



# Academic Year in America **School Administrator's Guide**

# Contents

- 1 The AIFS Foundation and the Academic Year in America Program
- 2 Our Mission
- 2 Benefits of Hosting an AYA Student in Your School
- 3 The AYA Support Network – Available 24/7
- 4 Why Partner with AYA?
- 4 CSIET Member
- 5 AYA Students
- 5 AYA Student Country List
- 6 AYA Local Coordinators
- 7 AYA Host Families
- 8 Private Schools
- 8 High School Enrollment Procedures
- 10 Special Grant Program

## The AIFS Foundation and the Academic Year in America Program

**The American Institute For Foreign Study (AIFS) Foundation**, an independent, not-for-profit, 501(c)(3) charity, was established in 1967 with the assistance of the late Senator Robert Kennedy to help young people from many nations and diverse cultures understand each other better. The AIFS Foundation provides grants and scholarships to students for participation in study abroad programs and provides grants to high schools and institutions to encourage international and educational travel. The Foundation is governed by a board of trustees that includes prominent educators and international business leaders. The board meets regularly to assess the Foundation's AYA program to ensure standards of excellence, effectiveness, and quality are being upheld.

The AIFS Foundation's **Academic Year in America (AYA)** program is one of the nation's most respected cross-cultural educational exchange programs. American families who host an AYA student learn about another culture and build a relationship with the student, who becomes like a son or daughter to them. AYA enables high school students ages 15 - 18 from more than 25 countries to visit the United States and live with American families while attending high school for a semester or an academic year. Students participating in the AYA program learn about America and its culture while improving their English language skills and achieving their educational goals. At the same time, American students have the special opportunity to increase their knowledge of foreign countries and languages and learn more about cultures different from their own.

The Foundation has been designated by the United States Department of State as an Exchange Visitor Program authorized to issue the Form DS-2019, which enables qualified participants to apply for a J-1 exchange visitor visa from the nearest U.S. Consulate or Embassy. Because of the program's official government designation, a high school is not responsible for a student's visa and does not need to register with the SEVIS Immigration Database.

Since its founding, AYA has enabled over 35,000 international students to come to the U.S. and experience the American way of life. The AYA program is recognized by the Council on Standards for International Educational Travel (CSIET), the national organization that reviews high school exchange programs.



## Our Mission

AYA's mission is to encourage and inspire young people to become considerate, forward-thinking citizens of the world by creating dynamic educational opportunities to share beliefs, ideologies, and values across cultures. We are committed to providing these experiences with an unrivaled commitment to the safety of our students.

## Benefits of Hosting an AYA Student in Your School

- **Tony Cook Memorial Grant.** Every year, the AIFS Foundation awards grants of \$1,000 each to assist schools in developing programs that increase international understanding. These grants are in memory of a former Trustee of the AIFS Foundation who dedicated his life to the ideals of fostering international understanding.

All AYA participating schools are invited to submit an application outlining a program or project that will promote international education in their school. Projects have included the purchase of foreign language learning programs, sponsorship of a cultural event, and funding the activities of international clubs.

- **A globalized campus.** AYA students allow intercultural learning to come alive. Classroom discussions are richer and more engaging when shaped by different cultural perspectives. Language classes become more enriching when native speakers contribute linguistic and cultural knowledge. World events take on new significance when personal relationships influence opinions.
- **Exposure to diversity.** Recent studies have shown that American and exchange students grow in their understanding and appreciation of diversity when friendships develop during hosting experiences. This understanding will lead to an increase in tolerance.
- **AYA students give back to the community.** AYA students participate in community service projects in the community.
- **Cultural presentations.** AYA students come prepared to make cultural presentations about their home country at schools and in the community.



- **A tangible connection to world events.** World events take on a new significance when we have personal relationships with people from the places in the news. Exchange students are a group of brave young people who are eager to share their cultural knowledge with teachers and students and to learn about our culture, our people, and our language.
- **Annual scholarship eligibility.** All participating high schools are eligible to receive an annual scholarship from AYA, which can be awarded to a worthy American student from the school community. One of the advantages of enrolling an AYA student in your school is access to the AIFS family of programs. AIFS offers a world of college study abroad opportunities open to American students. In addition, AIFS's sister organization, the American Council for International Studies (ACIS), offers short-term travel programs for students, teachers, and adults.



## The AYA Support Network - Available 24/7

### AYA National Office

A dedicated professional staff supports students, host families, Local Coordinators, and schools. The AYA office is comprised of a caring, committed team of professionals who work long hours to ensure that all involved receive the support they need and have access to AYA's comprehensive resources.

Student Support Specialists from the National Office who have access to AYA's resources supervise and support AYA's Local Coordinators. The Student Support Specialists serve as a point of contact for all communication between students, host families, Local Coordinators, and schools and are also responsible for maintaining contact with overseas partners. AYA staff receive detailed reports of student progress, evaluate the information, and take appropriate action when necessary.

### 24-Hour Emergency Coverage

AYA provides 24-hour service and access to our staff via telephone for the convenience of students, host families, Local Coordinators, and high schools. Round-the-clock coverage includes a program counselor, a toll free number, and a 24-hour emergency telephone service.

**Toll free:** 800.322.HOST (4678)  
or 203.399.5417

**[aya.info@aifs.org](mailto:aya.info@aifs.org)**  
**[www.academicyear.org](http://www.academicyear.org)**

## Why Partner with AYA?

Partnering with an educational exchange program can be very beneficial for a high school. However, it is crucial when selecting an exchange program to choose a well-respected and qualified program. AYA's 40+ years of experience in international exchange gives high school administrators the assurance that this program is an excellent choice.

AYA is recognized as one of the most respected educational exchange programs in the United States. We are pleased with our reputation and encourage you to be a part of our efforts in promoting international exchange.

### AYA is the right choice for the following reasons:

- Well-screened volunteer host families
- Trained Local Coordinators
- Support staff available 24 hours a day
- Academically oriented program with detailed progress reports
- Pre-departure and arrival orientations for students
- Comprehensive medical insurance for all AYA students
- U.S. Department of State grant recipient
- CSIET-approved program

66

The foreign exchange students bring such a positive atmosphere to our school. They show our students what it means to take academics seriously. 95% of the students who attend our school (11 this year) are in the honors and advanced courses with A's and B's. They are truly a joy to have at our school, and we welcome them.

—Gina Williams, Principal.  
Winter Haven Sr. High, FL

## CSIET Member

The Academic Year in America program is a member of the Council on Standards for International Educational Travel (CSIET). CSIET, established in 1984, is a non-profit organization that oversees quality international educational travel and exchange. It establishes standards for organizations operating international educational travel and exchange programs at the high school level, monitors compliance with those standards, and disseminates information regarding international educational travel organizations. AYA is listed in the CSIET Advisory List for high schools, which ensures a high quality program for participants, students, host families, and high schools. AYA participates in the CSIET evaluation process annually.

The CSIET certification mark certifies that this organization complies with the standards set forth in the CSIET Standards for International Educational Travel Programs.





# AYA Students

AYA students are carefully screened and selected by AYA’s designated network of overseas partners. Students submit a thorough application and are personally interviewed, with a portion of the interview conducted in English, to ensure that the student has the appropriate motivation to participate in the program. Complete applications are carefully reviewed by AYA staff before students can be considered for placement in American schools and homes. All students have full medical insurance coverage.

## Students must meet the following requirements to be enrolled in the AYA program:

- Demonstrated proficient English language ability to study effectively in U.S. high schools. Students must have studied English for at least three years.
- Maintained a grade point average of “C+” or better in academic courses (math, history, science) for the past three years.
- Reached 15 years of age, but have not exceeded 18 years of age, at the start of the program.

## Student applications include:

- Personal essays written in English
- Letter from natural parents
- School transcripts for the past three years with school seals
- Teachers’ recommendations
- Standardized test of English proficiency (if necessary)
- Health records with required immunizations
- Passport photographs

## AYA Students Come From More Than 25+ Countries, Including:

Armenia	Hungary	Romania
Austria	Italy	Serbia
Azerbaijan	Kazakhstan	Spain
Belgium	Lithuania	Switzerland
Brazil	Luxembourg	Tajikistan
China	Moldova	Turkmenistan
Ecuador	Mongolia	Ukraine
Estonia	Montenegro	Uzbekistan
France	Poland	
Germany	Republic of Georgia	



## AYA Local Coordinators

AYA has a network of several hundred dedicated Local Coordinators throughout the U.S. Local Coordinators are men and women of all ages —teachers, retirees, professionals, and homemakers. They share a deep belief in the value of cross-cultural exchange. They also receive ongoing instruction and direction from AYA, attend annual training sessions, and are certified annually by the U.S. Department of State.

Local Coordinators serve as community representatives for AYA, finding homes and enrolling AYA students in area high schools. The Local Coordinator is the person the school, student, and host family can turn to with any questions or concerns.

Local Coordinators interview families interested in hosting a student; all family members are required to be present. The purpose of the interview is to ensure that the family understands the responsibilities of hosting, examine the room where the student will sleep and study, and determine if all family members agree to support the experience. To the question, “Would I place my own son or daughter in this family?” the Local Coordinator must answer a resounding, “Yes!”

### Local Coordinator Responsibilities

- Acting as a local liaison to the high school
- Screening, interviewing, and selecting host families
- Providing host families with a pre-arrival orientation
- Supervising and supporting families and students throughout the program year
- Submitting monthly student reports to the national office, based on monthly student visits and communications with host families and high schools
- Providing emergency assistance to the AYA student, host family, and high school (if needed)



66

Bringing the AYA exchange students into our school system has helped our students to fulfill our Mission Statement, which is: To empower our students to succeed in the 21st century. This program helps the students to see the world through the eyes of someone from another culture. Because of this program, our world is becoming more closely connected in many great ways...

— Andrew Wielgus, Principal  
River Forest High School, Hobart, IN



## AYA Host Families

AYA host families are volunteers; they are not paid for hosting students. AYA carefully selects and conducts reference and background checks on all host families. Host families are expected to provide a safe, comfortable home to ensure a positive cultural experience for students studying in the United States. People of all ages, and from diverse backgrounds, volunteer to serve as host families. Grandparents, families with younger children, single-parent families, and traditional two-parent families have all successfully hosted with AYA.

### AYA Host Family Responsibilities

- Providing the student with a home for the academic year or semester
- Welcoming the student as a member of their family and encouraging him/her to participate in all aspects of family life
- Providing the student with his/her own bed and place to study, either in a room shared with a family member of his/her own sex and in the same age range, or in his/her own room
- Providing the student with all meals (except lunches purchased at school)
- Assisting the student with course selection and registration
- Encouraging the exchange of ideas through involvement with the student and providing for the student's exposure to the cultural and social environment of the home and community
- Providing the love and understanding a young person needs to enjoy a successful academic year in America

BB

Life is all about choices. And no matter how great or seemingly insignificant the decisions might be, our lives will be affected by the choices we make. Rarely has our family made choices that have brought us such love, joy, excitement, pride, and a sense of accomplishment as hosting an exchange student.

—Beth, AYA host mother, Arkansas



## Private Schools

AYA is pleased to work closely with a large network of private schools across the U.S. to enroll students and to support them throughout the experience. While the majority of AYA students attend public schools, AYA continues to welcome some students who choose to attend a private school, and we look to expand this network. AYA provides all of our students with J-1 cultural exchange visas; no action is required from the school to provide the visa.

## High School Enrollment Procedures

- The Local Coordinator will schedule a time to meet or speak with the school principal or designated administrator within the school district to explain the program. The Local Coordinator is always available to answer any questions the administrator may have about the program.
- The school will be notified when a family under consideration has been selected for hosting, and the Local Coordinator and AYA will provide the school with a copy of the complete student application. The school must then complete AYA's High School Enrollment Form, acknowledging acceptance of the student and verifying that the school is fully accredited.
- High schools may determine the appropriate grade level for each student, based on school policy and examination of the AYA student's academic history. (AYA can assist in evaluating a student's academic history at the school's request.)
- Students receive the form DS-2019 from AYA and arrive with a J-1 cultural exchange visa. No action is required from the school to provide the visa.
- AYA values its partnerships with high schools. We understand the pressures and demands schools face daily, and our goal is to work with you to ensure a positive experience for all involved.
- AYA appreciates your school's feedback. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the placement of one of our students, please inform your Local Coordinator or the AYA High School Liaison in the National Office.



## Course of Study

Academic Year in America offers programs for ten months of study (August through June) or for five months of study (August through January or January through June). Accordingly, students arrive in the U.S. in August or January.

AYA requires that students carry a full course load that includes a minimum of four academic subjects including an English class and American studies class.

- Students must maintain a C+ or better GPA.
- Students are required to obtain private tutoring or seek additional assistance if they cannot maintain the minimum GPA.
- AYA does not guarantee grade placement or graduation; both are determined at the sole discretion of the high school.
- AYA encourages exchange students to actively participate in extracurricular activities and sports; however, students must comply with all school and state policies regarding both.
- Students are required to abide by a strict set of program rules and code of conduct that include complying with all high school policies and guidelines; failure to do so will result in disciplinary action.
- Students are encouraged to participate in extracurricular activities and contribute positively to the student body. All students are informed that participation in sports is not guaranteed, and athletic eligibility is determined at the sole discretion of the high school.

## Graduation Policies

Diplomas and participation in graduation ceremonies are not promised or guaranteed to AYA students. AYA respects the right of the hosting high school to determine policies concerning graduation ceremonies and diplomas.

AYA's Local Coordinator may ask you if a student enrolled in the senior class will be able to graduate upon successful completion of coursework and receive a diploma at the end of the program. Please confirm at the time of initial placement whether this will be possible and what courses the student must complete in order to meet graduation requirements. Please also indicate whether or not a Certificate of Attendance can be issued to the student.

## School Fees, Expenses, Etc.

AYA students, like American students, are responsible for school fees and other incidental expenses. Prior to the student's arrival in the U.S., students are informed about their financial responsibilities. Students are informed that schools and school districts are not expected to provide any financial assistance or benefits. Program participants bring money for any expenses they will incur, such as school trips, yearbooks, or prom.

## Insurance

All AYA students have full medical insurance coverage.



## Special Grant Programs

AYA is proud to be a grant recipient to administer the prestigious FLEX scholarship programs sponsored by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. The program is identified by both the State Department and by members of Congress as an important initiative in U.S. public diplomacy in helping to promote mutual understanding between U.S. citizens and key foreign policy countries. The FLEX scholarship program is merit-based and highly competitive. The students selected are rigorously screened and identified as potential future leaders in their home communities. While in the U.S., these scholarship students participate in many different activities that enhance their experience, including local community service, International Education Week presentations in schools, and many different leadership activities.

### Future Leaders Exchange Program (FLEX)



The FLEX Program encourages long-lasting peace and mutual understanding between the U.S. and the countries of Eurasia. The FLEX Program was established in 1992 under the FREEDOM Support Act and is overseen by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs in cooperation with private, not-for-profit grantee organizations such as AYA. Since 1993, more than 18,000 students from 12 Eurasian countries have participated in the program and returned home to become active members of their home community alumni associations, where they are becoming agents of change based on the leadership skills they acquired while on the program. FLEX students become active members of their host communities by participating in community service projects and leadership workshops, and by making presentations in their schools for International Education Week.

## Reprint from the Code of Federal Regulations

Washington, D.C. 20547

*Criteria for Exchange Teenager Program sec. 22 CFR 62.25  
Secondary school students*

### Program Eligibility

Secondary school student exchange visitor programs designated by the Department of State must:

1. Require all exchange students to be enrolled and participating in a full course of study at an accredited academic institution;

### Student Enrollment

1. Sponsors must secure prior written acceptance for the enrollment of any exchange student in a United States public or private secondary school. Such prior acceptance must:
  - i. Be secured from the school principal or other authorized school administrator of the school or school system that the exchange student will attend; and
  - ii. Include written arrangements concerning the payment of tuition or waiver thereof if applicable.
2. Under no circumstance may a sponsor facilitate the entry into the United States of an exchange student for whom a written school placement has not been secured.
3. Under no circumstance may a sponsor charge a student private school tuition if such arrangements are not finalized in writing prior to the issuance of Form DS-2019.
4. Sponsors must maintain copies of all written acceptances for a minimum of three years and make such documents available for Department of State inspection upon request.
5. Sponsors must provide the school with a translated "written English language summary" of the exchange student's complete academic course work prior to commencement of school, in addition to any additional documents the school may require. Sponsors must inform the prospective host school of any student who has completed secondary school in his/her home country.

### Student Extracurricular Activities

Exchange students may participate in school sanctioned and sponsored extracurricular activities, including athletics, if such participation is:

1. Authorized by the local school district in which the student is enrolled; and
2. Authorized by the state authority responsible for determination of athletic eligibility, if applicable. Sponsors shall not knowingly be party to a placement (inclusive of direct placements) based on athletic abilities, whether initiated by a student, a natural or host family, a school, or any other interested party.





1 High Ridge Park,  
Stamford, CT 06905  
[www.academicyear.org](http://www.academicyear.org)



## Contact Academic Year in America



Toll free: 800.322.HOST (4678)  
or 203.399.5417

Fax 203.724.1536

[aya.info@aifs.org](mailto:aya.info@aifs.org)  
[www.academicyear.org](http://www.academicyear.org)

On behalf of our students, our staff, and the Board of Trustees of the AIFS Foundation, AYA would like to take the opportunity to thank members of the educational community who help make our program possible.