

EVALUATION SUMMARY



Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Office of Policy and Evaluation Evaluation Division

Evaluation of the Youth Exchange and Study (YES) Program

The purpose of this evaluation was to document the achievements and impact of the Youth Exchange and Study Program (YES), and assess the extent to which it is fulfilling its overarching goal of promoting mutual understanding and respect between the people of the United States and the participating partner countries. The study examined the program's performance in terms of key participant outcomes: attitudinal changes, learning and understanding, and behavioral changes.

Key Findings

Participants learned a great deal about U.S. society, values, and institutions, and view the U.S. more favorably as a result of their experience.

- Ninety-five percent of survey respondents reported that their understanding of U.S. politics, government, and economy increased during the program.
- After the program, 94% of respondents reported that they held a "more favorable" or "much more favorable" view of people from the U.S. than they had at the start of the program.

The program strengthened participants' beliefs in the importance of individual and civic rights.

- By the end of the program, over 90% of survey respondents considered freedom of speech and religion, access to adequate housing, healthcare and education, and the ability to have a job to be "very important" or "somewhat important" rights.
- At the end of the program, 94% or more of respondents believed "strongly" or "somewhat" in the importance of equal opportunities for minorities, women, and people with disabilities.

Participants gained confidence and leadership skills during the program, and feel empowered to make changes in their communities.

- Participants consistently ranked "leadership" and "confidence/determination" among the top five skills they acquired while in the U.S.
- On the key leadership skills of "being self reliant and independent," "being flexible," and "speaking in public," the number of participants who rated their abilities as "excellent" increased by over 50 percentage points between the beginning and end of the program.
- Female participants in particular made notable gains in their sense of empowerment, with a majority agreeing "strongly" that they can influence those around them and make a difference in their communities.
- Approximately 8 out of 10 participants reported involvement in community service and/or volunteer work in their home communities after the program.

Enthusiasm for the program and its benefits is strong.

Project Information: InterMedia, a Washington D.C.-based research organization, conducted the evaluation from June 2003 through August 2009. Four cohorts of YES participants completed surveys at three points: immediately before arriving in the U.S., immediately before returning home, and one year after the end of the program. Qualitative data was collected through focus groups administered at the end of the program.

Program Information: The YES Program provides scholarships for secondary school students (ages 15-17) from countries with significant Muslim populations to spend up to one academic year in the United States. Students stay with American host families, attend high school, engage in activities to learn about the United States, acquire leadership skills, and help educate Americans about their countries, cultures and customs.

Contact Information: For more information about this evaluation, or to request a copy of the final report, please contact the Office of Policy and Evaluation at (202) 632-6325, by email at ECAevaluation@state.gov or by mail at State Annex 5, 2200 C Street NW, Washington, DC 22301.

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