

THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE



Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs
Future Leaders Exchange Program

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Website: <http://exchange.state.gov/education/citizens/students/>



“The main thing I would like to share is how the program changed me. I became more independent and goal-oriented, and have no fear about overcoming difficulties in my path, and I help others do the same. I saw with my own eyes that a person with a disability can and should live like all other people.”

-FLEX participant from Russia in a workshop for students with disabilities

Promoting Peace and Understanding Between the United States and the Countries of Eurasia

“Our daughter became more independent, mature and responsible. We think this is a great program that helps many children find their place in life. It gives them an opportunity to experience things they wouldn't experience at home. This program teaches them to think differently, and conceive the world in another way.”

- Parents of a FLEX student from Russia

FUTURE LEADERS EXCHANGE

“Through this program, we can break down misconceptions and stereotypes.” - High school principal from Mississippi



What is FLEX?

The Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) is a U.S. government program that provides scholarships for high school students (ages 15 - 17) from the countries of Eurasia to spend a year in the United States, living with a family and attending an American high school. FLEX participants come from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Ukraine.

What is the goal of the FLEX program?

The program was created from former Senator Bill Bradley's conviction that the best way to ensure long lasting peace and understanding between the United States and the countries of Eurasia is to enable young people from these countries to learn firsthand about the U.S. and Americans. The primary goal of FLEX is improving mutual understanding between our countries by allowing young citizens of Eurasia to have the opportunity to observe and experience our way of life. Since the program began in 1993,

thousands of young Eurasian citizens have participated in FLEX and have returned to their countries with a new enthusiasm and desire to help others and share their newly acquired experiences and knowledge to benefit their home communities and countries.

How are FLEX participants selected?

Participants are recruited and selected through a multi-step, merit-based, open competition spanning the eleven time zones of Eurasia. Academic performance, English language competence, and personal qualities (for example, adaptability, flexibility, and cultural openness) are important factors in the selection process. Applicants are tested in English speaking, writing, and comprehension; are interviewed individually and in groups, and must have the academic equivalent of a “B” average. Approximately 20 percent of the applicants advance to the final round and their applications are sent to Washington, DC where trained committees of volunteers make the final selections. On average, one in 30 applicants is selected to participate.



Who administers FLEX?

The Department of State awards grants on a competitive basis to U.S. private, not-for-profit organizations that have submitted proposals to manage various components of FLEX. Grantee organizations recruit and select applicants; place students with American families and in schools; provide support to students while they are in the United States; liaise with natural families in Eurasia; conduct special programming; facilitate the participation of disabled students; and coordinate alumni activities.

Why and how can you become involved?

U.S. citizen engagement in the FLEX program is vital to its success. Your family, school, or community can learn about a different part of the world and help a FLEX student learn about our country. Everyone involved has the unique opportunity to learn about each other based on personal, direct interaction and sharing of cultures. When American host families welcome FLEX students into their homes and host schools receive FLEX students for an academic year, everyone benefits. Many FLEX students stay in touch with their U.S. host families and friends after they return home and many feel that they have gained a second family. Interested individuals, schools, and private, not-for-profit organizations should contact the FLEX program office at the United States Department of State for more information. Together we can make a difference!

"Our new Russian son stepped off the airplane and right into our hearts. This young man has been such a gift to our family. He has a great attitude, is helpful, a great student and generally a wonderful addition to our family. I want to encourage everyone to consider hosting a foreign exchange student. I especially like the FLEX program because the young people chosen for it are very well screened and prepared. It is a great way to expand your family's knowledge and experience!"
- FLEX Host Mom in Idaho

What is the impact of FLEX on participants?

A year in the U.S. gives FLEX students a unique opportunity to expand their horizons and prepare for the challenges ahead. Most FLEX alumni say that during the year in the U.S. they came to truly appreciate and value their home countries and many are eager to share what they have learned about American society and culture with their families, friends, and greater communities back home. Alumni of most international exchange programs often note that the most difficult adjustment they face is the reverse culture shock experienced upon returning home. To facilitate this adjustment and to assist FLEX students in continuing their American experiences, the program offers a network of alumni associations throughout Eurasia. This provides a forum for these bright, young individuals to participate in activities that allow them to share what they've learned in the U.S.



TOGETHER WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

"We hired Daler right after he got back from the FLEX program. In the two years he has worked for us he has shown himself to be responsible, punctual, reliable and trustworthy. He speaks English perfectly, which is essential for our company. Daler has exceeded our expectations in terms of his work load while at the same time attending university. We are proud to have such an employee!" - Director of an IT company in Tajikistan

"The best part of the FLEX program was to see so many nationalities all together, sharing ideas and supporting each other."
- FLEX student from Kyrgyzstan