

EVALUATION MATTERS: YOUTH ALL-STARS ABROAD PROGRAM

The Program

Under ECA's Sports Visitor Program implemented by FHI 360, the Youth All-Stars Abroad (YAA) pilot was a sports-based international exchange program for American youth athletes and their coaches to engage in sports camps and clinics alongside international ECA Sports Diplomacy alumni and their networks from around the world. The YAA pilot was designed to build leadership, academic, career, and cross-cultural skills among underserved American and international high school-aged youth female athletes. The pilot program also aimed to encourage participants to explore off-the-field sports-based careers or careers in international affairs or diplomacy. Part of a multi-country soccer and leadership program implemented in conjunction with the Julie Foudy & espnW Sports Leadership Academy (JFSLA), the YAA pilot included seven American and five Brazilian young women and three coaches to participate in a 19-day in-person (one week in the United States and 12 days in Brazil) program with virtual pre- and post-program content to further program objectives.

ABOUT THE EVALUATION

WHY: The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the efficacy of the initial pilot by determining the program's outcomes and identifying where modifications need to be made for future implementation.

WHO: ECA's MELI Unit

WHEN: June 2022 through April 2023

HOW: The MELI Unit utilized a qualitative design, conducting in-depth interviews with a wide variety of stakeholders involved in the YAA pilot.

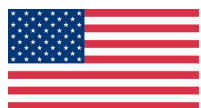
HOW MUCH: \$0 (Internal Evaluation)

Key Findings and Conclusions

Pre-Programming: FHI 360 stated their main challenge was gaining parent/guardian buy-in for the U.S. participants due to the virtual nature of pre-program interaction and the language barrier encountered in working within a bilingual community.

Embassy Involvement: The U.S. Consulate in São Paulo was brought into the planning stage of the pilot much later than they would have liked, which limited their ability to contribute meaningful input and introduce the American participants to a wider variety of Brazilian locations and cultural experiences.

Collaboration: The pilot required a great deal of collaboration among a variety of stakeholders to be implemented successfully, and an important aspect of this success was how organizers leveraged pre-existing organizational connections. Most stakeholders involved had worked together previously and were well-aligned with each other to the benefit of the pilot.



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<https://eca.state.gov/impact/evaluation-eca/evaluation-initiative/completed-evaluations>

Skills Development: YAA helped participants develop their self-confidence through their exposure to female coaches, which was a new experience for many participants. Seeing women in leaderships positions made them more confident in their own abilities and some wanted to become coaches for other girls. Participants also developed leadership skills both on and off the field, which partners reported the participants have shown since returning from the program.

Participant Diversity: The pilot met its diversity goal by recruiting participants from a traditionally underserved and underrepresented Spanish-speaking community, but stakeholders involved in the program felt the diversity goal could be broadened to include a wider variety of underserved and underrepresented communities to build stronger cross-cultural skills.

Integrating Recommendations

ECA should develop a pre-departure orientation (PDO) aimed specifically at parents/guardians and ensure that all information is available in multiple languages to establish more parent/guardian buy-in. This recommendation was implemented in 2023 to generate more parental buy-in and confidence in the program. FHI 360 hosted a virtual Q&A session with potential participants and their parents that included simultaneous interpretation. Once participants were selected, FHI 360 hosted five virtual PDO sessions and created a WhatsApp group for participants and their parents to ask questions directly to FHI 360. PDO sessions included topics such as: travel logistics (with interpretation for families), culture and language of the host country, leadership through a gender lens, etc. With these new measure in place, the program did not experience the same level of parental hesitation or last-minute changes that the 2022 program experienced. These PDO sessions and the WhatsApp group will continue to be implemented as a best practice for the program moving forward.

ECA should consider increasing the involvement of local American partners in the program development process. Beginning in 2024, the exchanges are now implemented in partnership with local U.S. organizations selected based on proposals that demonstrate both strong domestic and international capacity to recruit participants and conduct exchange activities in-line with the goals of Youth All-Stars Abroad. The U.S. organizations are now responsible for the planning and implementation of the exchange through subawards with FHI 360. This allows the ECA Sports Diplomacy Division to leverage U.S. partner expertise and their pre-existing in-country relationships.

ECA should consider expanding the number of participants who can participate in the program to increase diversity by reaching a broader audience. The Sports Diplomacy Division has expanded the total number of American participants to 60, Spread across four outbound Sports Visitor cohorts, this allows a greater number of American youth from multiple cities and geographic locations in the United States to access the program. Additionally, FHI 360 has started partnering with institutions that focs diversity – including Minority Serving Institutions of higher education, and institutions and organizations related to people with disabilities as well as other aspects of diversity as specified in ECA’s Diversity Statement.