



2018–2019



Find Out About This Historic Exchange Program with the United States



Bureau of Educational
and Cultural Affairs



“Exchanges can break down walls between us, for when people come together and speak to one another and share a common experience, then their common humanity is revealed. We are reminded that we’re joined together by our pursuit of a life that’s productive and purposeful, and when that happens mistrust begins to fade and our smaller differences no longer overshadow the things that we share. And that’s where progress begins.”

-President Barack Obama

In 1992, then-U.S. Senator Bill Bradley cosponsored with U.S. Congressman Jim Leach supporting the historic legislation providing for secondary school exchanges between the U.S. and the countries of the former Soviet Union. That program is now known as the FLEX program and has since expanded to other countries.

What does youth exchange achieve?

The concept of exchange programs grew out of a desire for nations and their peoples to build bridges of understanding after World War II. Since then, the youth exchange movement has become well known and accepted in many countries throughout the world. What makes youth exchange successful is the unique way in which young people learn about another country and culture: by living as a member of a host family, not as a guest. The success of this formula has resulted in a global awareness of the positive impact of exchange, not only on relations among nations, but on the lives of hundreds of thousands of participants, their peers, schools, communities, and parents. Many of today’s world, national, and local leaders have themselves participated in an exchange experience and can attest to its positive impact on their lives.

What is the FLEX program?

Youth exchange programs with the countries of the Soviet Union began in the 1980s. Exchanges between the U.S. and the USSR, which focused on graduate students and scholars, began earlier, in the 1950s. The FLEX program is the first large-scale, long-term program to focus on secondary school students.

This program was created by the United States Congress to extend a hand of friendship from the people of the United States of America to the people of the countries of the former Soviet Union. It established the first long-term exchange program for secondary school students to travel to the United States for a year. Now in its 25th year, the FLEX academic year program has provided scholarships to over 27,000 secondary school students. In 2017-18, 900 students are studying in the U.S. on the FLEX program. Each scholarship recipient will live for one year as a member of a U.S. host family and study in an American high school.

Secondary school students with disabilities are invited to participate in the competition. Approximately 20 students with disabilities are invited to the U.S. under this program each year. Selected students with disabilities meet the same criteria as other participants in the program.

What is NOT provided?

The FLEX scholarship does NOT cover the following costs:

- Any costs associated with receiving an international passport
- Personal expenses not covered by the monthly stipend
- Excess baggage costs
- Telephone calls or internet use, including access to email

What does the scholarship provide?

The FLEX scholarship provides the following:

- Round-trip domestic and international travel (from home to the United States and back)
- Monthly allowance to help students participate in social activities and buy necessary personal supplies
- Placement with a selected and screened U.S. host family for one year
- Enrollment in a U.S. secondary school
- Program orientation activities including pre-program preparation and re-entry preparation
- Program activities arranged in local U.S. communities
- Medical insurance, excluding pre-existing conditions and dental care

Who pays for the program?

This scholarship program is fully funded by the United States government and administered by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) of the U.S. Department of State. ECA fosters understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries around the world. ECA programs include educational and training programs that promote personal, professional, and institutional ties between private citizens and organizations in the United States and abroad.

The FLEX program is supported at the local level by U.S. citizens and local secondary schools that voluntarily host, educate, and support students with no financial compensation.



Who is eligible to apply to the program?

In keeping with the U.S. Government-sponsored initiatives dedicated to promoting greater understanding with countries in Eurasia, the competition for the FLEX scholarship is merit-based and open at no cost to applicants who meet the following requirements. Eligible applicants must:

1. Meet the grade/age requirements set for their country (refer to the table)

Country	Eligible Grades*	Eligible Birthdate Range	Completed Secondary Education or Graduated Prior to Program Start Date
Armenia	9, 10, 11, or 12* I, II, or III* year of college	15 February 2000 -15 July 2003	Eligible if graduated
Azerbaijan	11*	15 February 2000 -15 July 2003	Eligible if graduated
Georgia	9, 10 or 11	1 January 2001-15 July 2003	Not eligible if graduated
Kazakhstan	8, 9 or 10 or 1st year of a lyceum or college	1 January 2001-15 July 2003	Not eligible if graduated
Kyrgyzstan	9, 10, 11; or 1st year of a lyceum or college	1 January 2001-15 July 2003	Eligible if graduated
Moldova	9, 10 or 11	1 January 2001-15 July 2003	Eligible if graduated
Mongolia	9, 10 or 11	1 January 2001-15 July 2003	Not eligible if graduated
Montenegro	1st or 2nd grade of high school	1 January 2001-15 July 2003	Not eligible if graduated
Serbia	1st or 2nd grade of high school	1 January 2001-15 July 2003	Not eligible if graduated
Tajikistan	11	15 February 2000-31 December 2001	Eligible if graduated
Turkmenistan	N/A*	15 March 2000-31 May 2002	Eligible if graduated
Ukraine	8, 9 or 10	1 January 2001-15 July 2003	Not eligible if graduated

* NOTE: Students in their final grade of school who are required to complete military service are not eligible.

2. Be enrolled in a secondary school at the time of application
3. Have an academic standing of good or better
4. Have previously studied English and demonstrate English language ability at the time of registration
5. Meet U.S. visa eligibility requirements
6. Be a citizen of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Mongolia, Montenegro, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan or Ukraine and able to receive an international passport in the country where they apply to the program

Who is not eligible?

Students are ineligible to apply if:

- S/he does not meet criteria 1-6
- S/he has stayed in the U.S. for three (3) months or more during the past five (5) years
- His/her family (or member of family):
 - Applied or is applying to emigrate to the U.S.
 - Made plans to emigrate or has already emigrated to the U.S.

How are students selected?

Independent panels of American professionals in education and international relations in the United States will select program finalists and alternates. Selection will be based on merit as evidenced in a comprehensive application, teacher reference, and demonstrated preparedness for a year-long exchange experience. Students also will be required to provide medical evaluations and be certified as medically fit to participate in the program.

The selection process will be completed in spring 2018, and all applicants will receive notification of their status by mid-May 2018. English-language proficiency is important but it is not the sole element in selection.

What happens after notification?

Upon notification, finalists, alternates and their parents will receive information to prepare them for departure. They must officially notify their FLEX representative in writing that they accept the scholarship and must provide any additional documentation requested as well. Students must begin the process of applying for an international passport and U.S. visa immediately upon acceptance to the program. The FLEX program will instruct participants on the process of applying for a U.S. visa.

From May through August 2018, selected U.S. exchange organizations will match finalists with qualified U.S. host families and arrange for enrollment in local secondary schools. In June and July 2018, scholarship recipients will participate in a pre-program orientation in their home country. Students will then travel to their U.S. host families and communities to begin the exchange experience in August 2018.

Please note: Students participating in the FLEX program must return to their home country at the end of the program on the date assigned by American Councils. The U.S. visa issued for program participants will not be amended or extended beyond the program end date for any reason.

When and how can I apply?

Representatives of American Councils will visit the capitals of regions within the participating countries to conduct testing during fall 2017. Applicants should come to the designated testing center at the time of initial registration and bring proof of eligibility (birth certificate), one recent 3x4 cm photo, and a pen. Testing center locations will be announced as soon as possible through press and radio announcements; information can also be accessed via the Internet at <http://discoverflex.org>. Applicants may only participate in round 1 testing at ONE test center in fall 2017.

All applicants will take a short English test (round 1). Those who pass the first test will write a composition in English (round 2, which usually occurs on the day after round 1). Candidates must successfully complete the first two rounds of the competition before they receive final application materials, take a longer English language proficiency test, and are interviewed.

How will I benefit from the exchange experience?

The FLEX program offers students an opportunity to learn about the people and culture of the United States. FLEX participants are also young ambassadors who teach Americans about the people and culture of their countries. Students gain an appreciation for and develop sensitivity to other cultures, experience personal growth and independence, and become better prepared for an increasingly interdependent world. Students form strong ties with their American host families and U.S. communities, building relationships that often last a lifetime. Many alumni attend prestigious universities upon their return home, and later find exciting jobs that use skills learned during their stay in the United States.

What should you consider before applying to FLEX?

Students who are interested in this program should consider the possible negative effects of this program:

- Will I have to repeat a year of school after returning home?
- Will I be home too late in 2019 to take final school examinations/university/institute entrance examinations? FLEX students return to their communities in late May and June.
- Will my university or institute defer my admission if I have already been accepted?
- Will I be required to serve in the military upon return?
- Will I be eligible to graduate with honors/receive a gold medal at my home school?

Finally, although students attend a U.S. high school, the curriculum is substantially different from that in other countries, and likely you will not learn the same subject material.

Who organizes the program?

American Councils for International Education organizes recruitment, selection, orientation, and travel arrangements for the FLEX program. Founded in 1974, American Councils is an international non-profit organization working to improve mutual understanding between countries, exchange ideas among individuals, and enhance collaboration through education. It designs, implements, and supports innovative programs in the United States, Europe, Eurasia, the Middle East, Asia, and Africa.

Over the past 40 years, American Councils has become one of the premier U.S. international education and training organizations. It administers more than 30 exchange and training programs, including several U.S. government programs for secondary school students, university and graduate students, teachers, and professors. American Councils has professionally administered academic, professional and cultural programs for tens of thousands of participants from Afghanistan, Africa, Eurasia, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Southeast Europe.

Many other private, non-profit organizations in the United States also support the FLEX program. The U.S. government has asked these organizations to place FLEX participants in supportive U.S. host families and to organize local activities during the year-long program.

Where can I get more information?

Armenia , Yerevan	(374-10) 56-00-45
Azerbaijan , Baku	(994-12) 436-75-29
Georgia , Tbilisi	(995-032) 229-21-06
Kazakhstan , Almaty	(7-727) 291-92-26
Kyrgyzstan , Bishkek	(996-312) 910-989
Moldova , Chisinau	(37-322) 24-16-64
Mongolia , Ulaanbaatar	(976)93-130-647
Montenegro , Podgorica	(382-67) 562-121
Serbia , Belgrade	(381-11)3245-905
Tajikistan , Dushanbe	(992-37) 221-21-03
Turkmenistan , Ashgabat	(993-12) 36-90-21
Ukraine , Kyiv	(38-044) 289-39-52

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