



# Learning Agenda

Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs  
Evaluation Division

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## **BACKGROUND**

The U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) works to build friendly, peaceful relations between the people of the United States and the people of other countries through academic, cultural, sports, and professional exchanges, as well as public - private partnerships. ECA leads public diplomacy outreach efforts through our exchange programs. These exchange programs improve foreign relations and strengthen the national security of the United States, support U.S. international leadership, and provide a broad range of domestic benefits by helping break down barriers that often divide us.

The Bureau's 2018-2022 Functional Bureau Strategy advances four U.S. foreign policy goals for which international exchanges have a demonstrated positive impact, and one management goal:

1. Advance American foreign policy objectives through flexible, responsive exchange programs.
2. Increase American's global competitiveness
3. Counter disinformation and radicalization.
4. Bolster democratic principles, strengthen the rule of law, and encourage strong civil society institutions.
5. Achieve greater efficiency: evaluate programs, expand use of virtual tools, and leverage alumni relationships.

The ECA Evaluation Division is dedicated to enhancing the effectiveness of the Bureau's educational and cultural programs. As part of this effort, and in accordance with the July 10, 2019, Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Memorandum on Phase I Implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018: Learning Agenda, Personnel, and Planning Guidance (OMB M-19-23), the Evaluation Division developed a multi-year learning agenda. A learning agenda is a set of questions addressing critical knowledge gaps that, when answered, enable more efficient and effective programming.

The ECA Evaluation Division is responsible for managing the Bureau's learning agenda and continually collects data through performance monitoring, partner reporting, and evaluations. These data are used to determine whether programs are achieving Bureau goals and objectives, or if program modifications are necessary. Through the Bureau's learning agenda, ECA will continue to prioritize and refine its monitoring and evaluation efforts to ensure that its programming is evidence-informed, relevant, dynamic and responsive.

## **MONITORING AND EVALUATION REQUIREMENTS**

To meet the requirements of the Department’s monitoring and evaluation policy (18 FAM 300), the Evaluation Division engaged stakeholders across the Bureau to articulate program-level theories of change, create results frameworks and indicators to measure progress against overarching goals and objectives, and solicit research questions to address evidence and knowledge gaps related to the goals and outcomes of exchange programming. Out of this process, this learning agenda was created.

The Evaluation Division plans to include as part of its annual Bureau Evaluation Plan a research study and/or evaluation designed to provide evidence to answer one of the learning agenda sub-questions proposed below. These studies will most likely rely heavily on document review of external resources, as well as previous evaluations of ECA programs; the Evaluation Division anticipates that additional data will be collected utilizing a variety of methods, including key informant interviews, focus group discussions, surveys, and observations – particularly where ECA programming will provide the basis for answering the learning agenda question.

# LEARNING AGENDA QUESTIONS

	Includes exploring factors such as...
<p><b>1. How do variations in program design contribute to changes in program outcomes?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program length: Short-term vs. long-term</li> <li>• Virtual vs. in-person delivery</li> <li>• Housing type (home stay, apartment, dormitory, etc.)</li> <li>• Variety of experiences offered (i.e. cultural experiences; individual vs. small group)</li> <li>• Program content (academic studies, professional development, etc.)</li> <li>• ECA-funded vs. non-funded (sponsor) programs</li> <li>• One-way vs. two-way exchanges</li> <li>• Geography (single country, regional, multi-regional)</li> <li>• First-hand vs. second-hand experience (e.g. participants experience the United States or another country directly by visiting through an exchange vs. indirectly by learning through an American Space or during a virtual exchange)</li> <li>• Which program types (education, professional, cultural) most shape supportive perspectives on U.S. policy positions?</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. How do participant characteristics contribute to attitudinal and behavioral changes as a result of ECA program participation?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there distinct cultural factors or attributes that enable or impede participation?</li> <li>• How and to what extent do U.S. participants experience exchange programs differently than foreign participants?</li> </ul>

<p><b>3. What are the long-term cross-cultural competency gains of exchange participants?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent are cross-cultural competency gains retained after returning from abroad?</li> <li>• How and to what extent do cross-cultural experiences affect participant attitudes and behaviors related to diversity, respect, democratic values, and inclusion?</li> <li>• Do cross-cultural experiences reduce prejudice between majority and minority members?</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Does the act of participants sharing exchange experiences and working on follow-on projects when returning home have an attitudinal multiplier effect on non-program participants/communities?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do community members have a positive attitudinal change based on interactions with alumni?</li> <li>• What do alumni share with their communities? (skills, cross-cultural experiences, etc.)</li> <li>• How often and in what ways do alumni share?</li> <li>• How do these outcomes change based on alumni demographics? (age, gender, etc.)</li> <li>• Do alumni-led initiatives influence or change laws or policies in their home countries?</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. On returning to their home communities, what factors facilitate or hinder an alumni's ability to implement positive change in their home communities?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the motivation for alumni?</li> <li>• Do they have parental, peer, and/or community support?</li> <li>• How does engagement with the Embassy influence what alumni do in their community?</li> <li>• What program factors play a role in effecting positive change post-program (e.g., implementing successful alumni projects)?</li> </ul>

<p><b>6. What are the most effective ways to foster the creation and sustainment of networks that lead to collaboration among alumni, beneficiaries, and institutions?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Virtual vs. in-person networks</li> <li>• Formal vs. informal networks</li> <li>• Alumni engagement with their network</li> <li>• How do exchanges expand or otherwise impact existing alumni networks?</li> </ul>
<p><b>7. What is the impact of exchange programs on host communities?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What types of exchanges offer the most economic benefit to host communities?</li> <li>• What is the impact on U.S. organizations of hosting international professionals?</li> <li>• Do foreign exchange visitors displace local domestic employment?</li> <li>• Does economic development impact cultural protection and preservation?</li> </ul>
<p><b>8. How does utilizing exchange programs to meet Embassy goals provide long-term benefit?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does an individual's or organization's participation in an exchange program increase engagement with an Embassy or broader USG initiatives?</li> <li>• How effective are Embassies in selecting and nominating participants for relevant programs?</li> <li>• How, if at all, do non-ECA funded programs, such as Au Pair, Camp Counselors, and Summer Work Travel, contribute to Embassy objectives?</li> </ul>

The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs' (ECA)'s Evaluation Division has been at the forefront of the Department of State's (DOS) monitoring and evaluation (M&E) efforts since its creation in 1999. Throughout its 20 years, the Evaluation Division has built a robust M&E system to ensure that ECA program staff and senior leadership benefit from timely performance data that they can utilize for evidence-based decision-making.

For a complete listing of ongoing evaluation projects, an archive of completed reports, and resources for conducting evaluations, visit the ECA Evaluation Division website: <https://eca.state.gov/impact/eca-evaluation-division>

If you would like additional information or have any questions, please contact us at [ECAevaluation@state.gov](mailto:ECAevaluation@state.gov) or visit our Diplopedia page (internal State Department personnel ONLY).



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