

WORLD LEARNING

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2012-2013 Future Leaders Exchange Program (FLEX)

### **FLEX Host Families FAQ**

#### **1. First of all, what is FLEX anyways?**

The Future Leaders Exchange Program (FLEX) has been around for 20 years and is the flagship exchange program of the US Department of State. It was created by former Senator Bill Bradley in 1992. He believed 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 to learn firsthand about the U.S. and Americans.

#### **2. What do you mean by Eurasia? Where are the students from exactly?**

The Soviet Union ceased to exist in late 1991. One by one, the republics that comprised the vast, multi-ethnic empire that was the Soviet Union declared their independence. The peoples of this area were no longer Soviets; instead they became citizens of 15 republics, including the 10 countries that are home to the FLEX students – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Ukraine.

#### **3. How are the students chosen?**

Recruitment of FLEX students is a massive effort that involves a three-phase, merit-based, open competition in the 10 Eurasian FLEX countries. Field staffers make a tremendous effort to recruit students from diverse geographical areas, backgrounds, and ethnic groups. No special consideration is given to any candidate's financial status, which range from working class all the way to upper class. Instead, they are chosen based on their academic excellence, leadership potential, character, and English language skills.

This year, over 47,000 students applied - making the acceptance rate for FLEX even more competitive than that of Harvard University!

#### **4. Will my student speak English?**

Yes! This is a major requirement of FLEX students. The students take a rigorous English language test (SLEP) and have to meet a minimal language requirement. A small number of FLEX students (about 10%) attend an intensive English language program before they start school in the US.

#### **5. What do host families need to provide?**

- Separate bed (not inflatable or convertible), storage and study space, access to bathroom
- Three meals a day (bagged lunch if school does not provide lunch)
- Transportation to and from school activities (unless there is a school bus)
- Encouragement, care, and attention

#### **6. What kind of support does the student receive? Financial and otherwise?**

While host families do not receive any direct funds for hosting a student, a portion of your expenses paid are tax-deductible. FLEX students also receive the following:

- \$125 monthly stipend (e.g. school supplies, toiletries, social activities, phone cards)
- \$300 reimbursable incidental allowance (e.g. sports equipment, winter clothes, yearbook fees, etc).
- Medical insurance
- A large network of support (academic, emotional, programmatic) from local coordinators, World Learning, and the Department of State.

#### **7. How long do the students stay with the host families?**

August 2012 - June 2013

8. We can't host the whole time. Can we host for a shorter period?

Absolutely! We would love if you could host your student for the entire year, but you can also host for shorter periods. We are always looking for temporary or back-up host families that can assist in case of emergencies or family travel.

9. Do I have to have children to become a host family?

No, families are not required to have children of their own.

10. How old are the students?

Between ages 15 and 17 upon arrival.

**11. Do we have to work at home or have time-off to be a host family?**

Not at all! FLEX students come here to experience a broad cross-section of American life - that means working parents, singles, big families, small families -- you name it.

**12. I am a single-parent. Can I still host?**

Yes, absolutely. However, we'll want to ask you a few more questions to ensure a good support network for your host son or daughter.

**13. We don't know any foreign languages. Can we still host?**

Of course. This is not required whatsoever. FLEX students speak English and want to improve their skills while here.

**14. We have plans to go out-town during the time the student is here. Would this be a problem?**

This is a common question we receive from host families. Some families may choose to travel with their students. If that is the case, you will simply need to inform the Local Coordinators of any travel plans.

If families need to travel without the student, then the Local Coordinator will take care of finding a temporary family during your travel dates. You can also suggest someone you know to house your student while you're away.

**15. Are there group activities/classes that the student must attend?**

Since the students are here on scholarship from the U.S. government, they do have some extra responsibilities as young cultural ambassadors. Students will have monthly activities coordinated by the Local Coordinators. Additionally, they are required to make presentations to share their native culture with the Americans they meet. They are also required to give 40 hours of community service to your host community. It is an obligation for every FLEX participant to be both a cultural teacher and a student while he or she is in the U.S.

**16. What happens if they get sick or hurt while here?**

All FLEX students have health and accident insurance that covers for all illness and injuries for the duration of the program as long as they are not pre-existing conditions. The Local

Coordinators and other support staff are available to help in case of any sickness or injuries while the student is here.

**17. Who do I contact if there is a problem?**

The Local Coordinator will be checking in with you and the student at least once a month to make sure everyone is healthy and happy. The Local Coordinator is your first point of contact and will work with you before the student's arrival as well as throughout the year to ensure a great experience for everyone involved.

**18. Why host a FLEX student?**

The best answer for that comes from a host mom herself:

"We have now hosted two FLEX students and it has been a wonderful experience for our family. These bright, enthusiastic young people have opened our eyes to another culture, sharing their own vitality and worldview. The relationships we have developed with them - especially their closeness to our own son - will last a lifetime. Is there a downside to hosting? Yes. They have to go home."

-FLEX Host Mother in Virginia

For more information, contact the FLEX Local Coordinator in your area.