



A Program of  
the Bureau of  
Educational and  
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of the U.S.  
Department  
of State

**AMERICAN  
COUNCILS**  
FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION  
ACTRACCELS



# American Councils' Roles

- **Student Recruitment (Sept-Dec)**
- **Student Selection (Dec-March)**
- **Pre-departure Orientation (June-July)**
- **Travel Arrangements (Feb-Aug)**
- **On-Program Support (all year)**
- **Alumni Network**



*A typical train car in Eurasia – one of the recruitment team's most common form of transportation*

# Rounds 1 and 2

## ROUND 1 (38,000 applied)

- Trained AC recruiting teams visit over 170 cities (referred to as “test centers”) twice between 9/1-12/30
- From 60 to 1,500 students apply at R1; 200-300 is average.
- 16-question pretest of English; open to all who meet age and grade requirements
- Pre-test corrected, results for R2 posted.

## ROUND 2 (~15,000 make it to R2)

- SLEP and three in-class essays in English
- Materials sent for blind evaluation by trained screeners
- Results determine who will move on to R3



*A student checks the list indicating who has passed from Round 1 to Round 2*

# Recruitment at a Glance

1,928 students turned out for Round 1 in Tbilisi, Georgia – a record high



A visually impaired student takes the Braille version of the pre-test (Georgia)



Recruiters also travel to by car and experience the occasional break down in the middle of nowhere (Armenia)



Driving through a mountain pass en route to a test center (Tajikistan)



Summitting Anzob pass (14,000 feet) in a snowstorm (Tajikistan)

# Round 3

## Round 3

- Consists of:
  - Group activity
  - Two in-class essays
  - Interview
  - Application.
- ~6,000 participate.
- All materials sent to Moscow, entered into database
- ~5,500 applications sent to DC for evaluation
- ~1,200 students are selected to be participants.
- Notification (spring)



**Left:** Students writing essays at Round 3

**Below:** Moscow staff with a stack of Round 3 application materials towering in the background



# Evaluation and Selection

**GOAL:** Identify those applicants who have the most potential for success in their year in America and eliminate those who do not appear to be ready for the exchange experience.

- **October/November:** Recruitment and training of volunteers
- **December - March:** Evaluation and adjudication of applications
- **February/March (?):** Final country and PO numbers from ECA (required in order to complete final selection)
- **January-April:** Shipment of participant files to POs (rolling basis)



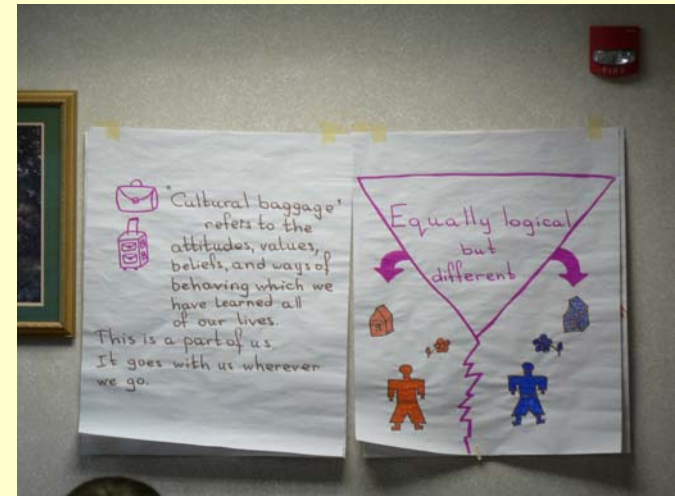
*Volunteers (above) evaluate R2 and R3 essays, interview form, group activity, host family letter, teacher recommendation, and activities. Many evaluators are former Peace Corps volunteers, ex-foreign service officers and educators.*

# Pre-departure Orientation (PDO)



**Left:** Students work in groups to discuss and offer solutions to examples of adjustment problems using the Introduction to the USA Workbook

**Right:** The basis of the Understanding Your Cultural Baggage session is “equally logical but different.”



- Held 4-6 weeks prior to travel, four days long; modeled as a “little America” (rules, dress code, meals)
- Led by specially-trained educators (one American, one alum) with AC staff presence
- Interactive modules
- [http://www.americancouncils.org/pdfs/bro\\_FLEX\\_fam\\_handbook.pdf](http://www.americancouncils.org/pdfs/bro_FLEX_fam_handbook.pdf)
- [http://www.americancouncils.org/pdfs/cultural\\_handbook.pdf](http://www.americancouncils.org/pdfs/cultural_handbook.pdf)

# PDO Topics

1. Welcome and Introduction/goals/red flags
2. What is FLEX
3. POs, problem solving and chain of communication
4. American families and values
5. You and your host family
6. Stereotyping and watching your words
7. Understanding your cultural baggage
8. Adjusting to living in another culture
9. Budgeting
10. High school in America
11. Friendship
12. Succeeding in a cross-cultural environment



# PDO: Red Flags

**Red Flags** are the first topic at PDO and are constantly referenced throughout the four-day workshop:

- **Attitude/gratitude:** American usage of “please” and “thank you.” In Eurasia direct or blunt requests are more common; lack of euphemisms and “filler.” The “How are you?” divide .
- **Rules and laws:** HF, PO, school, US and repercussions. These are very much in flux throughout Eurasia, and the way things get done is, by necessity, often by who you know, not what rule you follow. “No” tends to mean “find another way.”
- **Religion:** Strongly encouraged to try, explain that church in US is also a very social and community experience whereas at home it is a **very** personal, individual experience.
- **Male/female roles**
- **Computer/Internet usage:** Safety issues, HF rules. As a whole there is a lack of awareness of the dangers of myspace.com, for instance.
- **Food:** Type (US-processed and large portions; Eurasia – full fat but portions smaller) and temperature (breakfast and lunch are always hot; lunch is largest meal of the day)

# Return Travel

- May-June 2008 outbound
  - Student and host family determine return date together based on graduation, exams.
  - PO data entry of codes completed by 3/7 (AIS)
  - Itineraries available on [www.actr.de](http://www.actr.de) starting NOW on a rolling basis (TH)
  - Tickets mailed to POs starting early to mid April (minimum 3 weeks before flight date) on a rolling basis
    - POs mail tickets to students using return receipt mail
    - Packet includes luggage tags, travel information, memo to host family, letter from alumni coordinator and address list of all PY07 students by country

# Inbound Travel

- **Dates provided to hubs and POs in early March**
- **Arrivals I: July 25 and 26 available for:**
  - all students with disabilities (mandatory)
  - LP students (optional)
  - Students with early school start dates (optional)
- **Arrivals II: August 4-22 for all others**
- **POs enter preferred dates in AIS based on:**
  - Host Family (HF) schedule
  - School start date
  - LP needs
- **AC assigns US-inbound dates**



*Staff in red t-shirts help traveling students in blue t-shirts in Chicago's O'Hare airport*



*Students overnight at a Dulles airport hotel and enjoy a relaxing pizza dinner*

# Travel Resources and Planning

- Databases (instant source of information for PO)
  - POs can create reports of flight dates and detailed itineraries and email this info to local and regional staff 24/7, on an as-needed basis
  - Name and flight date finalized no less than 60 days out, and airport code no less than 30 days out
  - Effectiveness depends on timely entry of data
  - Airport codes to be “locked in” 30 days before flight date
- Planned overnights upon arrival to US
  - Avoids same-day connection problems caused by immigration/security screening/weather
  - Early morning travel problems = more options available to remedy them
- Increased staffing at IAD and ORD airports during travel
- Use of two emergency lines (one for POs, one for students)
- Unknowns: departure procedures, weather, the unpredictable

# On-Program Support (OPS)

- Chain of communication
  - PO works with HF and student
  - Heather at AC works with POs and hubs
  - AC hub staff work with natural families
  - Heather can provide Russian-language counseling at PO request
- Clear, concise, objective, thorough accounts of OPS issue and history
  - Inform AC of OPS issues as soon as they begin to avoid informing NPs of an ER with no lead-up and to ensure that AC overseas staff are well-informed should an NP call them first!
  - Provide detailed and objective explanation of the OPS issues
  - Please report HF changes as they happen! Hubs hear from NPs first, causes confusion
- Early Returns
  - PO requests ER from ECA
  - Cannot request specific return dates; first available flight is booked



# Alumni Network

- Welcome home letter from AAs; address lists
  - Re-entry seminar
    - Introduction to the alumni community and resources
    - Discussing reverse culture shock
    - Applying US experience to life at home
  - FLEX alumni are very active upon return to their home communities:
    - fundraisers, drives and holiday dinners for orphanages
    - leadership camps for high school students
    - active involvement in debating
    - clean-ups in cities and recreation areas
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