

Evaluation Matters: Sports Visitor Program

Case Study On Learning



THE PROGRAM

The ECA Evaluation Division conducted an evaluation of the Sports Visitor Program. The Sports Visitor Program brings non-elite youth athletes, coaches, and administrators to the United States for a fast-paced, two-week exchange program. These sports-themed programs offer participants, chosen by U.S. Embassies from all regions of the world, the opportunity to interact with Americans and experience American society, culture, and values firsthand. All programs include sessions on sports in the United States from grassroots community level sports up to the Olympics, Paralympics, and professional leagues, as well as background and legacies of movements that had an impact on sports in America such as the Civil Rights Movement, Title IX, and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

THE EVALUATION

Why: The purpose of this evaluation was to:

1. Determine whether the Sports Visitor Program is meeting its goals.
2. Provide evidence to inform future programmatic decision-making by ECA's Sports Diplomacy Division.

What: The evaluation addressed the following questions:

1. Are the goals outlined in the FY 2017 NOFO and FY 2018 - FY 2019 renewal solicitations being accomplished?

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KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Key findings and conclusions from the evaluation include:

- » **Enhanced Skills.** The program provides participants with a new way of playing, coaching, teaching, and communicating. More than 70% of participants enhanced their leadership skills, sports ability, coaching ability, networking skills, and English language competency. Participants also cited increased confidence, and better communication and leadership skills as their greatest take-aways from the program.
- » **Alumni as Change Agents.** Alumni return to their communities as change makers by volunteering in their communities (91%), initiating new activities and projects (83%), assuming leadership roles (78%), and establishing new organizations (40%). Additionally, 75% of coaches and administrators implemented projects in their communities. Those few who reported struggling to fulfill their original goals cited delays due to COVID, insufficient financial support, or simply being unable to complete their plans on their own due to lacking institutional or personal support.
- » **Cross-Cultural Understanding.** Although there were opportunities for cultural activities, participants expressed a desire for more time to engage with Americans. Many participants spent most of their time with other participants from their country and expressed interest in having more time to meet and interact with Americans, especially for the coaches and administrators.
- » **Embassy Engagement.** For U.S. Embassies, the Sports Visitor Program successfully provides the flexibility needed for Embassies to use the program



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THE EVALUATION

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2. What program areas need improvement?

3. Is there a better process for monitoring the program?

Who: ECA's Evaluation Division worked in partnership with the District Communications Group (DCG) to conduct the evaluation.

When: March through December 2020

How: The Evaluation Team conducted a survey and in-depth interviews with program alumni and select U.S. Embassies.

How Much: \$68,078

to meet their specific strategic goals. Embassies also maintain strong alumni engagement, especially in supporting alumni action plans by providing financial support or attending alumni-organized events.

- » **Alumni Engagement.** Alumni engagement is generally strong, but is mainly driven by informal communication among alumni themselves. Alumni shared that they would appreciate additional support in the form of boosting existing networks, providing follow-up trainings, and sharing information on possible funding sources or other resources.

INTEGRATING RECOMMENDATIONS

Through the FY 2021 renewal solicitation, ECA and FHI 360 made the following program adjustments to the Sports Visitor Program:

- » **Administrative Adjustments.** ECA and FHI made a number of adjustments to address program administrative issues, including increasing the number of interpreters (provided funding), allowing additional time for Muslim participants to pray, and ensuring that the needs of participants with disabilities are met.
- » **Increasing Overall Program Length.** ECA and FHI expanded programming from two to three weeks for the youth track of the program.
- » **Expanding Cultural Engagement Opportunities.** FHI added additional program components to expand participants' cultural engagement with Americans. Additional opportunities may include home hospitality, home stays, community receptions, speed networking, discussion circles, pick-up sports games, and citizen exchange circles.
- » **Action Planning for Youth.** Given the success of action planning for adult participants, ECA and FHI built action planning and small grant eligibility into youth programs, focusing projects around school or sports team-based projects with a teacher or coach "mentor" to manage small-grant funding.
- » **Expanding Alumni Programming.** FHI expanded their alumni offerings to include virtual workshops on the following topics (among others): mental health, technology, adaptive sports, digital storytelling, entrepreneurship, nutrition, sports programming for women and girls, action planning follow-up, and entrepreneurial ecosystems. Additionally, FHI is exploring how to provide alumni internet credit when needed to access follow-on content.
- » **Improving Monitoring and Evaluation.** FHI and ECA are standardizing survey collection based on the ECA Evaluation Division Monitoring Data for ECA (MODE) Framework, as well as exploring opportunities for a longitudinal study in the future to ascertain the multiplier effect of the program.

If you are interested in learning more, you can find the full evaluation report here:

<https://eca.state.gov/impact/evaluation-eca/evaluation-initiative/completed-evaluations> or www.sportsvisitor.org