

Home Hosting – FAQ

The **Congressional Office for International Leadership (COIL)** is an independent government agency of the United States Congress. COIL sponsors and funds the **Open World program**, which brings emerging leaders from mostly Eurasian countries to the United States in order to give them firsthand exposure to the American system of participatory democracy and accountable governance. The program allows Eurasian leaders and their U.S. counterparts to engage constructively in a manner that complements the U.S. Congress's efforts on timely issues such as accountable governance, the environment, health, and rule of law. The principles of accountability, transparency, and citizen involvement in government are emphasized by the Open World program.

The program brings groups of five to six participants, accompanied by a co-national facilitator, for theme-based visits to the United States. The visits usually begin with an orientation in Washington, D.C., followed by a program in a local community. Participants are placed individually or in pairs in homestays. They attend professional appointments during the day with an interpreter. Programs address the theme of federalism and representative government, as well as topics such as rule of law, health, environment, economic development, education, and social services.

Homestays are a valuable and rewarding aspect of the Open World Program for both delegates and hosts. For the delegates, the immersion into a host's home and family life for a week is the most authentic way to experience America. Hosts also found that this is the best way to make personal connections and find commonalities with the guests.

What are the Open World Program visitors like?

Open World participants come from different parts of Eurasia and may represent a variety of ethnic groups and political parties, as well as cultural and religious backgrounds. Visitors may hold government positions, both elected and appointed, usually on the regional and local level, or work for businesses, not-for-profit organizations, educational institutions, or the media. Women make up about 50% of the participants. Age of the participants varies from mid-20s up to 40.

How long do they stay?

The program visits to local communities typically last eight nights. The first and the last days are 'travel days' on which the participants arrive to and depart from your community. The program during their stay is usually quite intense and may include evening activities, such as cultural events, hospitality dinners, and sightseeing. Depending on your schedule, you may volunteer to get involved in some of these activities.

What do I need to provide for the guests?

Each visitor requires their own private bedroom with a clean bed and necessary supplies, such as towels and toiletries. As a host, you will also provide breakfast and sometimes dinners when there is no scheduled dinner for the group.

Who are the people who host Open World visitors?

Open World home hosts are common American people and families who volunteer to open their houses to international visitors. Some, but not all of them, have traveled extensively or have special interest in other parts of the world. Those who start hosting often come to like the experience so much that they never want to stop!

What is the most enjoyable part of hosting?

In the words of one of our hosts:

“Hosting is fun. You get to meet people, and in many cases, you keep in touch with them after they leave. I’ve been hosting international visitors, especially those from Russia, for 25 years now. I keep a map in my house with pushpins on places I had visitors from.” - Joseph C., home stay host, Syracuse, New York

Will my guests be screened for COVID prior to travel?

Participants are required to be fully vaccinated with a WHO-accepted vaccine in order to enter the United States. They must sign a COVID-19 liability waiver to participate on the Open World program. They are required to receive a negative COVID-19 test within 24 hours before travel to the United States. They will also be tested for COVID-19 at arrival in your host community and before they depart.

Will there be a mask policy?

All delegates, drivers, coordinators, and speakers will be required to wear a mask during the professional program. We ask that you talk to your individual guest about mask-wearing policies at your place of residence.

What if one of my guests begins to feel unwell?

Participants who test positive for COVID-19, or who start to experience symptoms, will be immediately separated from the rest of the group. Please contact your local host coordinator to inform them of the situation. After the local host coordinator contacts FHI 360 and the Congressional Office for International Leadership, the participant will be tested for COVID-19 and, if needed, placed in isolation in a hotel room for the amount of time recommended by the CDC since the onset of symptoms. Please see “COVID-19 Policy for Program Participants, Grantees, and Local Host Organizations” for more detailed information.

How much will I know about my guests before they arrive?

You will receive a biographical profile for your participant from the local hosting organization. Profiles include the participant’s name, brief biographical information, including educational background and family, present and most recent employment positions, participant’s areas of interest, and special needs (dietary restrictions, use of tobacco products, health restrictions).

How much English do the guests speak?

The program participants are not required to speak English, but some of them know at least some English. Each group has one English-speaking facilitator accompanying them. Facilitators are young nationals of the same country as the delegates. They have significant travel or study-abroad experience. The role of facilitators is to serve as cultural bridges and help those who need the most language help during non-professional events. Local organizers may try to place participants with no knowledge of English either in the same home with the facilitator or make arrangements for the facilitator to assist.

How do I get through the language barrier?

Some Open World delegates can speak and understand basic English while many cannot. Many home hosts have used phrasebooks and online translators for basic needs, such as to greet their guests, explain things about the house, call them to dinner, etc. Some have practiced the guests’ native language or other languages they may know (many Open World delegates have taken

French or German instead of English in high school and college). Facilitators will translate at home hospitality events or other activities for which participants and home hosts gather as a group.

How much money should I expect the guest to have?

Do not expect your guest to have pocket money or to cover any of your hosting expenses, unless the guest volunteers to do so. Money is a very sensitive issue. Some participants, especially those from big cities, will be well off even by U.S. standards. Others might be living below the poverty line. However, most delegates save money and tend to spend quite a lot, especially on items that are hard to find or overly expensive in their home countries because they are imported (i.e. clothing, electronics). Participants are told that housing and meals will be provided. The local coordinator has a limited budget for cultural events to cover tickets, admission fees, etc.

What do I do in case of emergency?

Contact your local coordinator right away. Your guest is provided with sickness and accident insurance and a personalized insurance card. The local coordinator and the group's facilitator will escort your guest for any necessary services.

What cultural differences should I expect?

The best advice here will be to keep your eyes and ears open and not to be afraid of asking questions or explaining basic things "just in case." Remember that your guest may not be like others from his or her country you met or previously hosted. A sense of humor always helps!

How much should I expect the visitors to know about my country?

Some visitors are more knowledgeable about the United States than others, depending on their occupation and interests. Since American movies and TV shows are easily accessible and popular in their part of the world, most Open World delegates come to this country with preconceived notions, based on what they saw on TV. Be prepared to explain why things in this country may be different from how Hollywood presents them.