



## YES Program FAQs

### What is the YES program?

The Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES) Program provides scholarships for secondary school students (ages 15-17) from select countries with significant Muslim populations to spend up to one academic year in the United States. Established by Congress in 2002 in response to the events of September 11, 2001, the program is sponsored by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA). YES Abroad, established in 2009, provides scholarships for American students (15-18 years old) to spend a year in select YES countries. Learn more on the YES website <http://yesprograms.org>, or visit [www.exchange.state.gov](http://www.exchange.state.gov).

### What is the goal of the YES program?

The YES program advances U.S. foreign policy goals of engaging youth populations and building civil society by providing physical exchanges and building lasting ties between high school students from countries with significant Muslim populations and the people of the United States. YES students:

- Gain an understanding of American society, people, values, culture, diversity, and respect for others with differing views.
- Interact with Americans and generate enduring ties.
- Teach Americans about their home countries and cultures.
- Explore and acquire an understanding of the key elements of U.S. civil society.
- Share and apply experiences and knowledge in their home countries as alumni.

### Who administers YES?

The YES program is administered in partnership with the U.S. Department of State by a consortium of non-profit organizations led by American Councils for International Education. PAX has been a member of this consortium since the inception of the YES program.

### How are YES participants selected?

YES students undergo an extremely-competitive and rigorous merit-based selection process. Efforts are made to recruit students from diverse geographical areas, socio-economic backgrounds, and ethnic groups to ensure a diverse candidate pool. Students with disabilities are also actively recruited.

YES applicants are given a comprehensive English exam and write a series of proctored essays in English. Finalists must demonstrate adequate English proficiency to study in a U.S. high school. Before final selection, candidates complete an extensive application, are interviewed individually by staff trained to evaluate these students, and take part in a group activity so that staff can assess their interpersonal skills. Selection of finalists is based on academic achievement, personal traits, social skills, and potential for success as an exchange student. On average, one in 40 applicants is selected to participate.

### What are YES students' English-language skills?

Students usually arrive with above-average written and oral English proficiency, which can still vary greatly depending on the student's nationality and socio-economic background. It is important to remember that YES is also an English-learning scholarship program, with tutoring available for students with weaker English skills.

### **What sets YES students apart from other exchange students?**

The U.S. Department of State holds its scholarship students to the highest standards and considers them to be youth ambassadors. While in United States, scholarship students are required to pursue the following activities:

- International Education Week (IEW): Each November, all YES students make presentations about their home countries in their schools, at community gatherings, religious congregations, and businesses.
- All YES students participate at least in two enhancement activities per quarter, and learn about American culture and diversity; government and democracy; entrepreneurship and free market economy; and leadership.
- All YES students complete at least 30 hours of service and participate in Global Youth Service Day in April.
- All YES students are encouraged to participate in workshop opportunities in Washington D.C. each spring. Through an essay competition, American Councils selects YES students to take part in these leadership workshops sponsored by the U.S. Department of State.

### **How can American families and schools become involved?**

U.S. citizen engagement in the YES program is vital to its success. When American host families welcome YES students into their homes and host schools receive YES students for an academic year, everyone benefits. Everyone involved has the unique opportunity to learn about each other based on personal, direct interaction and sharing.

Your family, school, or community can learn about a different part of the world and help a YES student learn about our country. You will be a citizen diplomat by creating positive impressions about America and Americans, breaking stereotypes, and fostering mutual understanding and respect.

### **What is the impact of YES on participants?**

While in the U.S, YES students—likely future leaders of their home countries—learn about concepts such as civic duty, the individual's capacity to effect change, and personal empowerment. Students also see important elements of civil society in action, including volunteerism and the notion that citizens can be proactive in dealing with societal problems. Upon return, as they share what they have learned, students make positive contributions to their home communities by initiating activities that build on acquired skills and experiences gained during their stay in the U.S.

### **What do I need to know about hosting a YES student?**

For general information about hosting with PAX, please visit [pax.org/faq](http://pax.org/faq) (families) or [pax.org.schools](http://pax.org.schools). Answers to common YES-specific questions can be found below.

### **When do YES students arrive in the U.S. and in their host communities?**

YES students arrive in five separate groups in Washington, D.C. every week in August and early September, depending upon their country of origin. After two days of orientation, students travel to their host communities.

### **When do YES students depart their host communities at the end of the program?**

YES students leave in early to mid-June. They attend a re-entry orientation in Washington, D.C. for two days before departing for their home country.

### **Do YES students receive an allowance?**

The scholarship provides for a monthly "stipend" (\$200) for items such as phone bills, snacks, toiletries, movies, etc., and a reimbursement fund for incidentals (\$300), such as winter clothing and school supplies. In addition, PAX can reimburse for required school fees, immunizations, and sports physicals.

### **Do YES students have health insurance?**

All YES students arrive at their host family's home with a PAX ID card on which is written the policy number and phone number for the student's health insurance provider. Upon arrival to the host family's home, students receive a packet with an insurance card, claim form, and description of coverage.