

# EVALUATION MATTERS: AMERICAN SPACES

## The Program

American Spaces (“Spaces”) began as cultural institutes that promote democratic values. Today, Spaces constitute a global network of physical places that are platforms for public diplomacy programs. Spaces provide programming in five programmatic areas: (1) providing information about the United States; (2) educational advising through EducationUSA; (3) English language learning and teaching; (4) strategic cultural programming; and (5) alumni engagement via State Department-sponsored exchange programs. Located within the Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), the Office of American Spaces provides direction, funding, and training to Spaces.

### ABOUT THE EVALUATION

**WHY:** The evaluation engaged 13 American Spaces (“Sample Spaces”) from around the world to: improve programming, and strengthen guidance for American Spaces moving forward, and to determine how the Office of American Spaces can effectively move towards a more robust global monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework.

**WHO:** ECA’s MELI Unit contracted Social Impact to conduct the evaluation.

**WHEN:** October 2019 to September 2021

**HOW:** Social Impact used a mixed-methods approach for the evaluation, which included document review, stakeholder interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and a survey administered by phone and online.

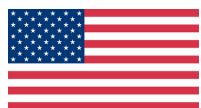
**HOW MUCH:** \$970,559

## Key Findings and Conclusions

**Integrated Country Strategy Goals:** Programs at the 13 Sample Spaces evaluated are mostly structured in a way that would contribute to ICS goals. This is in part due to the success of training provided by the Office of American Spaces. Most interviewees understood that Spaces’ programming must promote ICS goals and provided examples of how programs aligned with a particular goal.

**Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (KAP):** Available data show that Sample Spaces affect participants’ KAP in different ways. The degree to which KAP changes occur cannot be fully determined because, in general, Sample Spaces are not systematically measuring clients’ KAP. The evaluation’s survey respondents reported the top three skills gained were English language skills (59 percent), community engagement skills (49 percent), and the ability to work with technology (37 percent). Additionally, 33 percent said their opinions, beliefs, and attitudes positively changed about the United States and its people.

**Programming:** As a whole, Sample Spaces are performing strongest in the areas of strategic cultural programming, English language learning and teaching, and providing information about the United States. There was mixed evidence regarding educational advising and alumni engagement, hence conclusions about their effectiveness are more difficult to make.



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Learning, Innovation.

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You can find the full evaluation report here:  
<https://eca.state.gov/impact/evaluation-eca/evaluation-initiative/completed-evaluations>

## EVALUATION QUESTIONS:

1. To what extent are Sample Spaces' programs structured in a way that would contribute to achieving Mission Integrated Country Strategy (ICS) goals?
2. How do the Sample Spaces affect participants' and visitors' knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding the United States?
3. To what extent are the Sample Spaces achieving results in the five core programmatic areas, particularly educational advising?
4. How do the Sample Spaces affect the relationship between embassies/consulates and foreign officials?
5. What Standards should be revised or proposed to more accurately determine Space performance?
6. Leveraging existing resources, what metrics, data collection tools, analysis, and reporting methods can be easily implemented that will allow for continuous M&E of program results?

**Government Relationship-Building:** American Spaces promoted relationship-building between host governments, Spaces, and Posts. Spaces interacted with foreign officials through including them in programs, engaging alumni (now foreign officials), and engaging governments as local partners. These strategies increased Spaces' and Posts' ability to establish new channels of communication, collaborate on other projects, highlight U.S. investments and partnerships, and showcase positive relationships between the U.S. and the host country.

**Standards:** The Standards enable Spaces to assess where they currently stand relative to the Office of American Spaces' expectations, yet the purpose of the Standards is not always clear to stakeholders. Current elements focus strongly on outputs and functional elements and do not necessarily help orient Spaces toward impact. Further, they are not differentiated to account for differences between Space categories, and stakeholders are frustrated by the rating levels. A common criticism mentioned in over half of the Sample Spaces was that the Standards are outdated and require updating.

**M&E:** Sample Spaces are meeting the minimum requirements around required metrics. However, the majority of Spaces do not collect the types of outcome and demographic data that would allow them to adapt and target their programs to be more impactful. Most Sample Spaces and Posts do not possess the bandwidth or knowledge to implement additional M&E.

## Integrated Recommendations

**Revised Standards:** Revised Standards, which incorporated recommendations from the evaluation, were transmitted via cable by the Office of American Spaces to the field in January 2023. Per the evaluation's recommendations, the Standards differentiate between comprehensive and standard Spaces, and provide specific standards for each type of Space.

**M&E Toolkit:** The Office of American Spaces is working to incorporate the performance indicators developed during the evaluation into the Office of American Spaces Information System (OASIS) as the Program Specific Reporting (PSR) tool. The PSR will replace the current broad program and program attendee data with more granular information to improve reporting and better support ECA's Functional Bureau Strategy. Additionally, American Spaces is piloting the post-program survey from the M&E Toolkit with the MELI Unit's support. Other surveys provided in the M&E Toolkit will be piloted over the next two years.

**Regional public Engagement Specialists (REPS) Corps:** The Office of American Spaces has hired eight REPS since 2021 and four more REPS are expected to be onboarded in 2024. This increase in staff is a key part in American Spaces' efforts to implement the key recommendations from the evaluation around ensuring that Spaces have adequate support and guidance.