

Monitoring Matters: Youth Welfare Surveys



THE SURVEYS

Why: To ensure the health, safety, and welfare of youth participants in ECA programs, and to improve the programs for current and future participants.

What:

1. **BridgeUSA's 2021 Secondary School Student Program Monitoring Survey** (mailing list of approximately 17,000 current participating students)
2. **2021-22 PMT Survey** (mailing list of approximately 2,000 current participants)

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As part of its mission, ECA's Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning & Innovation Unit (MELI) assists program offices in monitoring and acting to ensure the welfare of their participants, particularly the young people who enroll in youth-focused ECA programs.

THE PROGRAMS

BridgeUSA annually attracts around 300,000 individuals to the United States from 200 countries and territories, many to study in U.S. high schools, universities, and research institutions. Within ECA, the Office of Private Sector Exchange Program Administration (OPA) monitors the daily operations of designated BridgeUSA sponsor organizations to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of exchange visitors, including the youth who enroll in the Secondary School Student exchange programs at U.S. high schools. OPA reviews and responds to all complaints and incidents reported to the Department, evaluates program data to identify systemic compliance issues and trends, and conducts site visits and electronic reviews to evaluate sponsors' regulatory compliance.

ECA has three long-term youth programs for foreign participants: The Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange (CBYX) program is an immersive exchange program jointly offered by the U.S. and German governments to foster people-to-people ties among young people in the United States and Germany. The Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) program provides scholarships for high school students from Europe and Eurasia to spend an academic year in the United States. The Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES) program brings high school students from countries of strategic importance to the United States for an academic year to forge lasting ties between Americans and the people of those countries. These three programs are served by the Participant Monitoring Team (PMT), a unit comprised of participant monitoring specialists who are responsible for ensuring the health, safety, and welfare of inbound high school exchange students for these three programs. The PMT oversees support activity for the three programs' placement organizations and conducts site visits in the communities where participants are placed.

KEY RESULTS AND FINDINGS

OPA Survey:

- » 9380 responses received.
- » 92% rated overall experience as "Extremely good" or "Somewhat good."
- » 92% rated experience with host family as "Extremely good" or "Somewhat good."
- » 98% said they felt safe with their host families "Always" or "Most of the time."
- » 98% said they felt safe at school "Always" or "Most of the time."
- » 84% experienced altered formats or disruptions in school due to COVID precautions.

In cases where problems were identified, the survey requested qualitative input from the respondents in the form of open-ended questions. MELI coded the qualitative data



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Who: Surveys prepared by OPA and PMT teams, with MELI providing support for survey launch and analysis of data.

When: October 2021 & February 2022

How: Both surveys launched and analyzed on the Qualtrics platform, using mailing lists provided by program teams.

How Much: No added costs; requirements were covered by existing office budgets.

thereby gathered for themes, while the OPA team reviewed each open-ended response to determine which cases required follow-up.

PMT Survey:

- » 1867 responses received.
- » 84% rated overall experience as “Excellent” or “Very Good”; 12% rated experience “Good,” while 3% rated it “Fair” or “Poor.”
- » 98% had no concerns about placement, health, safety, or well-being.
- » 99% felt supported by their host families.
- » 99% felt supported by their host communities.
- » 96% of respondents communicate with local coordinator/liaison/rep at least monthly.
- » 86% of respondents indicated pre-departure & post-arrival orientations prepared them adequately for program; 12% felt “partially” prepared.
- » 96% of respondents indicated that they know how to get emergency help.

Once again, the survey queried respondents about any issues/concerns in the form of open-ended questions. The PMT reviewed all open-ended responses, sorted by placement organization, to determine what cases required follow-up.

ACTING ON RESULTS AND FINDINGS

OPA Survey:

- » OPA team followed up with 650 respondents who indicated that they wanted to provide additional feedback.
- » 12 students reported significant problems/issues, which the OPA team addressed individually with the participant’s designated sponsors.
- » OPA team shared monitoring feedback drawn from the survey via an “email blast” to all 67 Secondary School Student Program sponsors.
- » All stakeholders obtained a better understanding of the effects of COVID on international youth exchange, which will be applied in any parallel contexts going forward.

PMT Survey:

- » PMT used the survey results to follow up directly with all students who reported a concern about their health, safety, and wellbeing.
- » PMT followed up with placement organization staff to request check-ins where there were unsatisfactory responses to questions about Local Coordinators or students who rated their program year low.
- » PMT adapted site visit schedule based on the survey results. *Example: site visits to one particular state were added to monitor several on-program support cases, with in-person interviews of relevant stakeholders included in the itinerary based on feedback students shared from the survey.*

Building on outcomes such as these, MELI will continue to work with offices across ECA to deploy targeted monitoring surveys, thereby helping ensure that young people and others enrolled in ECA programs have the most positive experience possible in the United States.



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