



2021-2022 LOCAL COORDINATOR HANDBOOK



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PART I: THE PROGRAM

THANK YOU!

Thank you for your willingness to place a Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) student in your community! This handbook is provided to give you additional background information on the FLEX program. By learning more about the FLEX program, you will have 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 rewarding and educational.

THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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 youth exchange organization which you represent) to carry out the FLEX program. ECA refers to the organizations which place students in homestays 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.

¹ The term "Eurasia" as used in this text refers to the countries of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Ukraine.

WHAT IS FLEX?

FLEX (previously called the “FSA” or “Bradley” program) was originally conceived out of former Senator Bill Bradley’s conviction that the best way to ensure long-lasting peace and understanding between the United States and the countries of Eurasia is to enable young people from these countries to learn firsthand about the U.S. and Americans. The goal of the program is to promote mutual understanding and foster relationships between the people of Eurasia and the United States by enabling students to:

- ▶ Gain an understanding of American culture, diversity, and respect for others with differing views and beliefs;
- ▶ 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. civil society, including concepts such as volunteerism, the idea that American citizens can and do act at the grassroots level to deal with societal problems, and an awareness of and respect for the Rule of Law; and
- ▶ Share and apply experiences and knowledge in their home communities as FLEX alumni, initiating activities that focus on development and community service.

Congress entrusted the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) with administering FLEX as part of the FREEDOM Support Act Legislation. Since the program began in 1993, thousands of young Eurasian citizens have participated in FLEX and have returned to their 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 Future Leaders Exchange program is to increase mutual understanding between the U.S. and FLEX students’ home countries. Unlike students who pay a fee to come to the U.S. on a private exchange, FLEX students are awarded U.S. government scholarships mainly so they can learn about the U.S. and our system of government through experiencing life here firsthand. A major goal of the program is for participants to gain a real understanding of concepts such as student government, debate, citizen empowerment, volunteerism, and community action so they can take these concepts back to their home communities in the independent countries of Eurasia. The federal grant awarded to your exchange student’s PO includes funds for “enhancement activities” that help students learn about the U.S. through visits to state and local government,

participation in community service activities, and so forth. These funds can also be used for activities that enhance students' leadership, entrepreneurship and diplomacy skills, such as Model UN, Future Business Leaders of America, Student Council, and Junior Achievement or FFA.

YOUR ROLE AS A FLEX LOCAL COORDINATOR

As the student's local coordinator, you play an important part in this worthwhile program. Regular contact is essential in order to develop a supportive and nurturing relationship with your student so that s/he feels 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 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 student 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 his/her host family during post-arrival orientation.

Each placement organization is responsible for submitting quarterly reports to the FLEX program office at the Department of State. These reports are reviewed carefully and are used as a tool to refine and improve the program. Your input is not only welcome, but also extremely important as a way for the State Department's FLEX program office to keep track of trends, issues and successes. Also, we look for opportunities to let others know about program effectiveness and we depend on you to provide your headquarters office with information about your student, including photos, newspaper articles and any success stories that we can share.

As a local coordinator, you probably need to wear many hats. You may find that you serve as a counselor, teacher, mentor, trainer, and sometimes disciplinarian. The disparities between American and Eurasian 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 student(s) will most likely grow and flourish. They will gain a real understanding of concepts such as student government, debate, citizen empowerment, volunteerism, and community action so they can take these concepts back to their home communities in the independent countries of Eurasia. This is one of the greatest rewards of working with FLEX students and could not happen without your active participation.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF FLEX STUDENTS

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Your organization has probably incorporated a community service component into the program of its FLEX students. ECA supports this effort, since participating in volunteer activities provides a way for these students to give something back to their host communities. In addition, the concept of volunteerism, that is such an integral part of American culture, does not really exist in Eurasia in the same way it does here. This is one of the concepts that FLEX students most frequently take home with them. For example, in mid-April, FLEX students join FLEX alumni to celebrate Global Youth Service Day (GYSD), an event that encourages youth worldwide to organize and implement activities that assist their local communities. More information about GYSD can be found at: www.gysd.org.

CULTURAL PRESENTATIONS

FLEX students are expected to represent their home countries and to teach Americans with whom they interact about the culture and the socioeconomic system of their native countries. All FLEX students are expected to make presentations at their schools and in their communities about their home countries during International Education Week, usually the third week of November. While it is hoped that all high school exchange students will share their native culture with the Americans they meet, it is an obligation for every FLEX participant to be both a cultural teacher and student while he or she is in the United States.

When they return home, these students are expected to teach their fellow citizens about life in the U.S. It is especially hoped that they will be successful at countering some of the negative stereotypes of Americans that, unfortunately, exist among some people in their countries. Many FLEX alumni have written articles for local newspapers, have been interviewed on TV and radio, and have made presentations about American life in their schools and universities.

SPECIAL OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE FOR FLEX STUDENTS DURING THE PROGRAM YEAR

In addition to fulfilling requirements such as community service and cultural presentations, FLEX students can take advantage of special opportunities throughout the year. Local coordinators should encourage students to participate in these events. First, approximately 125 FLEX students will win places in a Civic Education Workshop to be held in Washington, D.C. in late winter through competing in an optional essay contest. 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 federal system of government and some elements of a civil society. Your student will receive information about the essay contest in the fall.

During the year, there may be other opportunities available for students such as online chats with prominent Foreign Service Officers who have lived in Eurasian countries as diplomats. It is important that you encourage your student to be involved in these high- profile online dialogues. In addition, your local community may offer leadership training or other similar skill development activities. This would be a wonderful resource for you to tap into as a way to help your student build capacity as a future leader of his/her country.

FLEX STUDENT RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS is responsible for conducting recruitment and selection of FLEX students under a grant from ECA. American Councils coordinates this effort from its Washington, D.C. headquarters, while staff of its field offices in Eurasia conducts the on-the-ground operations.

Recruitment of FLEX students is a massive effort that involves a comprehensive, three-phase, merit-based, open competition in the 10 Eurasian countries that are part of FLEX. American Councils field staff makes a tremendous effort to recruit students from diverse geographical areas, backgrounds, and ethnic groups. This ensures that the participants are representative of the distinct groups of people that make up the populations of Eurasia. Students with disabilities are also actively recruited in Eurasia, in keeping with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). No special consideration whatsoever is given to any candidate's financial status, which range from working class all the way to upper class, or to connections that a candidate's parents may have. This latter condition is unprecedented in a society where bribes and connections have historically been used as ways to get ahead.

At the start of the recruitment period, American Councils staff advertises an open competition in over 150 targeted cities throughout most of the countries of Eurasia in newspapers, on the radio, on television, in local schools, and through the Ministries of Education. In order to maintain geographical diversity, this includes a number of cities in remote regions. Students are asked to go to the nearest testing site with a birth certificate and photograph to prove that they meet the eligibility requirements. Students who are eligible are administered a short, multiple choice English test to qualify them for the next round of testing. Those who pass are given a comprehensive, secondary level English exam, such as the SLEP (Secondary Level English Proficiency), and are asked to write proctored essays in English on specific topics.

These tests and essays are then reviewed by a multinational committee. Students who make it to the third round are selected for demonstrating in their essays that they possess qualities necessary for intercultural adjustment. Successful students from this round write two more proctored essays on given topics, receive applications to complete and are interviewed individually by both American and local American Councils staff who have been specially trained to evaluate them. Interviews are 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.

Applications of those who reach the final recruitment stage are sent to Washington, DC, where American Councils coordinates a committee of over 200 volunteers to evaluate the documents and select the finalists. Committee members (referred to as "evaluators") have volunteered because of their interest in and support of international youth exchange and this part of the world. They may have had experience in the field of international exchange, or perhaps have worked or traveled overseas. They may also have background in the countries of Eurasia. Before beginning the selection process, American Councils trains the evaluators, as they train those who recruit and interview the students, so they will recognize the qualities and characteristics in a student that would be most indicative of that student's ability to have a successful exchange experience.

FLEX PRE-DEPARTURE ORIENTATIONS (PDO)

All students participate in an extensive orientation in their home country before they depart for the U.S. The orientations are conducted regionally by American Councils and take place approximately four to six weeks before departure. The major goal of the PDO is to prepare the students for what lies ahead. Therefore, the 12 interactive sessions focus largely on cultural issues they are likely to encounter in the U.S. that will be very different from what they've been accustomed to, such as American families and their values, diversity and tolerance, budgeting and high school in America. Students learn that they will need to use their flexibility, open-mindedness, friendliness, and interest in learning new things in order to have a successful exchange experience. American Councils has developed several publications used for orienting FLEX students, including a PDO companion workbook called Introduction to the USA, a Student Handbook describing all program policies, and a corresponding handbook for natural parents. You may receive copies of these publications from the headquarters office of your organization. Although this pre-departure orientation covers many topics regarding students' roles and responsibilities, it is strongly recommended that the same topics be discussed once more during a FLEX-specific post-arrival orientation after the students have been in the U.S. for about two or three weeks.

When students are notified of their selection as finalists, each is assigned to one of the placement organizations. The role of the placement organizations is fully

explained to students at the pre-departure orientations in Eurasia. At that time, each student is given general materials that have been provided by each PO describing its mission, rules and regulations. After arriving in the American host community, it is the responsibility of organization representatives at the local level (like yourselves) to further orient FLEX students about your organization's rules and regulations including, for example, stipend dispersal, insurance, schedule of activities and other policies.

ORGANIZATION OF FLEX STUDENT TRAVEL

International and domestic travel for FLEX students is organized by American Councils. **Given the age of these participants, difficult itineraries, current worldwide security concerns, and complex new airport procedures, ECA requires that for international travel they travel in groups with an adult escort, so they will not have to wait alone during layovers or deal with challenging travel issues on their own.** Once participants arrive in the U.S., they will travel to their host communities on their own. Because there are so many FLEX students, it is often difficult to accommodate individual student schedules. This means that although American Councils attempts to factor school start and end dates into students' arrival and departure travel plans, this is simply not possible in some cases because of the wide variations in school start and end dates throughout the country. In addition, a student's destination in Eurasia is taken into consideration when U.S. departure travel plans are being made. An additional complication is that many students have to overnight in their capital city before coming to the U.S., and all students overnight in Washington, D.C., upon arrival to the U.S. When you weigh in all of these factors, plus the challenges of travel within Eurasia, arranging FLEX travel becomes a very complex process. It is important for you to ensure that students and host families understand this.

For U.S.-inbound travel, set dates are made available to PO national offices to select from depending on the host family's schedule, the host school start date, and whatever other factors may be involved.

The U.S. departure travel assignment process begins in December. Your students will receive a Return Travel Request Form on which they are offered two or more options for a U.S. departure date. 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. **The form makes it very clear that a student's choice of a return travel date cannot be guaranteed.**

Departure dates are assigned on a first-come-first-served basis. There are a limited number of seats available on each flight; and once these are gone, there is simply no more room on that date. So you can help your FLEX students by encouraging them to return their completed forms as quickly as possible.

In order for you to be kept in the loop, you should establish a system for your students to provide you with a copy of the form. Host parents should also be aware that the students and their natural parents signed an agreement before departing the home country acknowledging their understanding and acceptance of this regulation. (See page 40 for a sample of this agreement.) The specific language in the Parent/Student Agreement is:

“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:

“The sooner this form is returned to American Councils, the better the chance of the student getting the date requested as they are handled on a first-come-first-served basis. There are places on the travel form for both you and your student to sign, indicating that all of you understand the travel policies as stated. The student needs to think very carefully when deciding between two or more dates. Changing travel arrangements can be complicated and costly so return travel dates will not be changed except in the most extreme circumstances. Extreme circumstances do not include prom, graduation, or any other year-end activity!”

See page 25 for more information on student travel.

THE LANGUAGE PROGRAM (LP) AND INDEPENDENCE PROGRAM (IP)

Most FLEX students will travel to the U.S. in August and will go directly to their host communities. A small number of students will arrive in the U.S. in late July because they have been identified as needing one of two special pre-program components—the Language Program (LP) and/or the Independence Program (IP). A few may actually be identified as needing both the LP and IP.

Language Program (LP)

About 10% of the total FLEX population has been identified as needing the LP, a set of activities specially designed to enhance their English language capabilities. These are students who were thought to be excellent candidates but were recognized as needing a little extra help in getting their English up to par. Each PO has the responsibility to plan the English enhancement activities for its own

| BEHAVIOR | POSSIBLE CULTURAL ROOT | STRATEGY TO HELP STUDENTS ADAPT |
|--|--|---|
| Persistence when told “no” | Influence of complex bureaucracies. “No” may mean “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. |
| Reluctance to do chores or accept invitation to help oneself to things around the house | Guests are “from God” and treated accordingly; not expected to lift a finger. | Remind student that they are a part of the family, not a guest. |
| Pessimism, complaining | Seeking sympathy and comfort. Also reflective of general pessimism felt in many of these countries where things are not proceeding as promised, planned or expected. | Remind student that Americans are optimists and respond better to positive approaches. There are ways to make your point without being negative. |
| Not smiling | Cultural value of being genuine, not wanting to seem “fake.” Not smiling is considered a neutral expression. | Remind student that Americans value friendliness and view smiling as an invitation to talk and may help make friends. |
| Dependence, hesitance, asking for more advice than seems usual | Close family ties. Children are encouraged to be “children” and not be too independent even as teens. | Give clear guidelines about when you expect the student to ask for advice/ permission, and suggest decisions they should feel free to make on their own. It may also be helpful to talk to students about how you make decisions. |
| Lack of eye contact, passivity | Accepted gender role (mainly for females), although may also be representative of a child’s respect for adults. | Encourage student to try new things, especially activities with other girls, where she can feel comfortable being “one of the girls.” Explain that eye contact in the U.S. shows that you are interested and attentive. |
| Reluctance to help with certain housework | Accepted gender role (mainly for males). | Remind student that housework in the U.S. is not “women’s work” or “men’s work,” it is just work. |
| Not able to manage money (spends too much or saves too much) | Natural family may expect student to bring money home. Student may want to save program stipend to buy popular electronics which are much less expensive in the U.S. If student perceives self as a guest, s/he may expect host to pay. No tradition of giving allowances to children. | Remind them that the stipend is provided to help them learn American culture by spending time with friends and participating in events. It is not intended to purchase big-ticket items. Help them set up a budget. |
| Difficulty taking personal responsibility/ initiative | Collective culture (focus on group problem-solving while de-emphasizing the individual). | Remind the student that they have to be responsible for themselves before they can be “independent.” |

LP students, so the programming may be different for students of different POs. For example, some POs may arrange for their LP students to be tutored individually in their host communities. Others may group their LP students in one location for a special English program, after which they will travel to their host communities. The LP emphasizes conversational English so students will be better prepared to take part in classroom activities and discussions when school begins.

Independence Program (IP)

The Independence Program (IP) is designed for any students with disabilities who need some extra assistance in learning how to function independently in their new environments once they have arrived at their host communities. This could involve activities that help them in getting around on their own, doing homework, doing chores, using public transportation, practice in using new equipment, or any number of related activities.

All students with disabilities will attend the Preparatory Workshop for students with disabilities to be conducted by an ECA grantee organization. This is mandatory for all FLEX students with disabilities. But don't confuse this Workshop with the IP! Not all students with disabilities may need extra independence skills training. The workshop serves to support the adjustment of all students with disabilities to the year ahead in the U.S. In addition, workshop staff conducts an initial assessment of each student's independent living skills and the needs that will have to be addressed for his/her long-term host family and school placements. At the conclusion of this workshop, workshop staff will provide the relevant POs with a detailed needs assessment on each of their students with disabilities. Workshop staff will also begin efforts in independence training for any of these students who need it.

After the one-week workshop, these students will travel to their host communities. If it has been determined that a student needs continued independence skills training (the IP program) when s/he gets to the host community, his/her respective PO will arrange an appropriate program for the student. If this student is also an LP student, the program will include English enhancement activities as well. If a student with a disability has not been identified as an LP or an IP student, then the PO will arrange other types of enhancements or community activities for him/her during this period before school begins. This may include the involvement of peers from the local school who can help with the student's acculturation.

HOW CAN FLEX STUDENTS BE ASSETS TO THEIR SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY?

FLEX students were selected because they exhibited leadership qualities. They

have been told to come to the U.S. prepared to make presentations about their home countries and cultures to schools, churches, and community groups. Please encourage your FLEX students to make presentations for their history and government classes as well as their school's international clubs. All FLEX students are required to make a presentation at their school during International Education Week (in November, usually the week before Thanksgiving). Although most students have the ability and confidence to make these presentations, some may need extra help and support. As a local coordinator, you should ensure that your FLEX students are prepared to make these presentations. In previous years, some FLEX students have made wonderful presentations at middle and elementary schools, as well. Most people think of the vast area of what used to be the Soviet Union as being only "Russia," but the USSR covered 8.6 million square miles, making it one of the largest territorially contiguous empires 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 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, 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. Students, school staff and others in your community could benefit from learning more about these countries and citizens after being isolated from each other for so long. As a local coordinator, it is important for you to be able to pronounce the name of each of these countries correctly and to find it on a map. As a guide, here are the names of the countries in this region with a phonetic spelling after each:

| | | | |
|-------------------|--|---------------------|---|
| Armenia | (ar-MEE-nee-uh) | Moldova | (mole-DOE-vuh) |
| Azerbaijan | (a-zer-buy-DJAHN) (‘a’ as in ‘cat’) | Russia | (you know this one!) |
| Georgia | (just like the U.S.state) | Tajikistan | (tah-DJEEK-uh-stan) |
| Kazakhstan | (KAH-zahk-stan) | Turkmenistan | (turk-MEN-uh-stan) |
| Kyrgyzstan | (KIR-giz-stan) | Ukraine | (you-CRANE) (NOT “ <i>The Ukraine</i> ”) |

CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON BEHAVIOR

Many of the values, beliefs and behaviors of FLEX students have been shaped by the political, economic and family structure of Eurasia. Under the old system, all Soviet people were guaranteed employment, and prices for goods and services were fixed. People struggled to buy food and other material goods, which frequently were scarce. They tended to be pessimistic and learned to get what they needed through creative strategies and/or non-traditional methods. Finding loopholes in “the system,” exchanging/expecting favors and even bribery were considered perfectly acceptable behaviors. The concept of individualism and the idea that one person could accomplish something as an individual was dismissed.

Although current FLEX students have not grown up under this system, their parents and grandparents have, and this will likely influence the students' behavior.

The chart on the next page lists behaviors that some American host families have noticed in their FLEX students. Next to each behavior is an explanation and the cultural influence(s) that may have contributed to the development of this behavior, and finally a third column provides suggestions for addressing these issues. Please note that not all FLEX students will exhibit these behaviors. In fact, it is likely that some FLEX students will not exhibit ANY of these behaviors. Each student's individual history and personality will influence how he or she adapts to American life. Please note that this is not to imply that FLEX students will necessarily be more problematic than other foreign exchange students. These are presented only to increase your understanding of the cultural influences that may play a part in the behavior of your FLEX student.

HIGH SCHOOL IN EURASIA

FLEX students can experience major culture shock when first attending school in the U.S. because it is very different from what they are accustomed to. Although each country in Eurasia has adopted and continues to modify its own educational standards, there are still some generalizations that can be made about the entire region. Usually, students of all ages study at the same, large "comprehensive" school from the first through the 11th grades. Students do not change classes as frequently as American students and it may take FLEX students a while to get used to having individual schedules and switching classes each period.

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 they greatly enjoy and appreciate while in the U.S. 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. Although some differences among schools in the different countries are emerging as they develop as individual nations, it is safe to say that there are still many commonalities. Generally, students in Eurasian schools take classes in up to 15 subjects a week, and they usually take advanced mathematics classes before Americans do. The methods of teaching (and learning) differ from the American model. In American schools, students usually are encouraged to form their own thoughts and theories individually and to defend them. In contrast, students from schools in Eurasia frequently work in groups and are expected to memorize and recite information. Alumni of the FLEX program often recall how impressed they were with the interactive atmosphere of American schools.

THE DIPLOMA ISSUE

Those of you who have already worked with FLEX students may have encountered students who insist that they be awarded a diploma at the end of the year despite the fact that students are told before, during, and after their pre-departure orientation, including upon initial application to the program, that their U.S. school may not issue them a diploma. Although this demand is not unique to FLEX students or even non-FLEX exchange students from Eurasia, some FLEX students seem particularly determined to persuade high school teachers, administrators, and counselors that they need a diploma, appearing not to take “no” for an answer.

This topic is especially difficult to explain to FLEX students because of the decentralized U.S. education system. Perhaps it is your local school's policy not to issue diplomas to exchange students placed in the graduating class, but another FLEX student in a neighboring city will be awarded a diploma. This will confuse the FLEX student who is accustomed to a system with nationwide policies and procedures. The FLEX student may be confused by different municipalities having their own policies and regulations. Each student will have his/her own set of expectations regarding the diploma issue.

Some FLEX students and their parents are convinced that they need some sort of official document provided by the high school that proves to their home school that they were studying in America for one year. Many schools have issued 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. Some have been able to use their high school diplomas to help them enter the university or waive their final year of high school. Others have not. A majority of the alumni reported that the diploma was overall a bonus because they thought it might help them get a job. If it is against the policy of your school district to award diplomas to foreign exchange students, perhaps you could help your FLEX student by encouraging the school to provide an official document recognizing his or her enrollment.

ECA respects the policies and decision of the schools in your community on this matter. We hope that this information will be helpful in explaining what motivates some FLEX students to seek U.S. high school diplomas.

STUDENTS WHO WANT TO STAY IN THE U.S.

This situation is not unique to FLEX students. Many high school exchange students express a desire to stay in the U.S. after the end of their exchange program, particularly to attend an American university. What is different for FLEX students is that they are subject to the two-year home residency requirement of their “J” (exchange visitor) visa because their program is sponsored by

the federal government. Privately-sponsored high school student exchange participants generally do not have this obligation. The J visa requirement states that participants in U.S. government-funded exchange programs must 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.

However, this “two-year” rule does NOT prevent individuals from returning to the U.S. for tourism, study, and other purposes that involve a temporary stay. A student wanting to return to the U.S. to pursue university studies may be able to defer the two-year requirement by applying to the consular office at the U.S. Embassy in his or her home country for an “F” (student) visa. While there is no guarantee of getting a visa, applicants will probably increase their chances by being able to provide: 1) a letter of acceptance to a U.S. college or university; and 2) proof of financial support (tuition, room and board) for the length of the study period. The important thing to tell your FLEX student is that he or she must go home at the end of the exchange year. The J visa covers just the period of the exchange program. ECA regulations limit the high school exchange visitor’s stay in the U.S. 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.” The student’s insurance will be cancelled, and the Department of Homeland Security will be informed. His or her status in the government’s centralized guest visitor computer system will be listed as terminated, which usually ensures that no consular officer will grant them a U.S. visa of any type should they ever wish to apply for one in the future.

ECA and the FLEX program office have a strict policy on this issue. Students must go home on the date assigned by the American Councils travel office. If they are planning to return to the U.S., we would prefer they not do so immediately. The objectives of the FLEX program (as well as its continued support) are largely dependent on the students taking home what they have learned and sharing it with those in their countries. To a degree, the cooperation we receive from the ministries of education in the ten Eurasian countries depends upon our ability to ensure that these students—some of their best and brightest—will return home.

All this having been said, it is important to clarify that there is nothing in the law that prevents a FLEX student from exploring university opportunities, taking college admission tests, and seeking scholarships while he or she is in the U.S. It will be up to the consular officer at the U.S. Embassy in the student’s home country to determine if the applicant meets all of the requirements for a university student visa. Attending university in the U.S. postpones but does not eliminate the two-year home residency requirement. If you find that a student is so focused on the college application process that s/he is not fulfilling FLEX responsibilities, you should let your headquarters office know. A student’s priority should be the FLEX program and not applying to a U.S. institution for further study opportunities.

The FLEX program office will not facilitate a student's remaining in the U.S. following completion of his or her program. We ask for your help and support in emphasizing to your FLEX students (and their host parents) that they must return home.

WHAT HAPPENS TO FLEX STUDENTS WHEN THEY RETURN HOME?

The Re-Entry Experience

Like all exchange students, FLEX students encounter a re-entry and adjustment period when they return home. However, these students may experience unique re-entry issues that stem from political, economic, and social changes that have occurred in their home countries while they were away. Upon returning, some alumni feel as if they don't recognize the country to which they have returned while others feel frustrated with the lack of progress during their absence. Students may start to compare the conditions in their home country with conditions in America. Sometimes, the comparisons may not be altogether positive. Some alumni have noticed, for example, that people in their countries do not smile or say thank you as much as Americans do. They may find their cities have some buildings in need of repair. On the other hand, many students have a new respect for their cultural traditions and practices and find themselves more patriotic; despite possible initial disappointment with the physical appearance of their country. Students may also have difficulty readjusting to life with their natural families. Traditionally, college-age students in Eurasian countries live with their families and do not move out until they have married and can afford to live on their own. Many people in Eurasia live in multi-generational households their entire life. 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. And parents often are not prepared for the changes that have occurred in their children. American Councils conducts reentry seminars for returning FLEX alumni, but not all students are able to attend because of university exam schedules or distance from the nearest American Councils offices in their country. Therefore, it is important that local coordinators discuss reverse culture shock with students before students leave the U.S.

The Alumni Program

In a sense, this is the most important component of the program. The FLEX program is sometimes referred to as "forward-focused" because everything the students learn and experience during their exchange year should be thought of as something they might be able to take back to their home countries. One major objective of the FLEX program is to give these young people knowledge, skills, and tools they can take back and use in order to benefit their home

countries. Returning FLEX students have the opportunity to join the vast alumni network organized by American Councils offices throughout Eurasia. Alumni meet regularly for discussions, viewing of American films, celebration of American holidays, debates, speaker nights, and career counseling, and to help with recruitment and orientation of future FLEX students. Many alumni have participated in community service activities, such as volunteering in local orphanages, cleaning up parks, visiting the elderly, and teaching English or basic computer skills to others in their community or region. In addition, alumni are frequently involved in professional development and civic activities (e.g., serving as poll monitors during a local election). Alumni who live in cities where there are American Councils offices have the opportunity to meet more frequently than students who have to travel to an event, but all students 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. Alumni may also get involved when the recruitment competitions are conducted in their home town. Many cities farther from the capitals also have a local “city rep” who coordinates local events and communicates with the main alumni office. Alumni stay connected with each other on email listservs and have their own online English language newsletter, The Bradley Herald (**bradleyherald.org**), which contains continuously updated success stories and articles written by the alumni as well as news about upcoming alumni events and grant opportunities. In general, FLEX alumni have been extremely successful both in school and in their communities.

The alumni program was created to give FLEX alumni the opportunity to connect with one another and to continue their American experience. It provides both an outlet and a forum for these bright young individuals and gives them opportunities to participate in activities that support their movement into positions of leadership. In addition, alumni are able to provide a support system for one another during the readjustment period. If your FLEX students want to learn more about participating in the alumni program, tell them to contact the nearest American Councils office after they return home. Please be sure your FLEX students know about the alumni associations and encourage them to participate.

PART II: OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES

The following has been excerpted and adapted from the FLEX Operational Guidelines and J-1 Visa Regulations for Placement Organizations, Program Year 2010-11. This document is based on the Code of Federal Regulations (22 CFR Part 62.25), also referred to as “J visa regulations.” You may check the CFR website regularly for updates as it is subject to change: <https://ecfr.federalregister.gov/on/2021-06-09/title-22/chapter-I/subchapter-G/part-62>.

The references below (i.e., “...per Section (I) (1) (i)...”) refer back to the J visa regulations, which can be found in Part III of this Local Coordinator Handbook.

Unless specifically naming the local coordinator, the reference to “PO” in the following text refers to a representative of the Placement Organization’s (PO) national office. These guidelines are established for the smooth administration of the FLEX program and federal regulations support the safety and security of exchange students. These guidelines are provided here for your reference.

SECURING HOST FAMILY AND SCHOOL PLACEMENTS

Per Section (f) (7) of the J-1 visa regulations, once a finalist’s DS-2019 has been issued, the placement organization to whom the student is assigned bears responsibility for placing that student, unless the student withdraws or fails to receive a U.S. visa. Please see pages 32-34 for definitions of these terms.

Host School Placement Requirements

Sections (c) (1) and (f), parts (1) through (6), require that placement organizations must 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. Placement organizations are required to keep copies of these acceptances and arrangements on file and provide them to the Department of State upon request.

Further, schools must be provided with a written summary, in English, of the exchange student's complete academic course work prior to starting the host school. American Councils requires that students complete this at their pre-departure orientation and bring it with them to the U.S. for this purpose; if needed earlier, American Councils can assist. Sponsors must also inform the prospective host school of any student who has completed secondary school in his/her home country; this information will be available to POs via the FLEX online database, in the Pre-Departure Orientation Student Agreement, and upon request if needed earlier. Placement organizations may not enroll more than five exchange students in one school unless the school itself has requested, in writing, the placement of more than five students.

Finally, according to this section, under no circumstances can American Councils facilitate the entry into the U.S. of a FLEX student for whom a written school placement has not been secured. See the travel section in these guidelines for more information.

Host Family Placement Requirements

Per Section (I) (1) (i), placement organizations must secure a permanent or temporary host family for the student prior to the student's departure from his/her home country. Neither placement organizations, nor American Councils, may facilitate the entry into the U.S. of a student for whom no host family has been secured.

HOST FAMILY RECRUITMENT

Per section (m) (1) – (4), placement organizations must ensure that their promotional materials represent their purposes and activities professionally, accurately and ethically. In recruiting host families, placement organizations 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. Specifically, placement organizations 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.

HOST FAMILY SCREENING REQUIREMENTS

Placement organizations must screen and select all host families, **whether permanent, temporary, assessment, OR repeat hosts**, according to criteria established in section (j), (1) – (9). This section specifies that potential host families 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 visa regulations; b) a description of the home including photographs of the interior and exterior of the home; c) information about family composition; and c) a statement about how information collected about income will be used. Families who are 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 placement organization may also ensure that the family is capable of providing a comfortable and nurturing environment and that the home is sanitary. The family must be able to provide a separate bed (inflatable beds or convertible sofas are not acceptable) for the student, storage for personal belongings, study space and access to an exit in case of fire or other urgent need. Placement organizations 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), results of which must be uploaded into the FLEX online database. A criminal background check and check of the national sex offender registry must be run on all members of the host family who live in the home and are 18 years of age and older (either from the beginning, or who move in later) or who will turn 18 while the exchange student is in the home. Placement organizations should also inform American Councils of changes to the host family composition. Placement organizations must maintain records of all of these screening pieces and keep in mind that an exchange student **may not** live with his/her relatives.

Finally, per section (j) (9), placement organizations must obtain the written agreement of the exchange student and the student's natural parents in the case that the host family is composed of a single adult with no children living in the home. Single host parents with no children in the home must also undergo a secondary level of review by a placement organization representative other than the person who recruited and selected the applicant.

According to this section, under no circumstances may American Councils facilitate the entry into the U.S. of a FLEX student for whom a host family placement has not been secured. See the travel section in these guidelines for more information.

ECA requires that placement organizations analyze the results of criminal background checks with the goal of ensuring there are no findings that could adversely affect the health or safety of the student. The placement organization is responsible for making justified, valid, informed decisions about whether a potential host family is considered to have "passed" the criminal background check.

In addition ECA requires that the following people undergo a criminal background check and telephone interview:

- ▶ Anyone 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/or family friends.
- ▶ Anyone who assumes responsibility for the student in the absence of the host family, such as if the host family goes on vacation without the student and leaves the student in the care of a neighbor. Placement organizations should also inform American Councils of this by email.

HOST FAMILY REQUIREMENTS

Per Section (d) (9), placement organizations must conduct a host family orientation after the family has been vetted and accepted. Per Section (k) (1) - (5), At this orientation placement organizations must convey of the philosophy, rules, and regulations that govern the FLEX exchange program as well as “best practices;” provide all host families with a copy of the Department’s letter of appreciation to host families; provide host families with a copy of 22 CFR 62.25; provide all host families with strategies to aid in their and the student’s cultural adaptation, including conducting workshops to familiarize host families with cultural differences; and advise host families that they are responsible for informing their placement organization of any material changes to their or their student’s status including but not limited to change of address, finances, employment and criminal arrests.

As well, ECA requires that POs conduct site visits to the homes of at least 20% of their students, in order to see the students firsthand in their host environments.

Emergency Placements

If, in case of emergency, a placement organization has to immediately (within 1-24 hours) remove a student from the assigned host family home, the placement organization is responsible for placing the student with another host family that has been screened according to the criteria described in Section (j), (1)-(9).

REPORTING PLACEMENTS AND PLACEMENT CHANGES

Purpose

Timely reporting of complete and accurate host family and school placement information by POs 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, and handling of emergency or other early return situations.

When to Report Placements and Placement Changes

All placements, changes in placements, and changes in airport information should be reported to American Councils within two business days of the change, or sooner if possible. Types of changes include the following:

INITIAL PLACEMENT

Host family and/or school information provided to American Councils once you confirm that the required documentation has been secured and approved.

TECHNICAL CHANGES

If you discover that any of the contact data or spelling has been provided incorrectly, a new placement report needs to be submitted to American Councils.

CHANGE OF HOST FAMILY

Per Section (I) (3), in the event that circumstances necessitate a change of host family placement, placement organizations must document the reason for the change. This can be done by providing the new information to American Councils via its online database and by sending an email to the on-support officer with a brief explanation. Placement organizations must also provide ECA with an annual report reflecting the number and reasons for such changes.

If a student changes host families while on program, the placement organization is responsible for any and all necessary related travel.

HOST FAMILY COMPOSITION

The name of every person who lives in the host home as well as their relationship to the host family must be provided to American Councils. This includes any double-placement or other exchange visitors.

CHANGE TO HOST FAMILY COMPOSITION

If the host family composition changes in any way, including but not limited to if someone leaves or joins the host family, the FLEX online database must be updated to reflect this change, and a brief explanation emailed to the on-program support officer; in addition, the placement organization must run a

criminal background check on the new person, if age 18 or older, and conduct an interview with him or her.

Contacting Natural Families and Students in Eurasia

For initial placements: POs should advise their staff and their host families (HF) not to contact students until the PO has received the “all clear” from American Councils. This will ensure that your HFs do not call/email/find the student on Facebook and surprise students who have not yet been [1] health cleared and [2] notified of their finalist status. Once American Councils gives POs the “all clear” to contact students, POs should encourage their HFs to begin trying to contact their host students, as students likewise will be attempting to contact their HFs.

For placement changes: Please wait 10 days after your placement change is CONFIRMED by American Councils (e.g., delivery of the email confirmation before you or the host family attempt to contact the natural family or student in Eurasia. This delay is necessary because it can often take a week or more for American Councils field staff to make contact with and notify the natural family in Eurasia of a change in placement. Natural families expect to be notified of placements by the local program representative. Long-distance phone calls from unknown persons in America to non-English-speaking natural parents in Eurasia are out of the ordinary and can be very problematic. As well, unfamiliar email can end up in junk or spam mail, and cause the sender to believe their contact is being ignored, thus causing offense.

Permanent versus Temporary Host Families

Per Section (I) (2), placement organizations must inform the student of the host family composition and background, whether the placement is permanent or temporary. This can be done when entering information into AIS, which is then automatically emailed to the American Councils overseas office for conveyance to the student.

Placement organizations are required to screen temporary families according to the same criteria outlined in Section (j), (1) – (9). For host family placements, definitions are as follows:

- ▶ **Permanent:** If the host family is accepting the student for the duration of the exchange, or
- ▶ **Temporary:** If the host family is accepting the student for only part of the exchange.

Special Placements

Double Placement

Per Section (I) (1) (ii), placement organizations shall not place more than one

exchange student with a host family without the prior express written consent of the host family, the natural parents, and the students being placed. In such cases, placement organizations should utilize ECA's Double Placement Agreement Form, and send it to American Councils* to obtain the student's and the natural parents' agreement to a double placement.

Under no circumstances may a placement organization place more than two exchange students in one host family home 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.

ECA requires that the Double Placement procedure be completed if ANY other Exchange Visitor (regardless of what type of visa he/she is on) is living with the FLEX student's proposed host family. Further, ECA will not approve double placements under the following conditions:

- ▶ If both students are FLEX students
- ▶ If both students are from different countries but share a common language besides English

POs must keep copies of the signed, approved double placement forms, which must be promptly provided to ECA upon request.

SINGLE PARENT PLACEMENT WITH NO CHILDREN

Per section (j) (9), placement organizations must obtain the written agreement of the exchange 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 placement organization representative other than the person who recruited and selected the applicant.

STUDENT TRAVEL

Travel Administration and Logistics

Internal Eurasian travel, international travel, initial U.S. domestic travel to the host family, including travel to and from the IP workshop in Summer 2012, and end-of-program U.S. domestic travel from the host family are administered by American Councils. FLEX students travel to and from the Eurasian international gateway airports in groups of approximately 20-60. A trained adult flight leader

accompanies them. Students are assigned to international group flights by country and preferred flight dates as entered by the PO into AIS.

Travel to the United States: “U.S. INBOUND”

TRAVEL WINDOWS

- ▶ Travel for LP students (needing the language program) and students with early school start dates: July 30 and 31, 2012
- ▶ Travel for students with disabilities and students who attend the Moldova EFL Camp: August 6, 2012 (IP students travel to Eugene on August 7 and to their HFs on approximately August 12 or 13, 2012)
- ▶ General Travel: August 6-24 and 28-30, 2012

All students, except those whose final airport code is IAD, will overnight near Dulles (IAD) airport upon arrival to the U.S. from Eurasia, and travel to the preparatory workshop for students with disabilities or their host communities the following day. The dates above reflect the date the student arrives to Washington, DC (IAD).

Non-IP students whose final airport code is IAD (Dulles) will not overnight before going to their host families. Host families or PO representatives will be expected to pick up their students upon the students’ arrival to Dulles airport. American Councils airport staff will collect the students’ stamped DS-2019 and I-94 forms to make copies for audit documentation purposes; these forms will be returned to the students by express courier the following business day. Host families and PO representatives should be sure to identify themselves to American Councils airport staff before departing with their students, so that staff can ensure the students have been united with the correct host families or representatives.

U.S. HOST SCHOOL AND HOST FAMILY PLACEMENT

Students cannot depart for the U.S. unless a school placement and host family placement have been secured and entered in AIS. If no school and host family placement information has been entered by the Wednesday before the student’s scheduled travel week, the student will be moved to a flight on either August 28, 29 or 30, 2012 (with special consideration given to the July arrivals), as follows:

- ▶ Wednesday, July 25: Placement deadline for students arriving on July 30 and 31
- ▶ Wednesday, August 1: Placement deadline for students arriving the week of August 6
- ▶ Wednesday, August 8: Placement deadline for students arriving the week of August 13
- ▶ Wednesday, August 15: Placement deadline for students arriving the

week of August 20

- ▶ Wednesday, August 22: Placement deadline for students arriving on August 28, 29 or 30

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 his/her scheduled arrival to the U.S.

SELECTION OF U.S. HOST COMMUNITY ARRIVAL DATES AND AIRPORT CODES

Students will travel in groups of approximately 20-60. An adult flight leader will accompany each flight group. POs may begin selecting their preferred arrival dates and airport codes for students using the travel component in AIS (accessible from each student's Summary page) beginning in March 2012. Using the AIS travel system, POs will be able to select from the available dates for each country, and may select a primary and a secondary airport code. Once a travel date has been selected to capacity, the date will not present as an option to anyone else selecting dates for that country. POs must select, in AIS, their preferred travel dates and airport codes for students arriving in July no later than June 1, 2012. For students arriving in August, POs must select preferred inbound dates by June 8, 2012, and airport codes no later than July 6, 2012. After these deadlines, the respective fields will be locked and changes will be by special request only via email to American Councils. American Councils will enter final travel date and airport code assignments into AIS by July 13, 2012.

INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC ITINERARIES

Beginning in June 2012 POs may access their students' complete travel itineraries. All itineraries will be posted at least three (3) weeks prior to the student's departure from Eurasia. Domestic itineraries will begin to appear as POs provide airport codes in AIS. All students will arrive to Washington-Dulles International Airport (IAD) and overnight there, traveling on to their host families (or to the preparatory workshop for students with disabilities) the following day (with the exception of non-workshop students whose final airport code is IAD). Students will not be scheduled to arrive at the host family community after 11:00pm local time without American Councils' and the PO's joint consent. Such arrivals may occur, however, as a result of airline scheduling changes or delays.

CHANGES IN AIRPORT CODES

POs may make changes in arrival airport codes using the placement report procedures up until July 6, 2012. After this time, the airport code field will be locked and changes will be by special request only via email to American Councils.

Travel to Eurasia: “U.S. OUTBOUND”

TRAVEL WINDOW

| **All Students:** May 14 - June 21, 2013 (estimated, subject to change)

CONSIDERATIONS FOR ASSIGNING RETURN FLIGHT DATES

American Councils will endeavor to assign all students to return flights on the date they and their host families request. It cannot guarantee, however, that all requested dates will be honored because of several considerations. Flight assignments will be made based upon whether students must take end-of-school exams in their Eurasian 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 FLEX Host Family Handbook (page 14) and Form 8 (Parent/Student Agreement) of the FLEX application (point 13; see Part III of the Local Coordinator Handbook), year-end activities such as prom and graduation are not taken into consideration when assigning return flight dates. In addition, per Form 8, the student must return home at the end of the program on the date assigned by American Councils. The U.S. visa will not be amended or extended beyond the program end date. No exceptions will be made to this policy.

EXAM DOCUMENTATION

The natural parents of students with exam obligations in their home countries must submit documentation of said exams directly to American Councils' field offices in Eurasia. Field staff will enter the dates into AIS for POs to review when entering students' requested travel dates. American Councils DC staff will also use these dates to determine final return date assignments.

RETURN TRAVEL REQUEST FORM

American Councils will mail a Department of State-produced return travel request form to all students and their host families in early December 2012. The form is to be returned to the students' POs by February 1, 2013, who will enter the requested date into AIS. American Councils will make the final date assignments. Students and their host families have the opportunity to use this form to request a preferred departure date based on the available international flight schedule specific to each country. Students and their host families are strongly encouraged to consult with natural parents during this process to find out whether or not the student has exam obligations in

Eurasia. If a student and his/her 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.

RETURN TRAVEL DATE ASSIGNMENT AND CHANGE REQUESTS

Return travel date assignments will be available via the travel report in AIS for POs to share with students by February 11, 2013. Requests for changes may be made through mid-March 2013, 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.

ITINERARIES AND TICKETS

POs will be able to view their students' detailed return travel itineraries on a dedicated website. Transatlantic itineraries will be visible on the site beginning in early to mid March 2013 and finalized, complete itineraries will be posted during the second week of April 2013. Plane tickets will be issued in late March-early April, 2013. Tickets and return travel packets will be mailed to POs starting in mid-April 2013. POs will receive all tickets and return travel information packets to mail to their students at least three weeks prior to their students' departure dates.

Flight Leaders, Airport Transfers, Overnights, and Travel in Eurasia

FLIGHT LEADERS

An adult flight leader will accompany all students with disabilities, as well as all international groups larger than 10 students, both during U.S.-inbound and -outbound ("return") travel.

AIRPORT TRANSFERS

Students en route to or from the U.S. will be assisted, as needed, by American Councils airport staff at their U.S. international departure or arrival gateway – Washington-Dulles International Airport (IAD) or Chicago-O'Hare International Airport (ORD, a primary transit airport). Students in need of assistance while traveling should call the American Councils travel emergency

I phone number printed on their electronic ticket.

SCHEDULED OVERNIGHTS

All students, except those whose airport code is IAD, will have scheduled overnights upon arrival from Eurasia to Washington–Dulles International Airport (IAD) during which time they will be assisted by American Councils staff. **Those whose final destination is Dulles must be picked up by their host family or PO representative at Dulles airport on the date that they arrive.** Lastly, some students may need to overnight in the Dulles area, under staff supervision, on their way home, in cases where service from the host community airport is limited to the degree that the student is not able to arrive in time for their international flight on the same day.

TRAVEL IN EURASIA

American Councils overseas staff will work with natural parents to arrange students' travel from their home towns to their Eurasian gateways (usually the capital cities of their countries) at the start of the program, and back home again at the end of the program. American Councils will escort all departing students to, and meet all arriving students at, their Eurasian gateways, and will arrange all check-in issues, transfers (including necessary overnights) to or from connecting trains, planes, and other modes of transport in Eurasia.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

American Councils will distribute a booklet to all FLEX students that describes travel procedures, as well as security and safety measures, to follow. They are required to follow these procedures while in transit to or from their host families. Students must wear their blue FLEX T-shirts and ensure that their luggage is checked to its final destination. In cases of missed flights, cancellations, or other unexpected changes to their itineraries, students must inform American Councils at 800.841.6460 (which is also printed on their FLEX t-shirts and on their electronic ticket), unless they have already spoken to American Councils staff at the airport. American Councils airport staff will not leave the international gateway airport or the Washington, DC, office until they have accounted for all students.

FLEX students are solely responsible for ANY AND ALL **excess** baggage fees that they incur during travel to and/or from the U.S. FLEX students and their natural parents are made aware of this on multiple occasions. American Councils cannot reimburse POs and/or HFs for any **excess** baggage charges that they cover on behalf of a FLEX student.

NOTE: Arriving and departing FLEX students travel primarily on United

Airlines and its partner airlines. United and all other major carriers have, as of this writing, changed the free international passenger baggage allowance from two bags to one. Thus, while our students are considered international passengers, they are now only allowed one free piece of checked baggage that conforms to the size/weight limitations; the second piece will cost \$70.00. As regards **2012 Inbound** travel, the fee will be paid in the students' home countries by American Councils staff when the students check in for their flights to the U.S. For **2013 Return** travel, American Councils will include a \$70 check in the return travel packets that will be sent to students, along with an explanation of the check's purpose.

Anyone receiving a call from a student in transit seeking assistance is asked to instruct the student to contact American Councils at its travel emergency number: 800.841.6460.

HOST COMMUNITY ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE AIRPORTS

Air travel is arranged by American Councils to and from any U.S. airport designated by the PO that has regular, commercial airline connections to or from the student's U.S. gateway airport (IAD, Washington-Dulles International Airport). American Councils may, at its discretion, arrange arrival or departure from a nearby, alternative airport in an effort to obtain the most cost effective travel arrangements. If the alternative arrival airport is more than 50 miles from the PO-designated host community airport, American Councils will confer with the PO about the change.

All students traveling to the U.S. in July and August 2012 will arrive to Washington-Dulles International Airport (IAD). Requests for BWI (Baltimore-Washington) or DCA (Reagan Washington National) airports cannot be accommodated.

GROUND TRANSPORTATION

American Councils does not provide ground transportation to and from the student's host community airport. This is the responsibility of the PO and/or the student's host family.

EARLY RETURNS

The Department of State must authorize the early return of a student to Eurasia before American Councils can arrange a departure travel itinerary. Once counseling and on-program support channels have been exhausted, the PO should submit the repatriation request to the Department of State for authorization. These requests must be copied to American Councils. Return travel is scheduled by American Councils in consultation with the PO and American Councils field staff, which will meet the returnee at the Eurasian

This is one of many non-immigrant types of visa categories. J visas are issued to certain foreign exchange students (high school, university, post-graduate), teachers, trainees, au pairs, specialists, camp counselors, et al. All FLEX students come to the U.S. on a J-1 visa.

ALL FLEX students have a two-year home country physical presence (residency) requirement that prohibits students from emigrating to the U.S. or receiving a U.S. work visa until they have satisfied the residency requirement. The J visa also prohibits holders from changing their visa status while in the U.S. The two-year residency requirement does not govern the issuance of business, tourist or student visas. It is always up to the U.S. consulate to decide if a person should receive a visa, regardless of the two-year residency requirement.

I-94 CARD

This card serves as the official arrival-departure record for all foreign nationals entering the U.S. It is stamped at the port of entry with one portion retained by the immigration officer and the other portion remaining with the holder who needs to turn it in to the airline upon departing the country. Generally a person does not need an I-94 to exit the U.S. and return home, but this may change in the future.

LOST OR DAMAGED PASSPORT

International passports are not replaceable. In case of a **lost, stolen, or irreparably damaged passport**, please inform American Councils, contact the student's respective consular district office (which may or may not be in Washington, DC), and follow the guidelines on obtaining a certificate of return. **Generally**, most Eurasian consulates require the following documentation to issue a certificate of return, and will only issue it 15-30 days prior to the student's travel date:

- ▶ Completed application form requesting certificate of return
- ▶ Police report (in case of stolen passport)
- ▶ Two (2) passport-size photographs
- ▶ Non-refundable application fee, ranging from \$30-\$100 (usually in the form of a money order issued to the Eurasian country's embassy)
- ▶ A photocopy of lost/stolen passport (American Councils can provide this)
- ▶ A pre-paid, self-addressed FedEx envelope (so that the consulate can deliver the certificate of return to the student.)

On average, a certificate of return is valid for 30 days. Therefore, it is important to collect all necessary documents in advance and mail them to the consulate once the student's return travel date has been finalized.

- | Please contact the respective consulate to confirm their requirements.

EXPIRED PASSPORT

In case of a passport that expires BEFORE the student's return to their home country, American Councils will generally be aware of the situation in advance because it is the policy in some of the Eurasian countries not to issue permanent passports to children under a certain age. American Councils overseas staff will request that the issuing Eurasian ministry make a request in writing to its U.S. consul to waive the certificate of return fee. POs will be asked to gather the application materials from their students and review them for accuracy.

FLEX Student Travel To Mexico And Canada

FLEX REQUIREMENTS

In all cases the Placement Organization must be aware and approve of the travel, and the student's safety must be assured to the greatest extent possible. Specifically:

1. PO must obtain from American Councils the natural parents' signed travel release form/permission to travel.
2. There must be agreement with the school if the student will miss school days due to travel.

CUSTOMS AND BORDER PATROL REQUIREMENTS

Canada and Mexico are considered bordering countries to the United States. This means that FLEX students with even just a single-entry U.S. visa may travel to these countries and then re-enter the United States, as long as the **conditions below** are met:

- ▶ Students must hold a valid passport.
- ▶ U.S. visa: An expired U.S. visa is valid for FLEX student travel to Mexico or Canada IF the following provisions are met:
 - The trip is less than 30 days long.
 - The I-94 form was stamped upon the student's arrival to the U.S. as "Duration of Status."
 - The Mexican or Canadian consulate agrees to issue a visa despite the expired status of the U.S. visa. Some consulates will not do this.
- ▶ Students are not citizens of a country that is a state sponsor of terrorism.
- ▶ Students do not apply for a new U.S. visa while they are in Mexico or Canada.

- ▶ The traveler does not require a waiver of ineligibility under INA 212(d) (3).
- ▶ Students must obtain DS-2019 travel validation (contact ECA for instructions.)
- ▶ Students must apply for and receive a valid Canadian or Mexican visa. Please contact the appropriate country's U.S. consulate for visa application forms:
 - CANADA: <http://www.canadianembassy.org/offices/index-en.asp>
 - MEXICO: <http://www.mexonline.com/consulate.htm>

For more information, please see 9 FAM 41.112 N8, which can be found at <http://www.foia.state.gov>.

FLEX Student Travel to Non-Bordering Countries

FLEX REQUIREMENTS

In all cases the PO must be aware of and approve the travel, and the student's safety must be assured to the greatest extent possible. Specifically:

1. PO must obtain from American Councils the natural parents' signed travel release form/permission to travel;
2. PO must send the student's itinerary, natural parents agreement, and DS-2019 form to ECA one month prior to travel so that ECA can sign the DS-2019 form allowing the student to travel; and
3. There must be agreement with the host school if the student will miss school days because of travel.

CUSTOMS AND BORDER PATROL REQUIREMENTS

Students must obtain DS-2019 travel validation (contact ECA for instructions). Students need to check if they need a visa for specific countries, and the automatic revalidation rules do not apply - automatic revalidation procedures only apply for Canada and Mexico. Therefore, they would need to have a valid multiple-entry U.S. visa or they will not be allowed back into the U.S. For more information on travel issues, please visit

- ▶ <http://travel.state.gov> (section on student visas)
- ▶ <http://www.educationusa.state.gov>
- ▶ <http://www.ice.gov/sevis> (Student Exchange Visitor Information System).

FLEX Student Travel within the United States

FLEX REQUIREMENTS

In all cases, the PO must be aware of and approve the travel, and the student's safety must be assured to the greatest extent possible. Specifically:

1. If the student is traveling outside the host community WITH his/her host parent(s), school official, or other responsible adult, then the student must obtain written approval for such travel from his/her PO, only. Each PO may have its own rules governing such travel, in addition to those of the program.
2. If the student is traveling outside the host community WITHOUT his/her host parent(s), school official, or other responsible adult, then the student must obtain written approval for such travel from his/her PO AND the student's natural parent(s) or guardian(s).

3. There must be agreement with the host school if the student will miss school days because of travel.

HEALTH AND IMMUNIZATION ISSUES

Overview

To ensure that students are in acceptable health to participate in the FLEX program and to enroll in American high schools, each student's health records are reviewed by a FLEX medical consultant during the selection process. Health follow-up requests are made by American Councils to students, as needed.

Implications for POs

FINALIST ELIMINATION

A FLEX medical consultant may recommend cancellation of a student due to significant medical concerns. These concerns may include, but are not limited to, conditions that would require significant follow-up or ongoing care while in the U.S., or that might endanger the student's life or well-being if he or she traveled to the U.S. If cancellation is approved by the Department of State, the student's PO will be notified of the cancellation and a replacement finalist will be assigned according to the criteria outlined above.

IMMUNIZATION RECORDS

All students are required to provide evidence of their immunization records on the health certificate that they submit as part of their scholarship application. Those with incomplete poliomyelitis; diphtheria, pertussis, and tetanus (DPT); or measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) records will be asked during the FLEX health review process to obtain the necessary immunizations prior to departing for the U.S. These students are instructed to obtain the required documentation and deliver a copy (with English translation) to their local American Councils office, where staff will upload the results into AIS for PO access. Some vaccines commonly available in the U.S. (e.g., rubella and hepatitis B) are not readily available or are cost prohibitive in Eurasia, 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.

TUBERCULOSIS TESTING

- | All students are required to provide evidence of a normal skin test and/or

chest x-ray prior to departing for the U.S. Those with incomplete records will be asked during the FLEX health review process to obtain the necessary tests prior to departing for the U.S. These students are instructed to obtain the required documentation (whether skin test, chest x-ray, or other, depending on availability in-country) and deliver a copy to their local American Councils office where staff will upload the results, along with an English translation, into AIS for American Councils' medical team to re-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, if clear, the student will hand-carry the original film to the U.S. to share with PO. Incomplete or evidence of abnormal TB test results prior to departure may be grounds for a health cancellation from the program, and the student may not be permitted to travel to the U.S.

MMR VACCINATIONS

The rubella component is generally not available in Eurasia. Therefore, most students will require the MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) vaccine upon arrival in the host community in the U.S.

HEPATITIS B VACCINATION

Many U.S. school districts now require hepatitis B vaccination for enrollment in school. This vaccine is often not available or is cost prohibitive in most areas of Eurasia. Therefore, students may be required to obtain the vaccine upon arrival in the host community in the U.S.

IMMUNIZATIONS IN HOST COMMUNITY

Arrangement: in the event 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 and authorization from Natural Parents may be requested as well.

Reimbursement: POs will reimburse host families for immunization-related expenses incurred by their FLEX student, if required by the school system, by using emergency funds. POs should track immunization expenses and report them to ECA.

Overview

American Councils is available to provide cultural and logistical support to POs and natural parents of FLEX students. To fulfill this role, American Councils has a FLEX Program Officer who is in regular contact with the POs' national coordinators. In addition, American Councils has an established network of 12 permanent offices in Eurasian countries that support the FLEX program. Experienced and well-trained FLEX representatives in Eurasia remain in contact with natural parents throughout the year to resolve placement or support issues students face while on program.

American Councils' staff assists with health and welfare checks for students or their natural families and acts as a mediator to help resolve issues such as student behavior or well-being. American Councils contacts natural parents to gather information or to enlist their support and assistance in resolving behavioral and adjustment issues.

American Councils also offers counseling calls to students (at a PO's or at ECA's request) in Russian and some other Eurasian languages; see below for guidelines.

EXAMPLES OF FLEX ON-PROGRAM SUPPORT ISSUES

- ▶ Change of host family
- ▶ Change of host family composition
- ▶ Change in who is responsible for the student (ie while HF is out of town)
- ▶ Single parent/double placement forms
- ▶ Student or natural family emergencies
- ▶ Notifying natural parents of significant OPS issues and student early returns
- ▶ Cultural or personal background inquiries related to student adjustment
- ▶ Natural parent permissions for travel or medical procedures
- ▶ Health and welfare inquiries from the natural parents or students
- ▶ Follow-up on documents or school-related permissions
- ▶ Interpretation or explanation of program components, policies, and cultural differences
- ▶ 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 FLEX students at their pre-departure orientation, where they are encouraged to try this experience. Both host families and students must respect each others rights to have their own beliefs, and attempts to influence or convert them are strictly prohibited.
- ▶ Forwarding warning and probation letters to natural parents

- ▶ Follow-up on PO requests for additional health or placement-related info on finalists

ON-PROGRAM SUPPORT COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

As issues or problems with a student develop, POs are asked to route all desired communications with natural parents through American Councils.

While many on-program support (OPS) issues can be 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. In a number of cases, relatively minor OPS issues escalate into larger ones, and it is helpful for American Councils overseas staff to be aware of the issue from the start in such cases.

Per Section n (1), POs must immediately report to both the Office of Citizen Exchanges and the Private Sector Programs Division of the Office of Designation in ECA any incident or allegation involving the actual or alleged sexual exploitation or abuse of a FLEX student. POs 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 summary suspension and termination of the PO's Exchange Visitor Program designation.

Further, POs must provide the Office of Citizen Exchanges with reports of all situations that involve serious controversies or problems or that impact the safety, health, or well-being of FLEX participants.

OPS concerns come from all sources, and we are responsible for considering all of them. This is particularly true in the context of the heightened concern for the safety of exchange students. American Councils encourages natural parents (NPs) to share information with its overseas staff in the spirit of making sure that their student's experience is as safe as it can possibly be. While it thwarts the established chain of communication, students do often, naturally, express concerns to NPs that they may be reluctant or even scared to address with designated U.S.-based support staff. When an NP shares such information with American Councils, American Councils will in turn share it immediately with the PO. American Councils cannot, however, discourage students from sharing concerns with someone they feel comfortable with.

POs are requested to contact American Councils when a student changes host families, when adjustment or behavioral issues escalate, when a student does not respond to a PO's counseling or disciplinary actions and the natural parents' involvement is desired, or when the cultural interpretation of a

student's behavior is desired.

POs may also request that American Councils on-program support staff conduct a Russian-language counseling call to discuss on-program support issues with the student. ECA and American Councils may also initiate requests for such calls. In order to make the call productive and efficient, POs should provide the following information when requesting a call:

- ▶ Provide 2-3 days advance notice and do not confirm call time to the student until American Councils staff has sent confirmation of availability;
- ▶ Provide optimal call times;
- ▶ Provide the correct telephone number where the student can be reached; and
- ▶ Provide a brief background summary of the case and a list of the goals you hope to see accomplished with 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 him/herself or others or displays other similarly alarming behavior carrying a threat of risk to their own or others' personal safety, the student MUST be taken to a medical professional for assessment immediately.**

American Councils' Eurasia staff is trained to avoid communicating directly with the PO staff, students, and host families. PO local representatives are advised to avoid solving student problems through direct communication between their host families or local representatives and the natural families. The complexities of language differences, poor telecommunications, cultural differences, and a lack of understanding in Eurasia about the various players in the FLEX program all reinforce the need for a single communication channel. In its turn, American Councils discourages field staff and natural families from attempting to resolve issues directly with host families or local PO representatives.

In addition, in particularly sensitive on-program support cases, American Councils' overseas offices will keep the U.S. Embassy's Public Affairs Section up to date on events, and American Councils in DC will work with the placement organization to keep Department of State current on the situation as well. Such cases may include but are not limited to those in which a student broke U.S. law and has been arrested or charged, or threatens to complain about the program to the press or an Embassy.

For a list of FLEX program rules, please see Form 8 of the FLEX application in Part III of this Local Coordinator's Handbook.

PLACEMENT ORGANIZATION SUPPORT STAFF

In accordance with Section (d), (1) - (15), placement organizations must ensure that all of their staff, agents, volunteers and others affiliated with the program are adequately trained, to include the criteria used to screen host families; conflict resolution; knowledge of child safety standards and sexual conduct codes; procedures for handling and reporting emergencies including allegations of abuse, neglect or sexual misconduct; and participation in Department of State's mandated training for local coordinators prior to assumption of duties.

Further, placement organizations must ensure that these staff or agents are adequately supervised and been vetted through a national criminal background check including a search of the national sex offender registry. In addition, 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 personal contact with the student (first contact must be in person) and with the host family (at least two visits per exchange year, the first being in person). As well, within the first or second of the student's arrival in the host family home, a placement organization representative other than the representative who screened and selected the host family must visit the home.

Placement organizations may not provide host families with monetary payment or other incentives, and must ensure that the school also has contact information for both the local representative and the main placement organization office, and adhere to all provisions in this section and as DOS from time to time may impose. Placement organizations 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 their possession.

Also in accordance with this section [(d), (1) - (15)], placement organizations must ensure that all of their staff, agents, volunteers and others affiliated with the program refrain from acting as:

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

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE

In cases where a student has a host parent who acts as one of the PO's local representatives or coordinators, POs should provide the student with direct contact information for a PO support staff member at its national headquarters in addition to the student's regularly assigned local representative or coordinator. This requirement is made based on the difficulty students tend to experience in confiding in a local representative

who they perceive to be first and foremost a colleague of their host parent, thus inhibiting their tendency to communicate concerns. Providing a support staff person from its national headquarters, who is clearly removed from the situation ensures the student has access to appropriate support outlets.

If the HF is related to the local coordinator (LC) by blood or marriage, the student must also have immediate access to another FLEX program representative (including name, telephone number, and email address) of the PO for counseling issues, such as the state/regional coordinator or another LC located nearby.

If the LC's spouse is also the LC's supervisor, then the student should have access to someone else at the regional/national level for OPS supervision.

RESPONSE TIME FOR ON-PROGRAM SUPPORT ISSUES

Same day or 1-day priority:

This includes a life-threatening medical or psychological emergency, allegations of abuse, or travel emergency such as:

- ▶ serious illness or injury
- ▶ death in natural family
- ▶ suicidal ideation or attempt
- ▶ allegation of sexual abuse or harassment
- ▶ natural disaster
- ▶ student's international flight is delayed or cancelled
- ▶ early return for violation of a U.S. law
- ▶ suspension or expulsion from U.S. high school
- ▶ arrest or other involvement with the police
- ▶ extreme behavioral issues (such as in which HF requests the student's immediate removal from the home)

2-3 day priority:

This is a non-life threatening issue that requires prompt attention such as:

- ▶ change of host family/change in host family composition/temporary change in who is responsible for the student
- ▶ adjustment or behavioral issues

5-day priority:

This is the standard maximum response time for communication about basic on-program support issues such as:

- ▶ parental permission for travel
- ▶ health and welfare check

Emergency On-Program Support Issues

MEDICAL EMERGENCIES

POs are asked to notify American Councils and the Department of State of any emergency situations involving a student as quickly as possible. It is crucial to notify American Councils of any life-threatening medical concerns and/or emergency hospital admissions within several hours of the event to ensure that the natural parents are aware of the developing problem. During weekend hours please call American Councils' emergency telephone number (toll-free, 800.621.9559) to report the problem. POs are asked to do so even if the student and the host family choose to contact the natural parents directly. It is important for American Councils' staff in Eurasia to have information regarding the student condition so they can discuss these concerns with the natural parents.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT OR ABUSE

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 should be notified immediately. To protect the student, the PO should not inform the HF of the reason for the move until the student has been removed from the situation. After assuring the student's removal and safety, in accordance with Section (n) (1), the PO must file an incident report the Designation office, copying the Office of Citizen Exchanges, and report the incident to the local authorities.

Early Returns, Repatriation Requests, and Procedures

TYPES OF EARLY RETURNS (ERS)

Some students return home prior to completion of their program on either a voluntary or an involuntary basis. Some students may choose to return home voluntarily due to homesickness, natural family's request, or academic concerns, among other reasons.

Voluntary early returns fall into two categories:

- **Student Initiated:** If a student decides to terminate his or her program voluntarily, he or she must present the PO with a written statement outlining the reasons for his or her 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 to the Department of State for approval.
- **Natural Parent Initiated:** In similar fashion, if the natural parents request their child's early return, they will be asked to present their written request to American Councils' overseas office.

American Councils will forward their request to the Department of State and the PO. The PO should convey this information to the student, provide a brief written statement from the student and share any other comments the student may have, and request the early return from Department of State promptly. If a student is in disagreement with their natural parent(s) but cannot change their decision, the early return must proceed apace. Program experience indicates increasing problems with natural parents when their requests are unduly delayed.

Involuntary: If a student is an involuntary early return, he or she should be asked to provide a written account of their understanding of the situation for review and consideration by all parties.

In all early return cases, the PO must request approval for repatriation from the Department of State.

TEMPORARY RETURN

In case of the death or critical illness of a member of a student's immediate family (defined as mother, father, brother, sister), there is a possibility to allow the student to return home for a period not to exceed two weeks. This is dependent on:

- ▶ Department of State approval of such travel
- ▶ Source of funding for travel. This often includes the program insurance secured by Placement Organizations for each student. If this is not available, the Placement Organization should consult with Department of State and American Councils to discuss possible alternative funding sources.

However, it is not acceptable for students to choose an end date for their program, i.e., to indicate that they wish to finish the semester and then return home, or enjoy the holidays with their HF, then go home. If a student has OPS issues and concerns and wishes to return home, they must do so at that time, and not at some date of their choosing. To allow students to do this will contribute to rumors back in the student's home country that you do not need to make a year-long commitment if selected as a FLEX finalist, and that you can stay for only as long as you prefer.

Weekend travel is also avoided for ERs except in case of emergency.

REQUESTING AN EARLY RETURN

- | All on-program support channels should be exhausted before an early return

authorization is requested from the Department of State. It is vital that an official in-country American Councils program representative keeps 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.

Please note that being an ER does not affect a student's alumni status. Generally, ER students are not interested in this facet of the program in any case, but those who are, are welcome to approach their local American Councils office and find out what alumni activities they can contribute to. Alumni who were ERs are generally not eligible to receive alumni funding or to assume positions of leadership with American Councils (in the latter case, all such applicants are OPS-screened as part of the reference check process). In sending an ER request to ECA, POs do not need to select the categories; ECA will designate this.

REPATRIATION DOCUMENTATION

Repatriation requests should adhere to Department of State's "Repatriation Documentation Reporting" guidelines and include a written 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 agreement amongst all partner organizations. Student problems include inappropriate behavior, illegal behavior, homesickness, inability to adjust, family concerns, medical issues and academic concerns.

In the event a student is accused of committing a crime or facing 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 his or her obligation to the U.S. legal system, only after which may the student actually leave the country.

The following are guidelines for submitting a repatriation request and arranging early return travel:

Step 1: POs must send a written request for repatriation to FLEX Program Officers at the Department of State via email. The request should include a synopsis of the situation and/or timeline, efforts made to prevent an ER and, in the case of a voluntary withdrawal, a written request from the student or natural family. Please send a copy of your request to American Councils.

Step 2: Upon receipt of the PO's repatriation request, the Department of State reviews the request with the PO and American Councils staff in

Washington, DC, prior to making a determination and issuing a written approval for an early return. If repatriation is approved, DOS emails approval notice to the PO and American Councils. All repatriation 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 repatriation and availability of evidence documenting the problem.

Step 3: Upon receipt of final approval from the Department of State, the PO must contact American Councils to request travel arrangements for the student. Please note that American Councils cannot book early return tickets without written Early Return authorization from the Department of State. In order to proceed with booking early return tickets, PO must provide American Councils with the student's departure airport code.

NOTE: It is at the Department of State'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) of same should also be included in the request to DOS.

Under normal early return circumstances, the FLEX student travel emergency phone is turned on the day before scheduled travel and remains 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. Placement organizations are asked to remind early return students to wear their blue FLEX t-shirts, to facilitate the MAAS, and to remind them of the 800 number (also printed on their t-shirt and on the e-ticket that American Councils provides) and that they should call it if they experience travel problems.

Step 4: American Councils coordinates the return date with its overseas staff to ensure they have sufficient time to notify the natural parents and make domestic travel arrangements in Eurasia. Please note that all efforts are made by American Councils to avoid weekend arrival of students in Eurasia. 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. A routine repatriation approval process usually takes about one week from the date a repatriation request is approved by the Department of State to the time the return ticket is issued, but this also depends on flight availability to the student's home country. American Councils cannot accommodate specific date requests for ERs nor does American Councils schedule ERs for weekend days except in case of emergency.

RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

Overview

American Councils selects program finalists who meet the program requirements as stated in Section (e) (1) - (3). All FLEX program finalists are secondary school students who have not completed more than 11 years of primary or secondary education in their home countries, or are at least 15 and no older than 18-1/2 as of the start of their program; whose applications reflect candidates who have the characteristics necessary to succeed and thrive on program; and who have not previously attended school in the U.S. or participated in an academic or semester exchange program to the U.S.

Recruitment is open to all Eurasian secondary school students who fit the age, grade, and eligibility requirements established for each Eurasian country. American Councils administers recruitment. Because of the large number of applicants (over 47,000), the selection process takes place in several phases. Selection begins in Eurasia and ends in the U.S., where an American selection panel is convened to designate finalist and alternate candidates according to guidelines established by American Councils.

Selection Criteria

ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

This is measured by using a standardized English language test such as the SLEP or pre-TOEFL.

PERSONAL INTERVIEW

Semi-finalist candidates are interviewed to evaluate their suitability for the program. Prior to the interviews, all students participate in a small-group activity observed by American Councils staff to assess their ability to interact with peers.

STUDENT MOTIVATION, MATURITY, AND READINESS FOR AN EXCHANGE EXPERIENCE

These are the primary factors evaluated in the selection of FLEX students. These factors are measured through evaluation of in-class essays and essays included in the take-home application, and also are explored in the interview. Students not demonstrating strong motivation, appropriate purpose, sufficient flexibility, and a balanced sense of self are not selected.

LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

An academic reference is required.

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Students are required to submit a full academic transcript for the current and two previous school years. Students with less than a “B” average or “Good” academic standing (i.e., approximately a 75% to 80% average depending on the grading scale) are eliminated from consideration.

HEALTH

Medical professionals evaluate each finalist and alternate’s health status to ascertain her or his ability to participate in the FLEX program and enroll in a U.S. high school.

Selection and Follow-up

Using allocations established by the Department of State, American Councils assigns a target number of scholarships for each country and region of a country, where applicable. A corresponding number of finalists is selected, along with an appropriate number of alternate candidates, to ensure that all scholarship positions can be filled.

All finalist and alternate candidates and their natural parents are provided with detailed program information along with their notification letters. They also are shown the FLEX Home Away from Home video (in Russian) along with additional information about the U.S. hosting context. This information is provided to assist the student and his or her parents in making an informed decision about program participation.

Once students are notified, participation in the FLEX program depends upon their ability to:

- ▶ successfully obtain an international passport and exit visa, where required;
- ▶ successfully obtain a J-1 visa from the U.S. Consulate; and
- ▶ meet any health follow-up requirements.

Before accepting the scholarship, students are asked to:

- ▶ obtain academic leave from their home school for the following year; and
- ▶ determine whether leaving for the U.S. would complicate future academic plans or, for older boys, make them subject to military draft upon return.

Upon being notified, all finalists are informed that they are required to attend a pre-departure orientation (PDO) conducted by American Councils in their home country. Per Section (g) (1)-(6), the PDO provides students with a summary of program rules, policies and travel arrangements; information on how to identify

and report sexual abuse; and profiles of their host family, community and school if made available in AIS by the PO. In addition, immediately upon entry to the U.S., students are provided with an ID card which lists the student's name, host family contact information and a phone number that provides immediate contact with both the placement organization and DOS.

Finally, per Section (h) (1) - (3), at PDO students are also 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 eligible, the State authority responsible for determining athletic eligibility and 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.

Selection of Students with Disabilities

Finalists with disabilities are selected from a pool of applicants that are specifically recruited by American Councils field staff in most Eurasian countries. POs will be provided with a number of supplementary information forms for each student with a disability to assist with placement: a Registration Form for Students with Disabilities, an Observation Form for Students with Disabilities and a Natural Parent Comment sheet. These three forms are completed during recruitment and are sent to POs along with the student's complete application. Staff of the organization that will conduct the preparatory workshop for students with disabilities also receives copies of the complete application and these forms. Later in March when students attend notification meetings, American Councils collects and provides the following additional health forms to POs: Program Hub Director Observation Form, Vision, Hearing and/or Physical Impairment Checklist (completed by Hub Director and student) and any forms required to participate in the preparatory workshop. Lastly, in April, Moscow program staff conducts in-depth phone calls with each student who has a disability, and the write-ups from these calls are shared with POs and preparatory workshop staff. Students with disabilities undergo the same health review process as other students.

PRE-PROGRAM PREPARATION

Overview

All students will attend a pre-departure orientation administered by American Councils in their home country up to 4-8 weeks before their departure for the U.S. Certain PO-specific information will be provided at these orientations, as described below. All students with disabilities will attend a disability workshop from August 8-13, 2012 before traveling to their permanent host families on August 14. In addition, students whose English is substantially weaker than that of their peers will also attend the four-week long Moldova EFL (English as a Foreign Language) intensive immersive camp led by professional instructors. This will

include both students with and without disabilities. The camp is four weeks long; students take the SLEP when they arrive and again at the end of the program with results conveyed to POs.

FLEX Preparation Materials

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.:

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.

HOME AWAY FROM HOME

This is an English-language video, dubbed in Russian, shown to parents of FLEX students to give them a better understanding of the program. The video depicts the care given to actual FLEX students in the U.S., allowing parents to make a more informed decision about their child's participation in the program. The video is available in English to POs upon request to American Councils; charges may apply for multiple copies.

American Councils has prepared orientation materials for U.S. host families that are designed to enhance host families' knowledge of the students' backgrounds. They are intended to complement core host family materials

| used by each PO, and are available upon request to American Councils:

CULTURAL HANDBOOK TO THE NEW INDEPENDENT STATES

This is an English language publication with information about the cultures of the countries that participate in the FLEX program. This publication is available for download from the American Councils web site.

The Department of State has available several FLEX-specific publications for distribution to local coordinators, school administrators, and others. To obtain copies of any of these publications, please contact the Department of State FLEX team:

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.

PART III: RULES

E-CFR DATA IS CURRENT AS OF DECEMBER 27, 2011

Title 22: Foreign Relations

PART 62—EXCHANGE VISITOR PROGRAM

§ 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-019 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]



PARENT / STUDENT AGREEMENT

A. PURPOSE

The Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) Program (“the Program”), funded by the United States Government, promotes friendship between the United States of America and your country, and provides opportunities for personal development through international host family living.

The Program is implemented by private, not-for-profit organizations (“Program Organizations”). While in the United States, students will be in the care of “Placement Organizations” that identify and arrange host families and schools, and provide support and guidance for participants during the exchange Program. Participants attend an American school, share in U.S. 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. The Program, consistent with its commitment to mutual understanding between the people of the United States and people of other countries, encourages cultural diversity in the selection of Program participants and host families. Participants are required to return to their home country after their Program, where they are expected to share their experiences in the United States.

B. PARENT AGREEMENT

General Program Policies

- (1) We give our child permission to participate in this Program. We and our child will obey the policies described in the Program Handbook and Program Organization guidelines. We understand that the original English-language version of this document represents the final authoritative wording of all policies and guidelines.
- (2) We understand that if we or any other immediate family member has applied at any time to emigrate to the United States or if we or any other immediate adult family member (whether estranged or not) is a U.S. citizen or green card holder, it may impact negatively on our child’s final selection for the Program.
- (3) We understand that if another member of our family will be living in the U.S. at the same time our child would be on Program, it may affect his/her eligibility for the Program.
- (4) We acknowledge that our child has not stayed in the United States for three (3) months or more during the past five (5) years.
- (5) We understand that our child must meet the Program eligibility requirements, be a citizen of the country in which s/he is applying, and be able to obtain a passport from his/her country of citizenship and any visa required by the United States.

- (6)** 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 (2) two 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)** We understand that we may not visit our child during his or her participation in the Program unless we obtain prior written approval from the Placement Organization.
- (8)** We understand that if our child is selected to receive a scholarship, final acceptance will depend on fulfillment of the medical, placement, and academic requirements of the Program Organization.
- (9)** We agree to release and discharge the Program Organizations and their employees and agents; host families; Program representatives; school representatives; as well as the United States 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 our child in the Program, and
 - 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)** We agree that our child will travel to and from the United States in strict accordance with the travel plans made by the Program.
- (11)** We will not encourage or permit our child to travel outside the host community during his or her participation in the Program except in strict accordance with the following requirements:
 - a.** If our child desires to travel outside the host community with and under the supervision of his or her host parent(s), school official or other responsible adult, our child must first obtain written approval for such travel from the Placement Organization. For international travel this includes authorization to do so on the Form DS-2019.
 - b.** If our child desires to travel outside the host community unaccompanied by his or her host parent(s), school official, or other responsible adult, our child must obtain prior written approval for such travel from the Placement Organization and us, the child's parents or guardians. For international travel this includes authorization to do so on the Form DS-2019.
 - c.** We understand that many Placement Organizations place limits on or do not allow visits with natural family members or friends from the home country. We agree to follow all Placement Organization rules concerning visits with natural family members or family friends.
- (12)** We understand that our 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. We understand that this provision applies to both international and domestic travel within both the United States and our country.

- (13)** We understand that in making travel arrangements for our 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. We 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 or the Program.
- (14)** We understand that our child must return home at the end of the Program on the date assigned by the responsible 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 and agree that the U.S. visa issued to our child will not be amended or extended beyond the Program end date. No exceptions will be made to this policy.

School and Host Family Placement

- (15)** We authorize the Placement Organizations, employees, and representatives to change the place of residence or school designated for our child when they believe such change to be in our child's best interest. We understand that we will be notified of any such changes.
- (16)** We recognize that schools in the United States may impose academic standards or other requirements in determining grade level placement that differ from those imposed by the school our child now attends. We acknowledge and accept that participation in the Program does not guarantee credit or graduation from the school our child now attends or from the U.S. school he or she will attend while participating in the Program. We understand that it is our responsibility to arrange with the school our 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)** We are aware that the United States is a multi-racial, multi-ethnic country providing a diversity of possible living experiences and that there is no single living experience that is typical. We understand that placements are made on the basis of criteria designed to determine suitability of host families, and the Program does not illegally discriminate on the basis of race, disability, religion, gender, or ethnic origin, either with respect to students or to host families.
- (18)** We understand that there are strict laws restricting smoking in the United States and that the host family may have objections to smoking in their home. We agree to honor all U.S. laws and host family restrictions.

Health/Medical Issues

- (19)** We confirm that the information stated in the Student Health Certificate is accurate and contains no material omissions of which we are aware. We understand that omitting information on the Student Health Certificate could endanger the

health of our child and may be grounds for dismissal from the Program. We will immediately inform the Program Organization of any change in information given. We understand that any physical or mental health condition requiring a significant and sustained level of care or monitoring of our child may require reconsideration of my child's participation in the Program. In the event our child has a recurrence of any previous illness or anything contracted before leaving home or in the United States that is not covered by insurance provided by the Program, we authorize the Program Organization to release our child to our care in our country. We will not hold the Program Organizations and their employees and agents; host families; Program representatives; school representatives; as well as the United States Department of State and its employees, agents, and instrumentalities responsible for any debts incurred in connection with this permission. We understand that treatment will be provided for injuries sustained by our child while on Program but the extent of coverage is subject to the Program's insurance provider's rules and policies.

- (20)** We confirm that we have provided a full and complete medical and immunization history for our child. We understand that U.S. schools require immunizations, and we agree to allow the Program Organizations to arrange for all immunizations required for our child. We understand that such immunizations will be administered according to U.S. medical standards and at no expense to us or our child.
- (21)** As the applicant's parents or guardians, we agree to and authorize the Placement Organization, its personnel and representatives, and the adult members of the host family, to act for us in any emergency, accident, or illness.

Termination from the Program

- (22)** We understand that our 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 our child or to the program. Inappropriate or detrimental behavior may include, but is not limited to, violating host family or school rules, academic under-performance, or failure to participate in program activities. It may also include inappropriate sexual behavior, including but not limited to the viewing and sharing of sexually explicit material, verbal or physical harassment, and/or any violation of U.S. law.
- (23)** We agree that if we violate any provision of this Agreement, or if our child, during his/her stay in the United States, does any of the following, then it may be determined that our 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; or
 - b.** has misrepresented him or herself in the Program application.
- (24)** If our child voluntarily withdraws, or is dismissed from the Program at any time after departure from our country, we understand that his/her scholarship, Program status as a J-visa holder, and health insurance coverage are canceled.

Declaration

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

SIGNATURE OF PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN

PRINT NAME (FAMILY NAME/FIRST NAME/MIDDLE NAME):

DATE:

C. STUDENT 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.

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT

DATE:

I hereby attest that the student and the student's parent(s) or legal guardian(s) have signed this document before me.

SIGNATURE OF WITNESS

PRINT NAME (FAMILY NAME/FIRST NAME/MIDDLE NAME):

DATE:

POLICIES

(Excerpted from the FLEX Secondary School Program Student Handbook)

The policies presented here are the general policies for students. Since variations regarding specific policies and procedures exist among Placement Organizations, it is important that you check with the representatives or office of your Placement Organization in the United States.

PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Applicants will be considered for participation in this Program if:

1. The applicant meets the Program age and grade (class) requirements for his or her country; and
2. The applicant is a citizen of the country in which he or she applies.

GENERAL POLICIES

- **Internet:** Students are required to follow ALL RULES regarding use of computers, tablets, cell phones (including devices that belong to our child) and the Internet as determined by their Placement Organization, host family and/or host school. Students 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 and are based on federal guidelines and laws governing what can and cannot be posted online. Violation of any of these rules may result in dismissal from the Program. Students also may be subject to prosecution for any violation of law. Students who in any way put the safety of themselves or others at risk by misusing the Internet may be dismissed from the Program.
- **Dangerous/Risky Activities:** The following activities have been determined by most insurance companies to be too risky, and treatment for injuries sustained while participating in them is not likely to be covered by insurance: driving any motorized vehicle (such as a car, motorcycle, all-terrain vehicle, etc.), riding as a passenger in off-road vehicles or in a non-commercial aircraft, hang gliding, bungee jumping, jumping on a trampoline, parachute jumping, parasailing, scuba diving, piloting a private plane, mountain biking, mountaineering, rock climbing, skate boarding, extreme sports, handling or using a firearm or other weapon. 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:** Exchange students are not permitted to drive any motorized vehicle under any circumstances while participating in the Program in the United States. Violators of this policy will be considered for Program dismissal. This applies even if students are in possession of an International driver's license or if the host family feels that the student is a responsible and careful driver. Exceptions may be granted for farm equipment if allowed by the student's natural parents and Placement Organization. If

authorized, the student must observe precautions regarding safety and legal limitations. Exchange students are not permitted to pilot any aircraft under any circumstances while participating in the Program.

- **Employment:** The J-1 visa permitting students to stay in the United States restricts employment. Program participants may seek only part-time, small jobs such as babysitting, yard clean-up, etc.
- **Marriage:** Married students are not permitted on the Program. If marriage occurs while the student is a participant or is discovered to have occurred prior to the student becoming a participant, the student will be considered for dismissal from the Program.
- **Pregnancy:** Male students who cause pregnancies must return home. If a program participant is discovered to be pregnant, she must return home.
- **Student expenses:** The Program provides travel arrangements, host family and school placements, allowances, and insurance. In addition, the Program provides the Form DS-2019 that is 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 three meals a day for the student 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 student using Program allowances.

TRAVEL POLICIES

- **Return to home country at the end of the Program:** All students must return to their home country at the end of the program on the date assigned by the responsible Program Organization. Students will not be allowed to remain in the United States after their assigned return-travel date. Those who do not adhere to this may be reported to the Department of Homeland Security and will have their program insurance canceled.
- **Student travel:** Only authorized student travel is permitted. Authorized student travel must meet these three criteria:
 - a. The Placement Organization has knowledge of the student's location and approves the travel in advance, and/or the Program Organizations have obtained the natural parents' or guardians' written permission for the travel;
 - b. The student's safety is assured to the greatest extent possible; and
 - c. The travel does not interfere with school attendance.
- **Visits with natural family, home country friends or relatives who live in the United States:** Such visits are strongly discouraged during the Program year, especially during the initial adjustment period. 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.
- **Visits to the home country while on Program:** Such visits are not allowed. Exceptions may be made, contingent upon identification of a source of funding and Program approval, in the case of the death or imminent death of an immediate (mother, father, brother, sister) family member. An unauthorized visit will result in 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.

SCHOOL AND HOST FAMILY PLACEMENT

- **School attendance:** All Program participants must attend a high school and maintain a normal course of school work. Non-attendance may result in consideration for Program dismissal or determining that the student has left the Program.
- **School performance:** Allowing for an initial period of adjustment, participants must achieve and maintain adequate academic results. After a reasonable period of time, poor motivation, under-achievement, or inappropriate behavior in combination with poor family adjustment, may be cause for dismissal from the Program.
- **School expulsion:** If a student is expelled from school, it may result in Program dismissal.
- **Students and natural parents cannot choose their host family, school, grade placement, or location of placement.** Placement organizations will request agreement of the student and natural parent(s) if a student 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.
- Participants **cannot** be hosted by natural family members.

HEALTH/MEDICAL

- **Medical treatment of a student (including emergencies):** Before a student arrives in the United States, the Program must receive written permission from natural parents to obtain emergency medical attention if needed (see Permission for Care of My Child). Students 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 also is not responsible for any negative results because of medical treatment.

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, such as:
 - **Alcohol:** Participants are required to observe all U.S. laws with regard to the minimum drinking age. The minimum drinking age in the United States is 21.
 - **Drugs:** Participants may not possess or use drugs that are illegal in the United States.
 - **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.

OTHER GROUNDS FOR TERMINATION

- **Leaving the Program early:** If the student is absent from the host family, school or other place to which the Program has assigned him or her, without obtaining the advance written approval of the Program, the Program may determine that the student has left the Program through his or her own voluntary action. In this case, the Program is absolved from all obligations, legal or otherwise, to the student or his/her parents or guardians 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 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.
- **Unauthorized travel may constitute termination from the Program:** The Placement Organizations in the United States determine authorization for travel. Procedures for obtaining permission to travel vary by Placement Organization.

PRE-DEPARTURE ORIENTATION FLEX STUDENT AGREEMENT

STUDENT NAME

HUB CITY:

PDO DATES

PLACEMENT ORGANIZATION:

- 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 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.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. 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.

8. 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.
9. 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.
10. I understand that I may not return home before May 15 to take examinations in my home country.
11. 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.
12. 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.
13. I have received a copy of the Department of State's Exchange Visitor Welcome Letter which includes the Department's toll-free telephone number.
14. 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.
15. 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.

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT

DATE:

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The Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) program is a program of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, with funding from the U.S. government, and implemented by American Councils for International Education.

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