



OFFICE OF PRIVATE SECTOR EXCHANGE
BUREAU OF EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

BUILDING CROSS-CULTURAL COMPONENTS INTO THE
EXCHANGE VISITOR PROGRAM

➤ **Why Does an Exchange Visitor Program Need a Cross-cultural Component?**

The Exchange Visitor Program (EVP) brings true global value to American public diplomacy. People-to-people programs provide unlimited opportunity for exchange visitors and Americans to engage with each other, to inform exchange visitors' thinking about the United States and its place in the global community, to break down prejudices and misunderstandings, and in the long-term expand and strengthen the relationships between Americans and the rest of the world.

In accordance with the Fulbright-Hays Act of 1961, these cultural, educational and professional exchanges are intended to build mutual understanding -- and help create a foundation of trust between Americans and the rest of the world. By bringing people together to share perspectives and experiences, they strengthen our national security and promote prosperity – at home and abroad.

Each EVP category offers participants a unique opportunity to experience the U.S. and its diversity and to connect directly with Americans. The cross-cultural component of the EVP experience is critical to the short-term success of each individual exchange, and to the long-term effectiveness of the Program and of U.S. public diplomacy overall.

Through an Exchange Visitor Program sponsor designation, you are entrusted to implement a cultural exchange program, in collaboration with host organizations, other partners and the participants, themselves. Success in advancing U.S. public diplomacy goals, as all programs in the EVP are intended to do, is best achieved through careful planning and execution of the cultural component of the exchange.

➤ **What is the Goal of a Cross-Cultural Component?**

The cross-cultural component of the exchange visitor program gives participants the opportunity to learn about U.S. society and culture outside of their placement; to share their own culture, traditions and views with Americans; to help see the world from another perspective; to be more tolerant and respectful of differences; and to appreciate similarities that bring people together. These are the goals of people-to-people exchange and are the central reasons the Exchange Visitor Program exists.



➤ **Where Can We Begin?**

When you're planning cross-cultural activities, you might ask yourself some of these questions:

- What is the goal of your program?
- Who are your participants?
- How much do they know about the U.S.?
- What are their personal and career goals?
- What do they like to do during "off-hours"?
- How can they have fun, learn more about the community in which they're living, and connect with Americans in enjoyable and meaningful ways?
- What is special about their host community?
- What resources and special activities does the community offer?
- How does what these students/scholars/interns, etc. are doing in the U.S. fit into a larger picture about American values and customs?

Asking your participants about their understanding of American history, society, culture, etc., such as through a questionnaire or conversation before they come, would enable you to tailor a successful and fulfilling program.

- What do your visitors want from their experience in the United States?
- What is their knowledge of specific aspects of American society, history and culture?
- What are their pre-conceived notions?
- What do they know about the unique environment in which they will be placed?
- What do they want to know?

It simply makes sense to ask questions before arrival to determine what type of program would ensure the right engagement and focus while visitors are here.

➤ **What Can We Talk About?**

Cross-cultural programs can be built around any number of general themes that participants might like to learn more about: civic responsibility; civil rights; community service and volunteerism; American history and exploration; youth leadership; science, technology, engineering and math in the local/global economy; personal or individual freedoms; American entrepreneurial spirit; democracy and governance; individual responsibility; holidays and food; the media; government; American film, culture and the arts; and ethnic, racial and religious diversity in the U.S. These conversation threads can help set the stage for the activities you plan.



➤ **What Activities Work?**

Almost anything that is part of a well-crafted program! The objective is to think about your goals, determine themes, and match the interests of your participants with the unique resources of the communities in which they are living. Local communities in which participants are placed offer a wide variety of opportunities to engage at a very personal level such as through clubs, civic associations, shopping excursions, school visits, musical outings, community service, museums, company-sponsored events. Here are just a few examples:

- Talk/teach about the American culture/history of philanthropy and volunteerism and then arrange a day of volunteer work with a local charity.
- Talk/teach about the American economy, crafts and trade, and then plan a day at a county fair and/or a local trade show. Meet the local farmers, small business owners, crafts people.
- Talk/teach about American sports and recreation, then pick a sport to teach visitors to play, creating a league with competitive games. Go to a game/match (high school, college, professional) all together. Set up a fun match between the participants and a local team.
- Talk/teach about American cultural and religious celebrations. Celebrate U.S. holidays with families and community groups. Talk about the meaning of the day.
- Talk/teach about American cultural expression. What music/dance is unique to the host region (country, western, jazz, local high school bands, square dance lessons, etc.)? Arrange dance classes and dance-offs and go to a show. Give the participant a chance to share and compare his/her culture.
- Talk/teach about American theater and arts throughout our history and today; create a theater club. Theater is a great expression of societal values – and conflict. Check out the local and school theater schedules and schedule theater outings regularly throughout the program. Combine the outings with dessert discussions about the playwright, play and themes.
- Everybody loves to eat! Organize a series of American culinary evenings where participants can learn to cook and eat the results! Use food as a conversation thread to talk about American traditions, customs and history. Share the recipes and include some cross-cultural evenings for visitors to share and teach their own culinary traditions.
- Schools and teachers can set up pen pal relationships through social media.

➤ **Where Can We Go for Assistance?**

You don't have to re-invent the cross-cultural wheel. Many organizations in the host communities may already sponsor exchanges and organize cross-cultural programs. Reach out to community, HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) and tribal colleges and universities, international student houses on local university campuses, World Affairs Councils, local chambers of commerce and other international visitor and exchange organizations ([see Resources List below](#)). You may find great opportunities right in your own communities for collaborating on cross-cultural programs for your participants.



If you have questions, comments and, most importantly, would like to share your cross-cultural program successes, please send them to EVPbestpractices@state.gov.

EVP CROSS-CULTURAL ACTIVITIES GUIDE: RESOURCES LIST

Following is a sample selection of useful resources to check out as you are looking for ideas for building cross-cultural activities into your exchange visitor program.

National Council for International Visitors (NCIV): A vibrant network of over 90 non-profit organizations in over 40 states in the United States that connect leaders from all walks of life in U.S. communities with visitors from all around the world. Each member Council for International Visitors (CIV) conducts a variety of programs to introduce international visitors to U.S. society and culture, drawing on resources unique to their community. To find a CIV near you see:
<http://www.nciv.org/Members/community-test.html>

Friendship Force International (FFI): Promotes friendship and goodwill through an extensive program of home hosting and exchanges between clubs in over 50 countries, sharing the best experiences of their region. Check out Club Resources page. <http://friendshipforce.org/>

Sister Cities International (SCI): A non-profit national membership organization for individual sister cities, counties, and states across the United States. This network unites tens of thousands of citizen diplomats and volunteers in programs in 136 countries on six continents. SCI helps advance peace and prosperity through cultural, educational, humanitarian, and economic development efforts.
<http://www.sister-cities.org/>

U.S. Center for Citizen Diplomacy (USCCD): Promotes opportunities for all Americans to be citizen diplomats and affirms the indispensable value of citizen involvement in international relations in an era of increasing globalization. Find useful curriculum development resources at
<http://uscenterforcitizendiplomacy.org/pages/curriculum/>

Hostelling International USA (HI-USA): Founded in 1934 to promote international understanding of the world and its people through hostelling. HI-USA currently operates a network of over 50 quality hostel facilities across the United States, ranging from urban high-rise buildings, to neighborhood settings in smaller centers, to scenic and more remote locations on coastlines and parklands. HI-USA hostels offer a wide range of fun activities, events and educational programs that enrich the travel experience and create opportunities for greater intercultural awareness and understanding. <http://www.hiusa.org/>



Girl Scouts of the USA: Helps girls discover the fun, friendship, and power of being together through field trips, sports skill-building clinics, community service projects, cultural exchanges, and environmental stewardships. The NCIV partners with Girl Scouts to promote multigenerational involvement in citizen diplomacy and to facilitate international visitor exchanges focused on girls and women's leadership. Find a local Girl Scout council in your area. <http://www.girlscouts.org/councilfinder/>

World Affairs Councils of America (WACA): The largest nonpartisan, non-profit grassroots organization in the United States dedicated to educating and engaging the American public on global issues. The network consists of almost 100 councils in over 40 states. Find a member Council in your state. www.worldaffairsCouncils.org/

Peace Corps: Federal government agency devoted to world peace and friendship. Volunteers serve in host countries to work on issues ranging from AIDS education to information technology, environmental preservation and business development, while helping to promote a better understanding of each other's cultures. Their World Wise Schools program provides classroom resources based on Peace Corps Volunteers experiences. <http://www.peacecorps.gov/www/index.cfm?>

National Archives of the United States: Education section contains reproducible copies of primary documents from the holdings of the National Archives, teaching activities correlated to the National History Standards and National Standards for Civics and Government, and cross-curricular connections. <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/>

Federal Resources for Educational Excellence: Teaching and learning resources from federal agencies, grouped by topic (U.S. history, entrepreneurship, arts and culture) <http://www.free.ed.gov/>

American Studies Association: the nation's oldest and largest association devoted to the interdisciplinary study of American culture and history. Find a chapter near you at <http://www.theasa.net/chapters/>

U.S. Community Colleges (c/o University of Texas at Austin): Find a community college in your area at <http://www.utexas.edu/world/comcol/alpha/>

Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Find a list of accredited institutions at <http://www.ed.gov/edblogs/whhbcu/one-hundred-and-five-historically-black-colleges-and-universities/>

Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCU): Take a look at a map and roster of locations at <http://www.aihec.org/colleges/TCUmap.cfm>