



The AIFS Foundation and the AYA Program

The Academic Year in America (AYA) program has been in operation since 1981 and is conducted under the auspices of the American Institute for Foreign Study (AIFS) Foundation. The Foundation is a 501©3 not-for-profit educational organization founded in 1967 with the assistance of the late Robert F. Kennedy. In addition to sponsoring the AYA program, the AIFS Foundation awards grants to high schools (known as the Tony Cook grant) for projects that encourage intercultural awareness. The Foundation is governed by a board of trustees that includes prominent educators and international business leaders. The board meets regularly to review the effectiveness and quality of the Foundation’s AYA program to ensure adherence to standards of excellence.

It has been designated by the U.S. Department of State as an Exchange Visitor Program authorized to issue the Form DS-2019 which enables qualified participants to apply for a J-1 exchange visitor visa from the nearest U.S. Consulate or Embassy. In addition, it is CSIET (Council on Standards for International Educational Travel) certified.

Our vision is “to encourage and inspire young people to become considerate and forward thinking citizens of the world, by creating dynamic educational opportunities to share beliefs, ideologies and values across cultures – and to provide these experiences with an unrivaled commitment to the safety of our students and service to our participants”

Our mission is “we bring the world together”!

The AYA Program

The AYA program has been developed for high school students, ages 15 to 18 from all parts of the world, who wish to spend a semester or full academic year studying in the United States while living with American families. Carefully screened students who have a demonstrated ability in the English language, a solid academic record and positive references, are hosted by American families and attend local high schools. While improving their English, these young people share a cross-cultural exchange with their host families, schools and communities.

The goals of the AYA program are to:

- Encourage Americans to learn more about foreign countries, cultures and languages
- Create opportunities for cross-cultural friendships.
- Increase understanding of the United States, its people, culture and history, among young people all over the world.
- Provide a solid educational experience for all participants in the program.
- Make participants better citizens of their countries through the cross-cultural exchange of ideas.
- Continue to offer programs that are superior from both experiential and administrative perspectives.

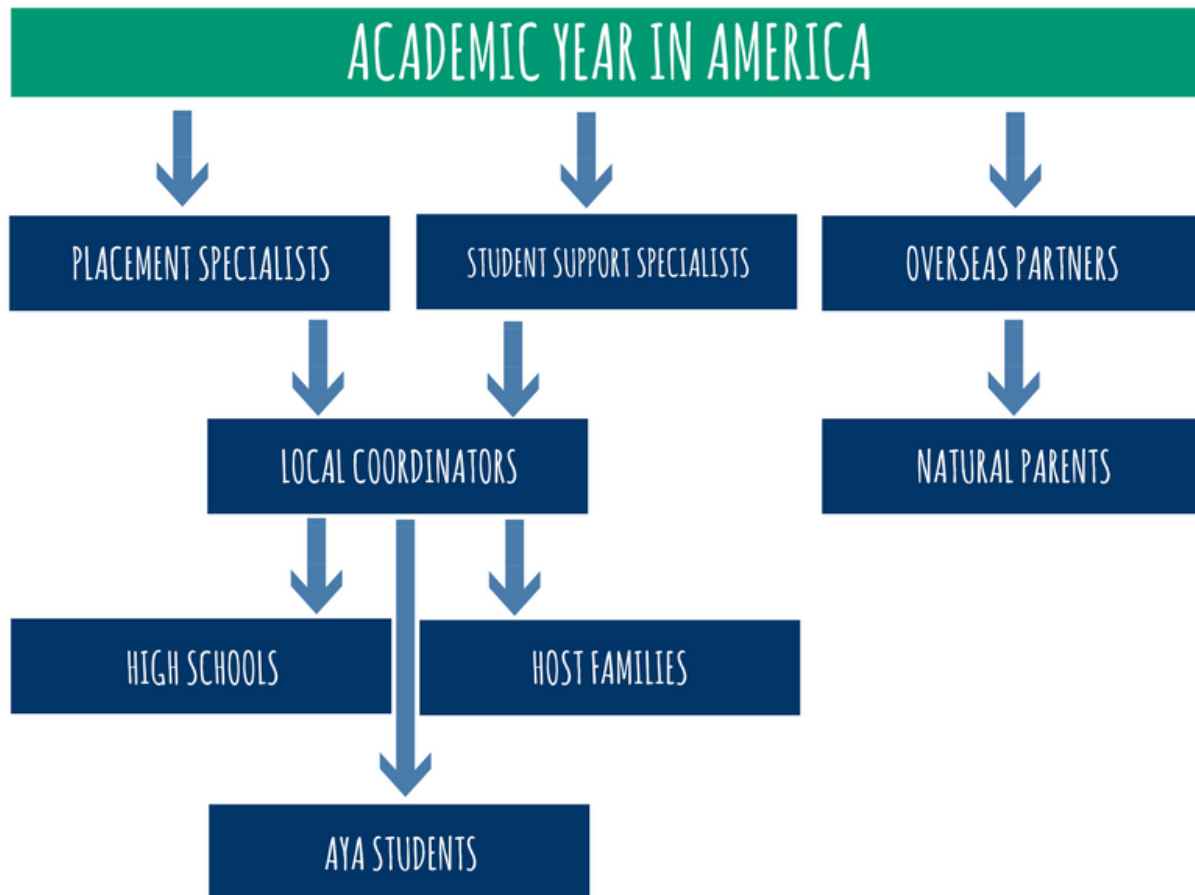


AYA students arrive in August for the 10-month full academic year, for the 5-month fall semester program, or in January for the 5-month spring semester program. Most of our students come for the full academic year, although we do place a smaller number of students for the August and January semesters.

Special Grant Programs

AYA is proud to be a grant recipient to administer the prestigious FLEX (Future Leaders Exchange) and YES (Youth Exchange and Study) scholarship programs sponsored by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. These programs are identified by both the State Department and by members of Congress as important initiatives in U.S. public diplomacy in helping to promote mutual understanding between U.S. citizens and key foreign policy countries. These scholarship programs are merit-based and highly competitive. The students selected are rigorously screened and identified as potential future leaders in their home communities. While in the U.S., these scholarship students participate in many different activities that enhance their experience, including local community service, International Education Week presentations in schools, and many different leadership and enhancement activities.

Key Players





Accredited High Schools

- U.S. high schools embrace AYA students as members of their student bodies.
- Students attend the local public high school serving the districts in which their host families live or a private school in the area.
- Students enroll in full course loads and can participate in most activities such as band, sports, etc., as long as the school approves their participation in such activities.
- School administrators determine a grade placement for students.
- Students must maintain a C+ in all classes.

Students

- They are between the ages of 15 to 18 and have a minimum of three years of English, a grade point average of C+ or better, and a passing score on an English language test.
- Their reasons for joining the program differ but all have a desire to improve their English, curiosity about U.S. culture and customs, and the dream to be a student in an American school.
- Students agree to adhere to the program rules.
- Students are fully insured and have their own spending money.
- They are from over 50 different countries, and are very thoroughly screened and interviewed.

Host Families

- Host families provide the student with a safe and suitable home for the academic year, semester, or welcome period.
- They welcome the student as a member of their family and encourage him/her to participate in all aspects of family life.
- Host families provide the student with their own bed and place to study, either in a room they share with a family member of their own sex and age range, or their own room.
- They provide the student with all meals except lunches purchased at school.
- Host families assist the student with school registration.
- They encourage the exchange of ideas by interacting with the student and exposing the student to the cultural and social environment of the home and neighborhood.
- They provide the love and understanding a young person needs to enjoy a successful academic year in America.
- They are flexible, patient, and open-minded.

Local Coordinators

Local Coordinators are the independent contractor, community representatives of the AYA program. They are volunteers who share a belief in the value of cross-cultural exchange. Local Coordinators are responsible for:



- Finding volunteer host families: networking, in-person promotion of the program, marketing initiatives, and more.
- Screening, interviewing and selecting safe and suitable host families.
- Enrolling students in local public or private high schools.
- Providing host families with a pre-arrival orientation.
- Supervising and counseling families and students during the year.
- Contacting students and host families monthly.
- Making sure students are safe throughout the program.
- Informing the National Office of any and all concerns and issues.
- Providing monthly student reports to AYA through your LC Portal.
- Answering questions and providing emergency assistance.
- Relocating students locally to other homes if necessary.
- Taking a student into his or her own home in the event of an emergency.
- Performing Second/Follow-Up Visits.
- Performing LC In-home Interviews.

Rules and Regulations

This section will focus on the Department of State federal regulations that are mandatory for the program and help ensure the safety of our students and the CSIET (Council on Standards for International Education Travel) standards. These federal regulations and standards enable us to offer exchange opportunities for students around the world while providing a safe environment. The Department of State regulates exchange student programs, and has designated AYA to issue J-1 visas that allow exchange students to live and study in the U.S. for a semester or school year.

CSIET, established in 1984, is a not-for profit organization that oversees and helps ensure that all organizations maintain a high quality international educational travel and exchange experience for participants. CSIET establishes standards for organizations operating exchange programs at the high school level, monitors compliance with those standards, and disseminates information. AYA is proud to be a CSIET certified program.

AYA has established our own program rules and guidelines to reflect the policies of the Department of State and CSIET. This section provides all of the guidelines mentioned above. It is important as a Local Coordinator to understand each of the federal regulations and guidelines prior to placing a student. Please share any questions you may have with your Placement Specialist. A copy of the DOS regulations is located in the Appendix.

U.S. Immigration Regulations and Procedures

As detailed in the Department of State's regulations, "...the United States Teenager-Visitor Program is designed to give teenage students from other countries an opportunity to spend from six months to one year studying at a high school or other educational institution in the United States. Under this program, a foreign student is placed by the Exchange-Visitor sponsor (in our case the AIFS Foundation's AYA program) with a United States family which serves as the host family for the duration of the visit. The



primary purpose of this program is to improve the foreign student’s knowledge of American culture and language through active participation in family, school and community life. A secondary purpose is to improve American knowledge of a foreign culture.”

When an international student has been matched with a host family and he/she has been accepted for admission to a U.S. school, the student may then be issued a visa to enter the United States. For students enrolled in the Academic Year in America (AYA) program, the AIFS Foundation issues a DS 2019 form. The DS 2019 form enables the student to obtain a J-1 exchange visitor visa from the nearest U.S. consulate or embassy in his or her native country so that he/she may enter the U.S. and participate in the AYA program.

A U.S. visa is a stamp placed by a U.S. consular officer on a page of a valid passport. It indicates that the consular officer has determined that the holder is qualified to apply for admission to the United States in a particular immigration classification.

The AIFS Foundation assumes full responsibility for all students participating in the AYA program.