenses, such as extra school fees or activities, social activities, personal and hygienic supplies, postage, and telephone calls, are paid by the participant using Program allowances.

32. Illegal Activity: Students may be subject to prosecution by the U.S. legal system and may be dismissed from the program if they engage in illegal activity, including but not limited to:

- **Alcohol:** Participants are required to observe all U.S. laws with regard to the minimum drinking age in the United States, which is 21.
- **Drugs:** Participants are prohibited from selling, using, distributing, sharing, or possessing any drugs that are illegal under federal, state, or local law, including, but not limited to, marijuana and unauthorized use of prescription drugs. Any infraction is considered a grave violation of policy and may result in dismissal from the program.
- **Smoking:** There are strict laws restricting smoking in the United States. The legal age to buy tobacco in the United States is 21 years old. According to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), tobacco includes cigarettes, smokeless tobacco, hookah tobacco, cigars, pipe tobacco, electronic nicotine delivery systems including e-cigarettes (vapes) and e-liquids.
- **Theft or shoplifting**
- **Any other activity that is against U.S. law** or that results in the participant being arrested or charged with a crime.

Neither the Program Organizations nor the Department of State is obligated to provide legal counsel or defray representation expenses or fines of any sort should a participant be charged with any crime or do something that attracts the attention of law enforcement officials. In such cases, the

participant is subject to all local, state, and federal laws.

TERMINATION FROM THE PROGRAM

33. I understand that my child may be dismissed from the program for behavior that the Program Organizations with the concurrence of the U.S. Department of State, consider inappropriate or detrimental to my child or to the program. Inappropriate or detrimental behavior may include, but is not limited to, misrepresenting themselves or impersonating someone else to any program organization (including prior to coming on the Program), not following the proper chain of communication during the placement process, violating host family or school rules, academic under-performance, or failure to participate in program activities. Inappropriate sexual behavior, including but not limited to the viewing and/or sharing of sexually explicit material, verbal or physical harassment, and any violation of U.S. law are also grounds for dismissal.

34. I agree that if I violate any provision of this Agreement, or if my child, while in the United States, does any of the following, then it may be determined that my child has voluntarily withdrawn from the Program:

- a. is absent without authorization from the host school or the place of residence designated by the Placement Organization without obtaining the

advance written approval of the Program. The Program may determine that the student has left the Program through their own voluntary action. In this case, the Program is absolved from all obligations, legal or otherwise, to the student or their Parents for the student's current or future well-being. The Program will, if the circumstances warrant, work with the student to return to the Program. However, if this cannot be accomplished, a decision will be made that the separation from the Program is final, and the student will receive a letter from the Program sponsor indicating that the student has been reported to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) database. The participant's medical insurance and health benefits will be canceled; or

- b. travels without their Placement Organization's authorization; or

- c. has misrepresented themselves in the Program application.

35. If my child voluntarily withdraws or is dismissed from the Program at any time after departure from our country, I understand that their scholarship, Program status as a J-visa holder, and health insurance/benefits coverage will be canceled.

C. NATURAL PARENT DECLARATION AND AGREEMENT

I have discussed the Program and this Agreement with my child, and each of us fully understands the obligations imposed on us. I confirm that all information provided in my child's application materials and this Agreement is truthful. **We understand that any misrepresentation or false answer in this application can be grounds for my child's termination from the Program.**

SIGN SIGNATURE OF PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN: _____

DATE: _____ PRINT NAME: _____
family name first name middle name

D. STUDENT DECLARATION AND AGREEMENT

I have read this Agreement and discussed with my parent(s) or guardians its terms and conditions. I agree with the purpose of the Program and fully accept all terms and conditions of this Agreement, and all other rules, regulations and conditions set forth concerning the Program. In particular I will do my best to become an integral part of my host family, school and community; will travel only in accordance with the Travel Policies Section of this Agreement; and will attend the school designated for me on a regular basis and complete all work to the best of my ability. I hereby certify that the information provided in all parts of this application is truthful. I understand that any misrepresentation or false answer can be grounds for my dismissal from this Program.

SIGN SIGNATURE: _____ DATE: _____

Pre-Departure Orientation (PDO) Agreement

STUDENT NAME: _____ HUB CITY: _____

PDO DATES: _____ PLACEMENT ORG: _____

☐ I will have completed my secondary education by the time I arrive to the U.S.

☐ I will **NOT** have completed my secondary education by the time I arrive to the U.S.

1. I confirm that I attended every session of the PDO in its entirety.
2. I understand that my placement organization will designate the city and state where I will be placed. I understand that I will not be relocated to another area at my request. I understand that my placement organization makes the final decision about changes in placement. I also understand that program policy prohibits me from being hosted by any natural family relatives.
3. I understand that the programs prohibit students from recruiting their own host families due to the dangers of sharing personal information online, with strangers, or otherwise outside of the host family vetting process.
4. I understand that if I misrepresent myself to **any** program organization (including prior to coming on the Program), I may be disqualified from the program.
5. I understand that declining a valid placement may be grounds for my disqualification from the program.
6. I understand that my U.S. high school makes the final decision about the grade level in which I will study (i.e. 10th, 11th, 12th grade). Furthermore, I understand that most U.S. high schools **will not** give diplomas to exchange students and that I must respect my host school's rules and policies.
7. I understand that my athletic eligibility or participation in school sports teams is **not** guaranteed and is subject to authorization by my local school district and the responsible State authority.
8. I have been instructed at the PDO to describe my previous two years of coursework in writing. I understand that I am responsible for bringing this self-made transcript with me to the U.S. to show to my high school counselor.
9. I understand that my host parents are not obligated to provide lunch money for me to buy lunch at school. My host family is, however, obligated to provide lunch for me, and I understand that it is my host parent's choice whether to provide lunch money or food with which to make a (usually cold) school lunch.
10. If my host family has a computer, I understand that it is the host family's private property and they have the right to not permit me to use their computer. I understand that my host family has the right to make rules about computer and

Internet usage even if the computer I use belongs to me. I understand that it is against program rules and U.S. law to view pornographic, terroristic or other objectionable content online, and that downloading copyrighted material (movies and music) is illegal and punishable by fines of \$150,000 or more.

11. I understand that incidentals allowance purchases are made by me, together with my host family, after my arrival. I have been instructed to discuss the items I may purchase with my placement organization representative after I arrive in the U.S., and before I make purchases. Furthermore, I understand my placement organization confirms which items may be purchased on my behalf. Finally, I understand that my host family and I will not simply receive a check or money for these purchases, but must submit receipts for reimbursement.
12. I understand that shoplifting is illegal in the U.S. and physical violence is not tolerated. I understand that if I am charged with shoplifting or assault, I am subject to the legal consequences including possible arrest and trial, and that neither American Councils nor my placement organization will be able to intervene on my behalf, and that I may also be sent home.
13. I understand that I may not return home **before** May 15 to take examinations in my home country.
14. I understand that I must return to my home country at the end of the program on the date assigned by the responsible FLEX program organization. I will not be allowed to remain in the U.S. after my assigned return travel date. My U.S. visa will not be amended or extended beyond the program end date.
15. I have received information regarding sexual harassment, and have a better understanding of this concept, including how to recognize sexual harassment and what to do if I feel I am being harassed.
16. I have received a copy of the Department of State's Secondary School Student Participant Welcome Letter which includes the Department's toll-free telephone number.
17. I acknowledge that I have received the "Your Safety and Security Online: Safety Tips" document from the Department of State with information regarding my safety and security online.
18. I have read and signed the Parent/Student Agreement (Form 8 of the application), and agree to abide by all of the terms and conditions in this agreement.

STUDENT SIGNATURE: _____

DATE: _____

Dangerous and Risky Activities: Guidelines for students, host families, and Local Coordinators

DANGEROUS/RISKY ACTIVITIES: Health benefit or insurance plans may consider certain activities risky and not cover treatment for injuries sustained while participating in them. Such activities may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- bungee jumping
- downhill skiing
- handling or using a firearm or other weapon
- horseback riding
- jet skiing (operation or passenger of)
- motorcycle/motor scooter riding (operation or passenger of)
- operation or passenger of an all-terrain vehicle (ATV) or motocross bike
- parachuting
- parasailing
- rock climbing (indoor/outdoor)
- scuba diving
- skateboarding
- snowboarding
- snowmobiling (operation or passenger of)
- spelunking
- wakeboard riding
- water skiing
- windsurfing
- zip lining

Participants are not permitted to engage in any activities not covered by program insurance. In addition, participants are not permitted to engage in any activities prohibited by their Placement Organization, even if the activity is covered by insurance.

DRIVING: Participants are not permitted to drive any motorized vehicle (such as a car, motorcycle, all-terrain vehicle, etc.) or pilot any aircraft under any circumstances while in the United States. Violators of this policy will be considered for Program dismissal. Exceptions may be granted for farm equipment if allowed by the participant's Parent and Placement Organization. If authorized, the participant must observe precautions regarding safety and legal limitations.

Religion

(Guidelines for *Local Coordinators*)

Exchange students and their host families frequently have very different ideas about religion. For some families, religious services and the other activities offered by their places of worship are important to their weekly routine. For others, religion is not an important part of their lives.

In cases where a host family does not attend religious services or observes a religion that is different from the student's, the student may need the help of a local coordinator to find an appropriate place of worship.

Students are encouraged to join all host family activities. Attending religious services can be an opportunity for students to observe another aspect of American culture. It is their choice whether or not to attend services, and it is important to respect this choice by encouraging hosts not to apply pressure or react negatively if they choose not to participate.

In many areas of the United States, religious institutions are centers not only of religious life, but also of musical, recreational, and social life. When religious beliefs make it impossible for students to attend services with their host family, they should be encouraged to take advantage of the many other social activities offered by most U.S. churches, synagogues, temples, mosques, etc. Students may find a much better opportunity for friendships and social activities than expected.

The role of a local coordinator is to ensure that both host families and students respect each other's rights to their own beliefs and that there is no pressure to influence or convert students while on program. If you have any concerns about this issue, please contact your Placement Organization.

Please note: J-1 visa regulations provide the following guidelines for host families in Appendix F, Family Activities (c): "A host family may want the exchange visitor to attend one or more religious services or programs with the family. Students cannot be required to do so, but may decide to experience this facet of U.S. culture at his or her discretion."

Religion

(Guidelines for *Host Families*)

Exchange students and their host families frequently have very different ideas about religion. For some families, religious services and the other activities offered by their places of worship are important to their weekly routine. For others, religion is not an important part of their lives.

In cases where a host family does not attend religious services or observes a religion that is different from the student's, the student may ask for help in finding a place of worship of their own denomination.

Students are encouraged to join all host family activities. Attending religious services can be an opportunity for students to observe another aspect of American culture but should be their choice whether or not to attend services. It is important to respect the student's choice by not applying pressure or reacting negatively if he or she chooses not to participate.

In many areas of the United States, religious institutions are centers not only of religious life, but also of musical, recreational, and social life. When religious beliefs make it impossible for students to attend services with their host family, they should be encouraged to take advantage of the many other social activities offered by most U.S. churches, synagogues, temples, mosques, etc. Students may find a much better opportunity for friendships and social activities than expected.

In all cases, both host families and students must respect each other's rights to their own beliefs. Both must refrain from any attempt to proselytize and must avoid the perception of trying to influence or convert.

Please note: J-1 visa regulations provide the following guidelines for host families in **Appendix F, Family Activities (c)**: "A host family may want the exchange visitor to attend one or more religious services or programs with the family. Students cannot be required to do so, but may decide to experience this facet of U.S. culture at his or her discretion."

APPENDIX II: Program Resources

Secondary School Systems in FLEX Countries

Valid for 2025-2026

Placement organizations can compare the number of grades below with the Home School information on the Applicant Summary page in AIS to determine if the student has graduated or not.

For example, students who were studying in the 11th grade in Tajikistan when they applied to FLEX will have completed their secondary education by the time they arrive in the United States in August 2025. The Home School information on the Applicant Summary page in AIS (pictured here) shows that the Tajik student was studying in Grade 11 when she applied to FLEX; thus, she will have completed her secondary education by the time she arrives to the United States.

▼ Home School

Class	11th Grade
Type	
School name	Jabbor Rasulov, N.A. Khujandi
Street line 1	Даврон Саматов №88
Street line 2	
City	Jabbor Rasulov
Viloyat/Shahr	Sughd
Postal Code	735820
Country	Tajikistan

Please keep in mind that this chart is designed to only give a general idea about the secondary schooling in each country. Due to the ongoing decentralization of the educational system and growing number of private schools, two different students from the same country may have very different school records. Therefore, we strongly advise that you consider each student's school records individually.

Please note that *some or all* of the students from the following countries will have graduated when they arrive to the U.S.: **Armenia (some), Azerbaijan (all), Moldova (some), Tajikistan (all), Turkmenistan (some).**

Armenia (FLEX)

# of Grades	Prevalent Grading Scale	Grades Eligible to Apply for the 2025-26 FLEX Program
12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students 1-10 1-100 or 1-5 for some junior colleges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9, 10, 11, 12; junior college years equivalent to grades 9, 10, 11, 12

- 12th graders from Armenia will have completed their secondary education by the time they begin FLEX. These students will take school exit/university entrance exams prior to coming on FLEX. Some 3rd year college students may also have graduated.
- 9th, 10th and 11th graders from Armenia will NOT have completed their secondary education by the time they begin FLEX.
- 9th and 10th graders will skip to 11th and 12th grades (respectively) when they return home. 11th graders will have to repeat the year they missed.
- Years 1, 2, 3, and 4 in eligible junior colleges correspond to grades 9, 10, 11 and 12, respectively, though, in some colleges, years 1, 2, and 3, may correspond to grades 10, 11, and 12, in which case those 3rd-year college students will have graduated.
- No participant will be required to take exams upon their return from the FLEX program.

Azerbaijan (FLEX)

# of Grades	Prevalent Grading Scale	Grades Eligible to Apply for the 2025-26 FLEX Program
11	0 - 5	11

- ALL students from Azerbaijan will have completed their secondary education by the time they begin the FLEX program. Students will take school exit/university entrance exams prior to coming on FLEX.
- Azerbaijan's Ministry of Education permits only 11th graders to participate in the FLEX program.
- Some public/state schools in Azerbaijan use a 1-10 or 1-7 grading scale.
- Some private schools following the U.S. model use a 0-100 grading scale
- Private school ABC uses A*-U grading scale.

Czechia (FLEX)

# of Grades	Prevalent Grading Scale	Grades Eligible to Apply for the 2025-26 FLEX Program
13 (9 ES; 4 HS)	1 - 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1st and 2nd year of secondary school, or equivalent grade at a multi-year high school

- No students from Czechia will have completed their secondary education before they begin the FLEX program.

Estonia (FLEX)

# of Grades	Prevalent Grading Scale	Grades Eligible to Apply for the 2025-26 FLEX Program
12	1 - 5	9, 10

- No students from Estonia will have completed their secondary education before they begin the FLEX program.
- Some public/private schools in Estonia use a 1-100, 1-10, or E-A grading scale with 'F' signifying 'failed'.

Georgia (FLEX)

# of Grades	Prevalent Grading Scale	Grades Eligible to Apply for the 2025-26 FLEX Program
12	1 - 10	9, 10, 11

- No students (with possible exception of finalists with disabilities) from Georgia will have completed their secondary education before they begin the FLEX program.
- Schools in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia operate under the Russian 11-year system, meaning that any student there in the 11th grade when applying to FLEX will have graduated by the time they come on program.

Greece (FLEX)

# of Grades	Prevalent Grading Scale	Grades Eligible to Apply for the 2025-26 FLEX Program
12	1 - 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 3rd year of gymnasium, or 1st year of lyceum

- No students from Greece will have completed their secondary education before they begin the FLEX program.
- Primary school is grades 1-6; gymnasium grades 7-9; lyceum grades 10-12.

Hungary (FLEX)

# of Grades	Prevalent Grading Scale	Grades Eligible to Apply for the 2025-26 FLEX Program
12	1 - 5	9, 10

- No students from Hungary will have completed their secondary education before they begin the FLEX program.
- Waldorf schools and certain technical schools have 13 grades.

- Certain types of vocational schools (*szakkepzo iskola*) have only 3 grades.
- Some students in Hungary take a language year, a year of intensive foreign language study, between 8th and 9th grade which often appears as 9^{ny}.

Kazakhstan (FLEX)

# of Grades	Prevalent Grading Scale	Grades Eligible to Apply for the 2025-26 FLEX Program
11	2 - 5	8, 9, 10 or 1 st year of college (if entered after 9 th grade)

- No students from Kazakhstan will have completed their secondary education before they begin the FLEX program.
- After 6th grade, students may opt to enter regular high school or enter a lyceum (5-year course of advanced study, grades 7-11; essentially a university preparatory program).
- After 9th grade, students may opt to continue their secondary education in high school (10th and 11th grade) or enter a college (3-year professional training program). The first year of a college curriculum (when entered after 9th grade) is equivalent to the 10th and 11th grade curriculum in high schools, with focus on a specific profession. College completes the student's secondary education and allows them to enter directly into the second year at university.
- There are private schools in each city that use the 12-year model of education in Kazakhstan, as do 22 Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (part of a special government English teaching initiative).
- Several international high schools in Kazakhstan use a U.S. grading scale (letter grades).

Kyrgyzstan (FLEX)

# of Grades	Prevalent Grading Scale	Grades Eligible to Apply for the 2025-26 FLEX Program
12	1 - 5	9 or 10

- No students from Kyrgyzstan will have completed their secondary education before they begin the FLEX program.
- After the 9th grade, students may opt to continue their education in secondary schools or lyceums (10th and 11th grade), which are the same as secondary schools, but with additional hours for separate courses (e.g., more math, biology, or English).
- Students with disabilities are eligible to apply if they study in 9th, 10th, or 11th grade (or 1st year of college after 9th grade which is equivalent to 10th and 11th grade).

Latvia (FLEX)

# of Grades	Prevalent Grading Scale	Grades Eligible to Apply for the 2025-26 FLEX Program
12	1 - 10	9, 10

- No students from Latvia will have completed their secondary education before they begin the FLEX program.

Lithuania (FLEX)

# of Grades	Prevalent Grading Scale	Grades Eligible to Apply for the 2025-26 FLEX Program
12	1 - 10	9, 10

- No students from Lithuania will have completed their secondary education before they begin the FLEX program.
- Grades 9 and 10 at Lithuanian *gimnazija/licėjus* are typically numbered as “I” and “II,” (1st and 2nd years of study).
- Some 9th graders skip to 11th grade when they return home, and some repeat the year, depending on the school and preference.
- Most 10th graders repeat the year.
- Some public/private schools in Lithuania use a 1-100 grading system.
- 10th and 11th grade students have exams.
- Primary education is grades 1-4; lower secondary education grades 5-8 (Part 1) and the first 2 grades of *gimnazija/licėjus* or grades 9-10 (Part 2); upper secondary education consists of grades 11-12 or years 3 and 4 of *gimnazija/licėjus*.
- Types of educational establishments include elementary school (grades 1-4); *progimnazija* (grades 1-8); basic school (grades 5-10); secondary school (grades 9-12); *gimnazija* (grades 9-12 or I-IV) and *licėjus* (grades 9-12 or I-IV)

Moldova (FLEX)

# of Grades	Prevalent Grading Scale	Grades Eligible to Apply for the 2025-26 FLEX Program
11 or 12	1-10 (1-5 is used in Transnistria/Prednestrovie)	9, 10, 11

- Students in grade 11, who attend a *scoala or shkola* (grades 5-11), or in grade 11 and studying in Transnistria region, will have completed their secondary education by the time they begin the FLEX program.

- Students in grade 11, who attend a *lyceum*, *litsey* (grades 10-12), *colegiu* or *uchilische* (grades 10-12) will not have completed their secondary education.
- Per the Ministry of Education, testing dates are non-negotiable. Students who miss exams are sometimes required to repeat the year they missed while on FLEX.

Mongolia (FLEX)

# of Grades	Prevalent Grading Scale	Grades Eligible to Apply for the 2025-26 FLEX Program
12	1-8, A-F, 1-100, or 2-5	9, 10, 11

- No students from Mongolia will have completed their secondary education before they begin the FLEX program.
- Students who come on FLEX after grades 9 and 10 will receive credit in Mongolia for their year in the U.S., but students in grade 11 who come to the U.S. during their 12th grade year will need to repeat their final year of school in Mongolia.
- Primary education is grades 1 to 5, secondary education is grades 6 to 9, and high school is grades 10 to 12.

Montenegro (FLEX)

# of Grades	Prevalent Grading Scale	Grades Eligible to Apply for the 2025-26 FLEX Program
13	1 - 5	9 th grade of primary school; I, II grades of high school

- No students from Montenegro will have completed their secondary education before they begin the FLEX program.
- Primary school is grades 1 – 9; high school is grades I to IV.

Poland (FLEX)

# of Grades	Prevalent Grading Scale	Grades Eligible to Apply for the 2025-26 FLEX Program
12	1 - 6	1 st , 2 nd and 3 rd class of lyceum/ <i>technikum</i> (9, 10 and 11)

- No students from Poland will have completed their secondary education before they begin the FLEX program.
- Primary school is grades 1-8; secondary school is 4 years (5 years for *technikum* and some bilingual lyceums); grades 9-12.

Romania (FLEX)

# of Grades	Prevalent Grading Scale	Grades Eligible to Apply for the 2025-26 FLEX Program
12	1 - 10	9, 10, 11

- No students from Romania will have completed their secondary education before they begin the FLEX program.
- Primary school starts at age 6-7 and is grades 0-4; middle (*gimnaziu*) is grades 5-8, high school (*liceu*) is grades 9-12.
- Students who come on FLEX after completing grade 9 or 10 should receive credit from their Romanian schools for their year spent in the U.S. Those who come on program after completing grade 11 will miss the required grade 12 school-leaving exam (BAC) and need to take other tests in order to be able to enroll in university in Romania.

Serbia (FLEX)

# of Grades	Prevalent Grading Scale	Grades Eligible to Apply for the 2025-26 FLEX Program
12	1 - 5	8, I, II

- No students from Serbia will have completed their secondary education before they begin the FLEX program.
- Primary school is grades 1-8; high school is grades I to IV.
- The British International School in Belgrade is the exception and is divided into Key Stage 3 (grades 7, 8 & 9), Key Stage 4 (grades 10 & 11) and Key Stage 5 (grades 12 & 13)

Slovakia (FLEX)

# of Grades	Prevalent Grading Scale	Grades Eligible to Apply for the 2025-26 FLEX Program
13	1 - 5	1 st and 2 nd class of high school; 5 th and 6 th years of an eight-year gymnasium; 3 rd year of five-year bilingual gymnasiums

- No students from Slovakia will have completed their secondary education before they begin the FLEX program.
- Lower primary school is grades 1-5; upper primary school is grades 6-9 (similar to U.S. middle school)
- High school is grades 10-13 (also written as I-IV, and equivalent to U.S. grades 9-12)
- Eight-year gymnasia serve grades 6-13. Students in the 5th and 6th years are thus equivalent to freshman (U.S. 9th grade) and sophomores (U.S. 10th grade), respectively.

- Students who attend five-year gymnasiums can take entrance exams in 8th grade (and skip 9th), or in 9th grade of primary school.

Tajikistan (FLEX)

# of Grades	Prevalent Grading Scale	Grades Eligible to Apply for the 2025-26 FLEX Program
11	1 - 5	11

- ALL students from Tajikistan will complete their secondary education before they begin the FLEX program.
- QSI International School of Dushanbe has 12 grades; a student in 11th grade attending there may not have graduated.
- The Ministry of Education and Science of Tajikistan does not allow 9th and 10th grade students to participate in the FLEX program.
- Private and international schools use different grading scales, including A-D or 1-100.

Turkmenistan (FLEX)

# of Grades	Prevalent Grading Scale	Grades Eligible to Apply for the 2025-26 FLEX Program
12	1 - 5	Based on age only

- Students from Turkmenistan whose application label lists their grade as 12 will have completed their secondary education by the time they begin the FLEX program.
- Students whose application label lists their grade as 9, 10, or 11, will NOT have completed their secondary education by the time they begin the FLEX program.
- International schools have 12 grades.

Ukraine (FLEX)

# of Grades	Prevalent Grading Scale	Grades Eligible to Apply for the 2025-26 FLEX Program
11	1 - 12	8, 9, 10

- No students from Ukraine will have completed their secondary education before they begin the FLEX program.
- The Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine has mandatory secondary school exit exams and university entrance exams. FLEX students, as international exchange students, are typically authorized to take make-up university entrance exams.

Uzbekistan (FLEX)

# of Grades	Prevalent Grading Scale	Grades Eligible to Apply for the 2025-26 FLEX Program
1 – 11 school	1 - 5	9 th , 10 th grade of high school or year I of lyceum/college (equivalent to 10th grade)

- No students from Uzbekistan will have completed their secondary education before they begin the FLEX program.
- Vocational college graduation depends on the college; sometimes it is 2 years, sometimes 3 years.
- Students who applied during their 10th grade will need to take final graduation exams in home country upon return (if home school accepts American transcript as 11th grade completion) or less likely will need to repeat an academic year in Uzbekistan.

What is Pre-Departure Orientation (PDO)?

The FLEX program is funded by the U.S. Department of State's (DOS) Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA). American Councils receives a grant from DOS to implement the administrative components of these programs, including Pre-Departure Orientation (PDO). PDOs are conducted in FLEX students' home countries to prepare them for their upcoming year-long cultural exchange to the U.S. PDOs include 12 interactive sessions and are revised and updated on a yearly basis based on ECA, American Councils staff and Placement Organization (PO) feedback. The sessions address topics and themes that students most commonly find new and challenging, based on more than 30 years of experience administering FLEX. PDOs take place from approximately June 15 - July 15 each year, thus 4-6 weeks before students begin arriving to the U.S. The PDO is standardized – the same core curriculum is taught to all FLEX students regardless of what country they are from. Sessions are team-taught by one American teacher and one teaching assistant alumna/us of the program who attend a Training of Teachers (TOT) workshop overseas. A total of 80 Teachers (Americans) and Teaching Assistants (program alumni) participate in this three-day training on how to conduct the PDO to ensure the curriculum and message is consistently delivered to participants across all countries.



At the TOT, experienced staff act as trainers and model key sessions that are taught by permanent staff during the actual PDO (sessions 1, 2, 3, 4 and 9) for trainees. Even though they will not lead those sessions, seeing them modeled at the TOT provides trainees with an introduction to the main themes of PDO, helps them become familiar with the materials, and enables them to reinforce the key points. Over the next two days the trainees have more than seven hours to put together one to two of the other sessions, as assigned to them, and to team teach in front of their peers with a debrief led by experienced American Councils staff trainers. A master teacher is also present to lead a session on tips for teaching effectively, particularly at the high school level.

By providing this 360-degree training exercise American Councils ensures that critical, required information is being conveyed to participants in a consistent manner, putting students on an equal footing in terms of being prepared to meet the year ahead. Naturally, there are some inherent challenges in sharing such a wealth of information in a short period of time with groups of excited teenagers, but our staff, teachers, and teaching assistants endeavor to do so with great commitment and enthusiasm. Below is a more detailed visual and written explanation of each PDO session.

A companion workbook called ***Introduction to the USA*** is actively utilized in the PDO classroom and students are instructed to bring it with them to the U.S. for reference. By keeping the sessions interactive and engaging while delivering a rigorous curriculum, PDO teachers ensure that students are as prepared as possible for what awaits them. A “question shelf” and new word chart are created on flip chart paper, and key lessons from each session remain posted around the room on flip charts, to serve as reminders. The PDO lessons are connected by a teaching device called “the toolbox” used at the end of each session to identify 1-3 “tools” or personal qualities learned in the course of the session (or that the student already possesses) that the student can utilize in order to have a successful exchange experience. Staff hands out some physical form of the tools (such as puzzle pieces) at the end of each session for the students to put in their “toolbox,” which is also included in the workbook.

SESSION 1:

Welcome, Introduction, and what is FLEX?

Purpose:

1. To set a firm but encouraging tone for the orientation.
2. To help students understand why they have been selected to be FLEX finalists.
3. To explain what it means to be a part of a scholarship program.
4. To explain and discuss the official goals of the FLEX program.
5. To introduce the concept of a “toolbox” identifying skills and resources to help adjust to their new American life.

Topics:

- Overview of PDO
- The Scholarship
- The Toolbox

Overview:

During **Session 1** students get acquainted with the teachers and their peers and begin by establishing classroom rules. Students learn about the purpose of the PDO, and teachers give a brief overview of PDO sessions. Students share their personal goals for their exchange year and learn the official goals of the FLEX program. Students do an exercise listing their personal goals and discussing how they correspond with program goals. Students are introduced to the tradition of community service and volunteering in the U.S., and how they relate to program goals. Teachers point out that there are many ways to volunteer and that students can often find volunteering opportunities that coincide with their interests. International Education Week is also discussed as a way for students to be ambassadors of their country. Teachers stress that students may be the first person in their host communities from their country and that it is important to make a positive impression. Teachers introduce the concept of the Toolbox and “power tools” (tools that are particularly important) Teachers explain that students already possess two power tools - their communicative nature and their flexibility. Teachers also explain that when students encounter difficulties on program, it is their responsibility to take initiative to use their tools to overcome these difficulties. Students learn that responsibility and initiative are also power tools and that these power tools when combined with other tools that they will learn during PDO have an even stronger impact on their exchange year.

Tools:

- Responsibility, Flexibility, Communicative Nature, Initiative

SESSION 2:

Your Placement Organization, Chain of Communication, and Problem-Solving

Purpose:

1. To teach students about the structure of placement organizations involved in the FLEX/YES program and the roles they play.
2. To train students to communicate and cope effectively when problems occur
3. To prompt students to begin thinking about the realities of the exchange experience.
4. To discuss common issues students face while on the program and give them the tools to constructively solve problems.

Topics:

- Placement organization overview
- Problem solving and using the chain of communication
- Red Flag issues
- Green Light issues

Overview:

In **Session 2**, staff covers the role of the local and national/regional representatives in general (since this varies among the 15 POs that place FLEX students) and explains how POs may be structured. Students discuss what they should do if they have a problem while on program and highlight that many problems can be resolved by communicating with the people in the host community who are there to help them (i.e., host family, teachers, and local representative). Some problems will require the involvement of D.C. American Councils staff, hub staff, or natural parents. Teachers explain and demonstrate to the students how the chain of communication works and how and to whom students can reach out for help if they need it, which also works in reverse if natural parents have a question or concern about their child while on program. Students look at how the chain of communication works in a couple of examples and teachers take this opportunity to tell students that they should limit how often they communicate with people from home as this can cause them to become even more homesick. This leads to a discussion about common Red Flag issues which are issues that consistently pose challenges to exchange students who are on program:

- Attitude/gratitude (using the niceties and phrases we are used to in America)
- Rules and laws (students must follow all program, J-visa, PO, school, and host family rules, contrary to any expectation of "American freedom")
- Religion (the uniquely social nature of many places of worship in the U.S. is explained in contrast to the more typically singular, personal experience that characterizes practicing religion in other countries)

- Male/female roles (an explanation of the trend away from traditional roles in the U.S.)
- Computer and Internet usage (dangers and problems of social networking and sharing personal information online)
- Food (differences in quantities and preparation, as well as attitudes, i.e. “help yourself” and possibly eating at different times than family members)

Students observe a variety of skits performed by staff illustrating the various red flag issues, then debrief each by identifying the issue and what the characters could have done to avoid or resolve the situation. Teachers then discuss “green light” issues, which some students might find concerning at first, but which generally turn out to be extremely positive:

- Double placements (students get to learn about a new third culture, share experiences with someone their age, and gain a new friend)
- Dogs (Just as their host family might include host siblings, there is a good chance it will include “host pets”)
- Being placed in a small town (Former FLEX students, who lived in small towns, report that they got to know many different people and to teach many people about their home country.)
- Religious host families (Especially in smaller U.S. host communities, houses of worship are part of the larger community and sometimes are a key social center.)
- Empty Nest Placements (Some of the most successful placements can be with older “empty nesters” as they tend to enjoy the activity the exchange student brings to their now quiet home.)

Students discuss these points and other benefits of these “green light” issues.

Tools:

- **Chain of Communication, Placement Organization Structure, Polite Phrases**



SESSION 3:

Rules and Expectations

Purpose:

1. To reinforce the rules and laws students will have to follow while in the U.S.: U.S. and local laws, program rules, placement organization rules, school rules, and host family rules.
2. To clarify student rights and privileges while on the FLEX/YES program.
3. To re-emphasize the importance of "Speaking Up" should situations occur (i.e. living arrangements) which conflict with the intent of the program.

Topics:

- Different Types of Rules
- Rights vs. Privileges

Overview:

During **Session 3**, teachers discuss the difference between rules and laws and begin by teaching FLEX program rules. Students then learn about different U.S. laws. In one interactive exercise students read out loud from a letter written by a female scholarship exchange student who spent two days in adult prison in Texas for shoplifting. Students then learn

about the rules (and consequences) they are expected to follow while on program. They learn also that while some PO, school, and host family rules may be different, students must follow all the rules as given. Finally, students learn and take a quiz about the difference between program rights and privileges including topics such as meals, grade placement at school, receiving a diploma, own bed/room, stipend, and double student or single-person placements.



Tools:

- Different Types of Rules; Rights vs. Privileges

SESSION 4:

Culture and American Values

Purpose:

1. To define culture and reflections of culture.
2. To consider the many ways we learn our culture.
3. To identify some American values as reflected in proverbs.

Topics:

- What is Culture?
- Culture as a Tree
- How Do We Learn our Cultural Values?
- Identifying American Values
- Regional Cultural Differences in the U.S.



Overview:

To broach the complicated topic of culture, teachers guide the students through how we define our own culture and how our values and beliefs influence daily life. The first exercise involves students drawing pictures in their workbook of things a tourist would photograph if they visited their country, then discussing as group how they chose what to draw, and how in fact the picture is only a limited representation of culture, it does not convey the values at its foundation. Students also see a visual representation of culture using the analogy of a tree. Teachers explain that the students' current knowledge of American culture only represents the leaves of the tree, but that as exchange students, they will have the opportunity to learn firsthand about all things that are "under the soil", which gives the tree life – our values and beliefs. Next, students discuss where they learn these cultural values. Teachers then lead an exercise about common proverbs that exemplify American values including, among other things, privacy, honesty, creativity, personal responsibility, optimism, being polite, punctuality, personal hygiene, and thriftiness. Teachers use creative methods to convey the points such as matching the value to the proverb, which provokes thoughtful discussion, or performing skits that model the proverbs where students must guess the value. Teachers are encouraged to use appropriate personal examples to make this more realistic to the participants. While there are some general American cultural values, teachers point out that every person is different and that there may be regional differences in culture as well.

Tools:

- Culture as a Tree, American Values

SESSION 5:

You and Your Host Family

Purpose:

1. To consider how living in a different family setting will feel.
2. To identify some free time activities students may not be able to pursue in America and to consider some alternatives that will be new and valuable to them.
3. To identify some personal qualities and behaviors that will help students adjust to life with an American family.
4. To compare and contrast common American family rules, routines, and customs with those of the natural family.

Topics:

- You and Your Own Family/Fitting into a Host Family
- Suggestions for a Successful Adjustment
- Learning American Family Rules, Routines, and Customs

Overview:

Students discuss their own families, roles of each member, daily routines, who makes decisions and deals with discipline, and free time. This is compared to placements the students might already have in the U.S. (if received by PDO) and with sample host families of different compositions and interests from the students' natural families. This illustrates the likelihood of a host family different from their own family and to help students feel comfortable with the idea. For students without a host family by PDO, staff demonstrates potential host family variations by making paper dice with different family characteristics on each side to roll or students draw characteristics from a hat to compose their mock



host family. This reinforces the idea that students cannot choose their host families and that all kinds of families host. The workbook contains extensive corresponding data about American family composition and social/familial trends. To help students integrate more easily into their host families, students learn the acronym TOPHAT: Talk, Obey, Participate, Help, Affection, and Trust – all qualities and actions that will help them fit in. Alumni Assistants share their own experiences about what worked best for them. Finally, teachers explain in broad terms some typical host family rules such as curfew, chores, and internet/phone time, as well as possible consequences for breaking them.

Tools:

- TOPHAT, Host Family Differences, Host Family Rules



SESSION 6:

Applying What You've Learned

Purpose:

1. To help students understand that people are always influenced by their own cultures.
2. To discuss specific cultural differences students may encounter in the U.S.
3. To reinforce the idea that as exchange students, they are the ones who will be expected to adjust to cultural differences.

Topics:

- Sunglasses analogy
- Dear placement organization letters

Overview:

Session 6 continues the theme of culture using an analogy: differently colored lenses show how different people see their own and other cultures differently. The premise is that Americans, for example, wear yellow sunglasses (each student receives one yellow and one blue piece of plastic film) and people in the student's home country wear blue glasses. When an American goes to the student's home country, he decides to put blue sunglasses over his yellow ones, in order to better understand the local culture. He thinks he succeeds but it is actually more nuanced than that – his yellow sunglasses, representing his beliefs and values, are still there, so what he experiences is really a hybrid – blue over yellow, or green. Through this exercise the students learn that getting along in another culture will be easier when they understand that other traits and attitudes are not necessarily right or wrong, not better or worse, they're just different. We see things differently, and the lens of our culture is always part of how we perceive and experience new people and places. This is followed by the students breaking into small groups and reading, discussing, and then presenting (acting out, drawing cartoons, discussing in a talk show format, etc.) solutions to cultural challenges posed in "Dear Placement Organization" letters based on typical on-program support issues (including some that touch on the red flag issues) while constantly reminding students that every situation can be seen from more than one perspective and that it is "not better, not worse, just different!"



Tools:

- "Not Better, Not Worse – Just Different"

SESSION 7:

Adjusting to Living in Another Culture

Purpose:

1. To discuss emotional reactions to cultural differences.
2. To teach the concept of the adjustment cycle and give students suggestions for dealing with difficult periods.
3. To introduce the monthly rating lists that students can use to watch their own progress in the areas of language, family relations, school, general adjustment, and learning and growth.

Topics:

- Reactions to cultural differences
- The adjustment cycle

Overview:

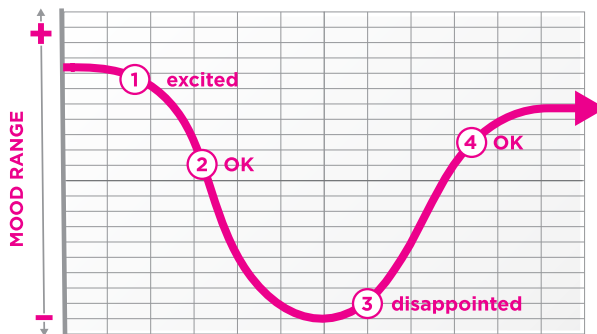
Having become familiar with cultural differences and terminology, students learn about how they might experience the adjustment process, namely, culture shock, in **Session 7**. Students read a letter from Omar who discusses his struggles with adjusting. The teaching team explains that everyone living in a foreign culture for an extended period of time experiences culture shock to some extent, and they discuss their own experiences with culture shock. Teachers visually explain the classic U-shaped adjustment cycle, and how they can use the “ADJUST” acronym (Ask, Do, Journal, Understand, Stay positive, and Teach) when they experience culture shock. Students split into small groups to discuss what advice they would give Omar for overcoming culture shock by using what they have learned. Students then look at a monthly rating list in their workbook, and teachers explain how students can use this to monitor their adjustment to the U.S.

Tools:

- **The Adjustment Cycle, ADJUST**



Stages of Cross-Cultural Adjustment



SESSION 8:

Taking Care of Yourself

Purpose:

1. To help students understand how emotional well-being is viewed in America;
2. To discuss the importance of resilience;
3. To teach tips and strategies that increase students' emotional well-being.
4. To reinforce the idea that as exchange students, they are the ones who will be expected to adjust to cultural differences.



Topics:

- Understanding Emotional Well-Being
- Know Yourself: Your Baseline, Your Stressors
- The House of Self-Care

Overview:

Session 8 teaches students vocabulary related to emotional well-being and explains how emotional well-being is impacted by cultural exchange. There is discussion about how students talk about moods and emotions in their home countries and how this compares to the United States as oftentimes Americans feel more comfortable sharing their emotions and experiences compared to many students from FLEX countries.

The concepts of comfort zone, stretch zone and panic zone are introduced. Students learn about the seven factors of emotional well-being with a focus on the fact that good emotional well-being is not the absence of stress or problems but rather a feeling that you know how to respond to problems.

There is a discussion of students' baseline (normal behavior, reactions, thoughts, and feelings) and how it is affected by stressful events. Resiliency is defined, students learn about stressors, and students practice affirmations and discuss other ways of dealing with stress. Calming practices such as box breathing and 'five senses' are introduced and practiced. Students are taught to start selecting tools and coping strategies (such as self-care) that will work for them in maintaining and improving their emotional well-being while in their new environment.

Tools:

- Resiliency

SESSION 9:

Money Matters and Making a Budget

Purpose:

1. To introduce students to allowances and budgeting.
2. To discuss budgeting as a reflection of American values– independence and responsibility of teenagers.
3. To explain the basics of the incidentals allowance.
4. To reinforce the importance of using the monthly allowance as it was intended, not saving most of it to buy items to take home at the end of the year.

Topics:

- Incidentals allowance procedure
- Monthly allowance

Overview:

Session 9 covers the basics of how to manage your money and make a budget – two very new concepts for most of the students who come on program. The central activity of this session involves the teachers giving each student \$200 in fake money (using different USD denominations), then going through an imaginary month on program. Each day the students are presented with situations and choices where they must decide whether or not to make a purchase. Looking at the photo below, you can see that one example (before the advent of Netflix) of this is "Sunday, October 26. Your friends want to come to your house to watch a movie. Cost of renting a movie: \$3." Each student who wants to make the purchase gives the required amount to the PDO teachers. Many purchases are "elective" such as "it's your host mom's birthday. Flowers: \$10," but some are required, meaning everyone has to



pay – for things such as toothpaste, a haircut, and so forth. At the end some students have a negative balance, some have almost all of the \$200 intact, and most are somewhere in the middle. This forms the basis for conveying to students the importance of making a budget and minding it carefully – not spending it recklessly, nor hoarding it to the point that they do not engage in their exchange experience. Teachers also explain the Incidentals Allowance and lead an exercise where students mark “yes” or “no” for which items (such as school uniform, mobile phone, instrument rental fee, and a phone card, among others) are allowable under the Incidentals Allowance and which are not, and then talk about the procedure for using this allowance (discuss what you wish to buy with your HF, then with your LC, if approved save the receipts, submit the receipts to PO, get reimbursed by PO). The session concludes with a True/False quiz, the answers to which are included as an appendix in the workbook for students’ reference.

Tools:

- **Budgeting Skills, Incidentals Allowance Procedure**

SESSION 10:

High School in America

Purpose:

1. To emphasize some of the differences that students are likely to encounter between their U.S. high school and their native school.
2. To prepare students to think about their academic course work in the U.S. and to introduce them to the value of a key resource: the high school guidance counselor.
3. To build vocabulary as well as understanding of U.S. high school courses, school counseling, and the notion of course choices.
4. To understand general high school rules in America and the consequences of breaking them.
5. To stress that students must make school arrangements at home regarding exams, gold medals, etc. before they depart for the U.S.
6. To reinforce to students that they cannot expect to receive a U.S. high school diploma or be in the 12th grade in the U.S.

Topics:

- Similarities and Differences
- Overview of High Schools in America
- Courses, Grading, Scheduling, and Support
- Common US High School Rules

Overview:

In **Session 10** students call out expectations of their U.S. school and qualities of their home schools, which the teachers flip-chart and then correct to show what U.S. school is like in reality. Teachers give a general overview of common characteristics of U.S. schools and much attention is given to typical rules in U.S. schools concerning violence, aggression, and harassment as well as plagiarism and cell phone use. Students are introduced to the entirely foreign concept of choosing a portion of your own classes.

Alumni Assistants give examples of their experiences, while they and the teaching



team continually emphasize that all high schools are different, experiences may vary, and that not all courses are offered at all schools. A sample high school Student Handbook is included in the workbook, and students are familiarized with this concept. Finally, students read a “Letter from Olga” which leads to an in-depth discussion about plagiarism.

Tools:

- High School Structure, Making a Schedule, High School Rules



SESSION 11:

Friendship

Purpose:

1. To discuss the concept of friendships across cultures and consider the ways Americans build friendships.
2. To offer meaningful suggestions for students to develop friendships on program, thus helping to fulfill essential program goals.

Tools:

- Different Meanings for Friendship
- Characteristics of American Friendships
- Tips for making Friends

Overview:

Session 11 discusses how young people make friendships at home and in the U.S. Topics include: the places where teens make friends, the depth and quality of these relationships, and how friendships are similar and different between their country and the U.S. Teachers share general characteristics of what friendship means in the U.S. and discuss actions that have caused problems between the participants



and American friends while on program (borrowing money and relying on American friends for transportation to activities). Next, the students examine a case study about a student who is struggling to make friends. The teaching team gives general tips for making friends in the U.S., using the easy to remember acronym FRIEND: First step, Reach out, Invite people to do things (don't wait for them to invite you), Expect challenges, be Natural (don't try to be someone you're not) and Do -join clubs, sports teams, other groups, as these are excellent ways to meet people.

Tools:

- Tips for Making Friends, American Ideas of Friendship

SESSION 12:

Succeeding in a Cross-Cultural Environment

Purpose:

1. To look at specific host family situations and analyze why the student is having an adjustment problem.
2. To use skills gained from the toolbox to solve individual situations.
3. To look for viable alternatives to situations when students find themselves in difficult problematic situations.

Topics:

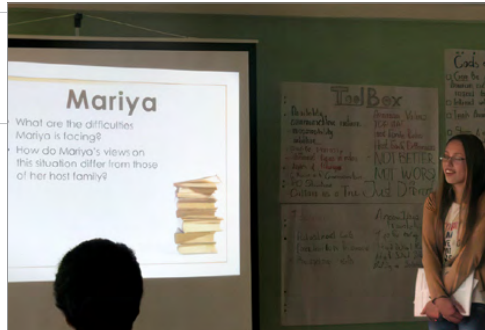
- Case studies

Overview:

In **Session 11** participants work in groups and are given case studies about students who are experiencing problems. These situations are culled from real-life on-program situations regarding Red Flag Issues among others. After reviewing their scenarios, the students present them to the class. The class together answers a set of related questions for each case study, which is facilitated by the teachers, and then decides which tools in their toolbox could help solve the problem and why. For example, the questions about "Mariya" in the photo refer to a scenario in which Mariya really likes her host family but is growing less comfortable with attending church three times a week with them. Students discuss what some possible solutions are, what Mariya should do now, and how her toolbox can help her."

Tools:

- By now, the toolbox is complete!



Other required PDO activities and items

Each PDO features an **Alumni Panel** that reinforces the topics and lessons covered at PDO and specifically addresses the Red Flag issues covered in Session 2. Five to seven alumni who have been carefully vetted by American Councils full-time staff sit on the panel. The Hub Director, or another American Councils staff member carefully moderates the panel. They monitor the panel and add to or correct information as needed to ensure that alumni answers are in line with program policies and realities. This once again reinforces for participants that everyone has a unique experience, and that they should keep an open mind.

Each PDO concludes with a skit performed by the PDO teachers and Alumni Assistants called **“An American Dream”** which shows students, in an entertaining but pointed way, how some unrealistic expectations can negatively influence their exchange year, and the importance of using the tools they have in their toolboxes. The skit follows starry-eyed Vasya from PDO to the U.S., where he experiences culture shock and has a hard time adjusting his expectations to reality. A visit from the “PDO fairy” reminds him of all the skills that he has and that he learned at PDO (as embodied by TOPHAT), which help him turn his experience around. In addition, the following material is also included in PDO:

- **Sexual Harassment:** Per J-1 visa regulations, a module and handout on sexual harassment is presented at all PDO cycles. The goal is to educate students about what sexual harassment is, give them examples of inappropriate relationships in the U.S. and how they can recognize them, and give them the resources to take action if they feel uncomfortable or threatened. The module includes an overview and case studies and lasts approximately two hours. It is led at all times by an American Councils staff person. Students are divided into male/female breakout groups for this session.
- **International Education Week (IEW):** Students are instructed to prepare “mini” IEW presentations to give at the beginning and end of classes, as a way to prepare them for and get excited about giving presentations about their home country during IEW in the U.S.
- **Field Testing:** Staff administer short written tests at the start of PDO, before classes begin, to help us select essay questions for the next program year.



Emotional Well-Being and Self-Care

PDO Session Overview



EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING AND SELF-CARE SESSION AT FLEX PDO

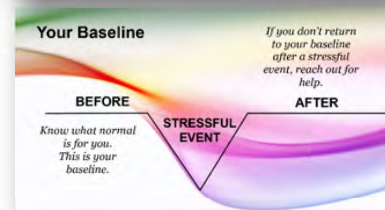
GOAL: Equip FLEX and YES students with an understanding of emotional well-being and self-care as part of the “emotional first-aid kit” they need in order to succeed and thrive on program when facing challenges by learning:

- How emotional well-being is impacted by cultural exchange – living in a new environment is stressful, even if it is GOOD stress! The program is intense and students may have high expectations of themselves. Our brain doesn’t always know the difference between good and bad stress.
- How to build a self-care kit before going on program:
 - Know your triggers.
 - Be open with people you trust.
 - Make a self-care plan (mindfulness, self-soothing, and self-care tools to improve emotional well-being while on program).
 - Begin healthy self-care habits.



KEY PRINCIPLES

- Emotional well-being does NOT mean you have no problems; it means you are able to **cope** with them.
- Know *your* baseline (normal functioning). A stressful event causes a drop in functioning. Most often, once you get through it, you return to normal.



INDICATORS OF EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

- **Energy level and motivation:** You wake up in the morning and start your day with enough energy. You are interested in the challenges of your day-to-day life, and you feel curious about learning new things. You accept that some days will be harder than others and you won’t do everything perfectly!
- **Friends and family:** You enjoy meeting new people, can share yourself with others and express yourself.
- **Academic success:** You try your best to complete assignments, show up on time, and focus well.
- **Asking for help:** You feel generally comfortable, content, and satisfied in your day-to-day life, and



Emotional Well-Being and Self-Care

PDO Session Overview continued

when you don't feel good, you're able to ask someone in America for help.

TRIGGERS AND CALMING PRACTICES

- **Triggers** impact action. Think about what some of your triggers are – perhaps being in a new place, or certain things people say, or their tone of voice, for example.
- **Calming practices** for self-care (choose how to build your “house” of self-care).
- Mindfulness means asking yourself the following, and not judging yourself in doing so: What am I thinking? Feeling? Doing?
- Common calming techniques include affirmations, yoga, gratitude, and deep breathing.
- Try the “breathing box” (inhale for a count of 4, exhale for a count of 4; repeat around the contours of the box, twice).
- Try the five senses calming practice:
 - What are 5 things you can see?
 - What are 4 things you can feel?
 - What are 3 things you can hear?
 - What are 2 things you can smell?
 - What is 1 thing you can taste?
 - Completing this exercise helps us to calm down and feel more focused.



COMMON WAYS EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING IS SUPPORTED in THE U.S.

Many Americans:

- Are open about their concerns if they observe someone is struggling.
- Ask a lot of questions about your thoughts and feelings
- Offer counseling
- Attempt to find solutions to help you feel better
- Assume that talking about it will make you feel better

CONCLUSION: WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW TO PREPARE FOR YOUR EXCHANGE

Throughout the session students complete a self-reflection worksheet where they can list their personal triggers, preferences, and plans, and are instructed to take a picture of this and bring with them on program.

- Identify triggers.
- Talk with trusted people.
- Make a self-care plan.
- Practice healthy self-care habits.
- Bring something from home to feel good while away.

Program Publications Library

(available upon request from your organization's main office)

American Councils has prepared pre-program materials for students and natural parents. These FLEX-specific materials provide basic information and cross-cultural preparation for an academic-year program in the U.S.:



Local Coordinator Handbook

The LC Handbook contains an overview of the FLEX program along with specific information about cultural adjustment issues, travel, recruitment and selection, re-entry, and alumni programs.



School Administrator Handbook

The SA Handbook is designed to help schools understand that FLEX is a unique program. It also contains information regarding the varied school systems in Eurasia and the issuance of diplomas to FLEX students by U.S. schools.



FLEX Informational Brochure

This is a general information brochure about the FLEX program designed for use with any audience.



Host Family Handbook

This host family publication designed to assist host families in understanding the FLEX program, policies and procedures, as well as general issues common to FLEX students. While this is a DOS publication, copies are available upon request to American Councils. Copies of this publication will be included in one of the application shipments sent to POs. It is also available on the FLEX online database.



Student Handbook

The Handbook is distributed to all finalists and alternates at notification. The handbook serves as a general-purpose guideline for students while they prepare to depart for the U.S., as well as while they are on program. It covers topics as varied as what to pack for the year, how to read an airline ticket, how to obtain help when needed, program policies for student behavior, and much more. A small supply is distributed to all POs.



Introduction to the USA Workbook

The Workbook is distributed to all finalists and alternates at their pre-departure orientation. The workbook serves as the core orientation textbook to prepare the students for their time in U.S. host families, U.S. high school, and U.S. culture. A small supply is distributed to all POs.



Natural Parent Information Guide

This Guide is distributed to all finalists and alternates at the time of notification. This Russian-language guide helps answer many of the questions and concerns that natural parents have as they prepare for their child's departure. A Ukrainian-language version also is published. An English-language version is distributed to all POs.



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