

EVALUATION MATTERS: CONGRESS- BUNDESTAG YOUTH EXCHANGE



ABOUT THE EVALUATION

WHY: The evaluation focused on American CBYX alumni and American host communities to assess short- and long-term outcomes from the program's 40 years.

WHO: ECA's MELI Unit contracted The District Communications Group (DCG) to conduct the evaluation.

WHEN: March 2021 to December 2022

HOW: DCG used a mixed methods approach for the evaluation, which included document review, stakeholder interviews, focus group discussions, and a survey administered online.

HOW MUCH: \$548,780

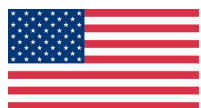
The Program

The Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange (CBYX) program was inaugurated in 1983 through a bilateral agreement between the U.S. Congress and the German Bundestag. The program supports the exchange of American and German young people to sustain and strengthen the American-German friendship. Currently, six U.S. implementing partners (IPs) are connected with seven German IPs to administer three components of the CBYX program: 1) high school, 2) vocational, and 3) young professionals.

Key Findings and Conclusions

Intercultural Exchange: Alumni reported being exposed to German culture as well as new political, social, and educational systems different from their own expanding worldview. Alumni identified aspects of German culture they admired, but also articulated they were prouder of the [American] society they represent. Host communities also reported an opportunity for deep cultural exchange by hosting German students with 86% of host families saying they are more aware of other cultures, while 92% of host schools reported their school benefited from an increase in intercultural awareness.

Academic and Career Growth: Overall, the CBYX program was reported to have notable contributions to American alumni. Citing the development of skills such as self-confidence, communicating with those from other cultures, and adaptability, 88% of alumni believe they would not be where they are now academically or professionally had they not participated in the program. Additionally, 95% of American alumni also reported continuing to use skills from the program even decades later with the most common being German language, teaching and project management skills.



MELI
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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. Did the CBYX program have an effect on the educational and professional trajectories of CBYX alumni?
2. Have alumni maintained a focus on German studies, language, or business relationships?
3. Did the program have an effect on alumni's view of the role of the United States or Americans in the world, or their identity as an American?
4. Did alumni share what they learned/their experiences during the program with their community, family, and friends? What did they share?
5. Did hosting a German participant lead to increased understanding or interest in other cultures within host communities?
6. Did American organizations benefit from German participants working and volunteering with them?

Investment in American Communities: Through the placement of German CBYX participants at host schools, 80% of American community respondents reported being exposed to new perspectives and ideas, while 73% reported a heightened interest among students to study abroad. When asked about the benefits of hosting, 97% of school representatives surveyed felt that hosting German CBYX students enriched students' educational experience.

Awareness and Access: During focus groups and interviews, several alumni shared they were only able to participate in CBYX because it is fully funded. While funding makes the program more inclusive, alumni highlighted that awareness of the program is often limited to those who know someone who has participated in the program or who already has a strong existing connection to Germany or the German language. Alumni also reported that some participants' cultural experiences are more limited because they cannot pay for additional excursions or activities not covered by program funding.

Alumni Engagement: While 86% of American alumni reported maintaining at least annual contact with someone from their program, alumni from earlier cohorts explained that over the years it has become more difficult to stay in touch. Based on survey results, alumni who report being part of the CBYX Alumni Association (CBYXAA) are 10% more likely than non-members to maintain five or more relationships from the CBYX program.

Integrated Recommendations

Expanded outreach: Based on the evaluation recommendations, the CBYX program team is using data and first-hand accounts to communicate both to potential participants and host communities what they can expect from the program. This includes sharing information at in-person events, information sessions, and through social media channels; as a special initiative to help strengthen outreach, ECA offered small grants to current participants and alumni to organize CBYX 40th anniversary celebrations designed to spread the word about the program in their communities. Finally, the Youth Program Division made administrative changes to strengthen CBYX, such as providing new stipends to broaden the programs' appeal to American students of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

Renewed collaboration with CBYXAA: Since the conclusion of the evaluation, the CBYX program team has met with CBYXAA Board leadership to share findings and alumni insights from the evaluation. ECA continues to collaborate with CBYXAA to increase membership in the organization, provide opportunities for alumni, and increase transparency of the organization.