



YOUTH FOR UNDERSTANDING
Intercultural Exchange Programs



FLEX and YES Scholars Required Activities Booklet

Introduction

International exchange exposes students to a wide range of new ideas and perspectives. YFU collaborates with the U.S. Department of State through different programs to promote intercultural understanding and mutual respect. The **Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) Program** was established in 1992 to ensure long lasting peace and understanding between the U.S. and countries of Eurasia; the **Kennedy- Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES) Program** was created in response to the events of September 11, 2001, to build bridges between the U.S. and countries with significant Muslim populations. These exchange programs provide the participants with an opportunity to:

- Gain an understanding of the diverse American culture
- Strengthen the relationship and understanding of each country's cultural, social, political, economic, and ethnic diversity by sharing lessons in tolerance and harmony
- Explore and attain an awareness of the key elements of U.S. civil society and volunteerism
- Acquire experiences, knowledge, and leadership skills to share and apply in their home country as alumni

Email & Communication Responsibilities

FLEX/YES students **must maintain and monitor a personal email address** during their exchange year to be informed of:

- YFU news and announcements for students
- FLEX/YES program announcements, such as U.S. Department of State news, scholarship program opportunities, and return travel

Students - follow these steps to stay in touch with YFU USA:

1. **Respond** to YFU USA online Arrival Survey within the first month to confirm contact information.
2. **Check** personal email at least once a week for Local Coordinator messages and YFU USA announcements, activities, and opportunities.
3. **Report** to YFU USA (yfugrantscholars@yfu.org) any changes to personal email while on program. **This is a YFU and J-1 visa requirement.**

Required Activities

All exchange scholars are required to participate in certain activities designed to meet the program objectives and to promote engagement in community life. The required activities include:

- **Community Service** - At least **30 hours** of volunteer work by May 1
- **Participation in Education and Service Events** – International Education Week (November), Global Youth Service Day (April)
- **Community and Congressional Activities** – Local activities to enhance leadership skills
- **Completion of Monthly Surveys** – Each month you will receive an email from the YFU Grants Team, requesting that you complete a brief survey to tell us about your experience that month.

This booklet explains the required activities and provides ideas to meet these requirements. Participants can initiate their own activities and seek help from Local Coordinators and Cluster Leaders. In some geographic regions, activities will be organized throughout the year that meet the program requirements.

Community Service

Community service is an important component of U.S. culture. Many Americans believe in giving back to the community by dedicating their time to a cause. Volunteer work is a beneficial opportunity to learn more about the community, gain exposure to diversity, make friends, learn new skills, and contribute to the betterment of your community. **Your YFU host families are doing valuable volunteer work by welcoming you into their homes.**

Requirements:

YFU FLEX and YES scholars must complete at least **30 hours of community service between August and May 1** (*a little over 3 hours each month*).

What is community service?

Community service is volunteering your time and effort to *benefit the community* or its institutions. Everyday household chores, like doing the dishes or helping your host family, do not count as community service. Find out what interests you and look for activities within your community in which you can participate. The activities can be carried out in groups or individually. Ask your host family and Local Coordinator for ideas or join the Key Club at your high school. You can always come up with a new idea if it addresses a community need.

Participating in school sports or theater are wonderful activities, but they are not considered community service. If you have a question about whether an activity counts as community service, send an email to the Grants Team at yfugrantscholars@yfu.org.

Note: Per U.S. Department of State rules, International Education Week (IEW) cultural presentations do not count toward community service requirements.

Ideas and Resources:

These websites can serve as a guide when you look for ideas and opportunities:

- <http://www.volunteermatch.org>
- <http://www.idealists.org>



- <https://www.dosomething.org/us>

Recognition for community service hours:

- **30 or more hours:** YFU USA Certificate of Recognition
- **100 or more hours:** U.S. Department of State Volunteer Service Certificate

Documenting Your Activities

- YFU will utilize an app called MobileServe to track community service activities. You'll receive instructions by email on how to enter your volunteer hours through an app on your phone or via the website. It's important to use the link provided so that you will be connected to YFU's account.
- Planning: Start volunteering right away—don't put it off. You should plan to **complete about 15 hours by January 15.**
- Deadline: You must complete your volunteer hours by **May 1**, no matter when you will be departing. This allows staff adequate time to print completion certificates, which are mailed to students prior to departure.

International Education Week and Global Youth Service Day

YFU USA and the U.S. Department of State require exchange scholars to participate in these events:

- **International Education Week (IEW)** is celebrated each year in **November**. It promotes learning about other countries and cultures <http://iew.state.gov/>
- **Global Youth Service Day (GYSD)** is a weekend of community service activities performed by youth around the world in **April** <http://www.gysd.org/>

Both events are an opportunity to be cultural ambassadors and educate more people about your country.

International Education Week (IEW) Cultural Presentations:

Exchange scholars are required to complete **at least one presentation** about their country for a U.S. audience. Aim to do this presentation during IEW. However, if your school cannot schedule it that week, schedule it close to IEW on another day in November. Consider doing more than one country presentation to reach and teach more Americans.

What can you do?

- Check dates and suggested activities on the IEW and GYSD websites.
- Reach out to alumni and ask for some suggestions.
- Ask your Local Coordinator and Cluster Leaders about group activities or initiate your own.

International Education Week:

- Present on your culture (music/dance/cooking/arts etc.) to a class at school or community groups.
- Speak about your country at an international fair or in history, language, or government classes.
- Create a website on your culture/country to share with your U.S. community.

Global Youth Service Day:

- Participate in a park clean up
- Volunteer at a food pantry
- Serve as a tutor or mentor to a student needing academic help
- Volunteer with your local religious group or at a retirement home
- Or implement your own service idea and ask friends to participate

Civic Education Week (CEW)

Civic Education Week (CEW) is a one-week program in Washington, DC, that is funded by the U.S. Department of State. Students will gain a better understanding of the U.S. federal system of government, civic participation, and basic democratic principles. The workshop will advance leadership skill development by cultivating critical thinking, public speaking, teambuilding, and goal setting. Through seminar discussions, briefings and meetings on Capitol Hill, students will explore topics including citizen empowerment, volunteerism and community action, the role of media in the U.S., modern American politics, and foreign politics.

YES and FLEX students **must apply** for this opportunity, and **not all students are selected**. Application materials will be distributed in December. YFU encourages you to apply for this opportunity.

Workshop For Youth Leaders in English Teaching (WYLET)

The Workshop for Youth Leaders in English Teaching (WYLET), a program of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), will select 32 current **FLEX** and **YES** students and build on their U.S. experience through an intensive, week-long training program in Washington, DC. The Workshop will cultivate skills specific to teaching English, such as student-centered methodology, effective use of technology, classroom management, organization skills, and lesson design and delivery. Participating students will also develop and practice important leadership skills such as public speaking, team building, and goal-setting. Workshop alumni will be expected to return to their countries and organize or participate in English teaching opportunities in their home communities.

YES and FLEX Students may apply for both CEW and WYLET, but can only participate in one if offered both.

Community and Congressional Activities

Exchange programs are designed to provide students with a wide variety of opportunities to enhance their leadership skills.

Leadership Skills and Community Activities:

In certain geographic regions, YFU organizes different events throughout the year to cater to the needs of the students. Students are encouraged to participate in diverse activities, such as school field trips, clubs, and events in the local community, to polish their leadership skills and deepen their understanding of the U.S. culture. Examples of leadership activities include:

- Student Government
- School Clubs such as the Key Club, Debate team, Model UN
- Lead or start a school Club or an activity/event that interests you
- Sports team player, manager
- Faith based communities youth groups, music groups

To make the best out of the exchange year, YFU encourages its scholars to participate in academic contests, events, and other local opportunities.

Connecting with Congressional Representatives:

Students are encouraged to contact and/ or meet their local Congressional Representatives to thank them for sponsoring your exchange program. This is an opportunity to inform your local representative about your exchange program if they are not already familiar with it.

- Visit your Representative's or Senator's local offices
- Offer to write an article on your exchange program and your experience in their community for your member's newsletter to constituents
- Volunteer in the member's district office if it is close to your host family

Ask your Local Coordinator to help you contact/meet with your local representative(s). Share your experience and any pictures with your YFU Local Coordinator and YFU Grants staff (email: yfugrantscholars@yfu.org)

Find your local U.S. Congressional representative by entering your host family's zip code into the following websites:

- **U.S. House of Representatives:** <http://www.house.gov/representatives/>
- **U.S. Senate :** <https://www.senate.gov/>

Experiences and Accomplishments

Share your awesome experiences and accomplishments with your Local Coordinator, Cluster Leader, or the YFU Grants Team so that they can be publicized appropriately. You can also submit your stories to the program websites below:

YES: <http://www.yesprograms.org/stories>

FLEX: <https://exchanges.state.gov/non-us/program/future-leaders-exchange/stories>

Questions?

If you have questions about the information in this booklet, get in touch with your Local Coordinator (contact information is printed on your YFU ID card) or send a message to the YFU Grants Team at yfugrantscholars@yfu.org. If you are not sure how to reach your Local Coordinator, call the YFU main office at 989-777-4420 to request this information.



Student Guide to Congress

As a participant in a U.S. Department of State scholarship program, established by Congress you are encouraged to connect with the Congressional representatives of your host community at least once during your program year. This is a great way to learn more about the U.S. government, share your exchange experience, and your appreciation for your exchange opportunity. Use the resources included in this guide to reach out to your Congressional representative.

Understanding Congress

The U.S. federal government has three branches: *Executive*, *Judicial*, and *Legislative*. The Legislative branch is called *Congress*. It is responsible for making the laws of the country. Congress is divided into two chambers: the *House of Representatives* and the *Senate*.



The US Capitol Building in Washington, DC

House of Representatives

The “House” has 435 members, called Congressmen or Representatives. The number of Congressmen for each U.S. state depends on the state’s population. Each state is divided into equally sized *congressional districts* that are home to approximately 710,000 residents. One Congressman represents one district, so states with bigger populations have more districts and more Congressmen.

Representatives serve their district for two-year terms. Members of the House are very aware of the needs and opinions of the people in their districts, so they usually vote on laws based on how their district will be affected.

Senate

The U.S. Senate has 100 members, called Senators. Each state is represented by two Senators. Depending on how many people live in their state, Senators may represent between 1 million and 37 million *constituents* – the people who live in the area represented by a member of Congress.

Senators hold office for six years. Because Senators represent more people and serve longer terms, they tend to take positions and vote on laws based on how they might affect the entire country, not just a particular district.

Members of Congress have an office in Washington, DC, and at least one district office in their home state. The DC office focuses on legislative work, while the district offices take care of constituent services.

Contacting Your Representatives

Find out who your representatives are by visiting the House and Senate websites. These sites are also excellent resources for learning more about the history and functions of Congress.

Enter your zip code on the House website

Find Your Representative

Not sure of your congressional district or who your member is? This service will assist you by matching your ZIP code to your congressional district, with links to your member's website and contact page.

Please review the frequently asked questions if you have problems using this service.

Enter your ZIP code:

FIND YOUR REP BY ZIP

<http://www.house.gov/representatives/find/> to find out who represents your congressional district.

Find your state on the “Choose a State” tab on the Senate website:

http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm to find out which two Senators represent your state.

Once you have identified your representatives on the House and Senate websites, click on their names to go to their individual websites. Explore the sites to learn more about the issues they support and the services they offer to constituents.

Contacting your Congressman is ideal if you live near DC. If your host community is in another region, or if you would just like to experience local government, it may be beneficial to try the following options:

- State Government – Each U.S. state has its own legislative branch similar to Congress. Contact your state representatives or plan a visit to the state capitol to learn more about your host community.
 - Find your state legislature’s website at <https://www.congress.gov/state-legislature-websites>
- Local Government – Cities and towns often have their own governments and officials (sometimes called city councils and mayors, respectively). Attend a public meeting, or speak with a local government representative to learn more about your host community.
- School Board – Ask your YFU Field Director how to contact the people who approved your school enrollment and send them a letter of appreciation. Observe a school board meeting to learn about its work and concerns - these are generally open to the public.

To contact your representatives, you can use the phone numbers and office/email addresses on their websites to:

Call. This is the fastest way to get in touch. A staff member will answer your call.

Write a letter. A short, typed letter is a great way to introduce yourself to your Congressional representatives. Include your host family’s mailing address in your letter; this allows a response to be mailed to your home and confirms that you live in the district or state he/she represents.

Send an email. Emailing is an easy method of contact, but this means that many people send emails to Congressional representatives every day. An email might not stand out as much as a phone call or printed letter. Always include your mailing address.

When you contact your representative, ask about arranging a visit to a district or federal office. Meeting your representatives and/or members of their staff allows you to express appreciation for your scholarship and learn more about his/her work. Contact the nearest office to find out when he/she will be available for a meeting. Here are some tips for a successful visit:

Share Your Story

- Thank them for your scholarship and explain your program if he/she is unfamiliar with it.
- Let them know how your exchange experience has impacted you.
- Talk about your first impressions of the U.S. and/or your host community. Explain how and why they changed. What positive things did you learn?
- Tell them why you believe exchange trips like yours are so important.

I called my congressman, Jim Jordan and asked if I could meet him. He came to my high school to talk to me personally and to answer questions that I and the other students had.

Since he had not heard of the CBYX program, I had the opportunity to tell him about the program and about my wonderful experience as a CBYX scholar. We also talked about the German-American friendship and about the NSA affair. It was certainly an interesting experience.

Frigga, CBYX '14



Ask Questions

- What happens on a typical day in Congress or the district office?
- What are some of the biggest challenges for the state/district?
- Ask to take a picture with your representative! Share your photos and experiences in your YFU monthly survey and with your Local Coordinator or Community Manager.

Other Resources:

Learn about the Senate: <https://www.senate.gov/about/index.htm>

Learn about the House: <http://www.house.gov/content/learn/>

More Opportunities:

- Write an article about your exchange program for the representative's newsletter to constituents.
- Contact a district office to find out how you can learn more about elections. As an exchange student, you cannot support a candidate, vote, or donate money, but you might be able to observe campaign and election activities.
- Volunteer in a local office during a school break. Or, look into volunteering at your local precinct during the upcoming elections. These hours can be included in your community service log.
- Find out what if there are any activities hosted by your representative. Also, keep track of other events hosted by their office that you can be involved in. Details are available on their website.

You are encouraged to connect with the Congressional or local representatives of your host community at least once during your program year.

In drafting a letter to your representative, it is important to mention your full name and the exchange program you are part of. Briefly describe the program, including its history, purpose, and current statistics. Talk about a positive learning experience that you have had or your favorite experience in your host community.

If it is possible for you to visit the representative's office, request an opportunity to meet with him or her. When requesting a meeting or voluntary internship, contact the office at least thirty days before the date you are requesting, and call or email the office to make sure your letter has been received.

Use the template in the following page to guide your communication with the representative. Make sure to personalize the letter to your experiences and interests.



I had the opportunity to meet the Mayor of Denver and the Congress woman of Colorado, Diane DeGette. We sat and talked about the issues the country is facing due to the current leadership including the Muslim ban, minority rights and health insurance and how exchange programs can contribute to changing the perspective of Americans through their experiences.

Noor Khatri, YES '16

akistan

Student Guide to Congress

Sample Letter

Date

The Honorable Full Name of Representative
United States Senate/House of Representatives
Street Address Room/Suite #
City, State Zip Code

Dear Senator/Representative Last Name,

My name is Full Name and I am a participant in the Youth Exchange and Study (YES) program funded by the U.S. Congress and administered by the U.S. Department of State. It was established in 2002 to foster cultural understanding between American students and students from countries with significant Muslim populations. It now includes students from over 36 countries. As part of the program, I am spending an academic year with an American student and their family, attending their high school and engaging in other activities to encourage mutual understanding and gain leadership skills.

I would like to thank you for your support of this exchange opportunity. Through the YES exchange program, I have traveled from my home in Jordan to live with my host family in Arizona for one year. During my exchange year, I have learned so much about the United States, Arizona, and myself.

The most significant thing I have learned is how important it is to stay engaged with my community. My host family spends a lot of time volunteering in their neighborhood, and my host sister is part of a volunteering club at her high school. This is a great way to be active as it is an immense help to others and, as a result, is very rewarding for us. This is an idea that I will keep in mind when I return to Jordan.

To learn more about the American system of government and your role as a Senator/Representative for Host State/Community, I would like to request the opportunity to meet with you in your Location district office on Date(s).

Thank you again for your support and consideration. I will contact your office to follow up.

Sincerely,
Full Name
Host Address
Host City, State, Zip
Phone Number