

# YES Program: Required Student Activities Booklet



Youth For Understanding USA

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## Introduction

The Youth Exchange and Study program (YES) was created in response to the events of September 11th, 2001 in order to build bridges of understanding between the United States and countries of the Arab and Muslim world. Being an exchange student in a foreign country exposes students to a wide range of new ideas and perspectives that can ultimately have a life-changing impact on a person. In an effort to create greater understanding of US culture, the YES program has specific goals for students meant to expose them to a wide range of ideas and practices that are important to the culture of the United States. Specifically, the YES program is designed to help students:

1. increase their understanding of American society and values;
2. foster leadership skills;
3. encourage community and civic responsibility/volunteerism;
4. Address issues of tolerance and diversity, including interfaith dialogue.

## Five Required Activities

YES students are required to participate in a number of activities in order to meet the goals mentioned above and get more involved in their community. In the booklet that follows, these required activities are explained in more detail and students are provided with ideas for where to begin. This booklet gives more information about the following required activities:

1. Community Service Project – students must complete at least 20 hours of volunteer work in their community before June.
2. Enhancement Activities – students should plan to attend the four enhancement activities that are scheduled throughout the year.
3. Leadership Mentoring Project – students should identify a mentor and meet with this person at least once per month.
4. Participation in Education and Service Celebrations - students should take part in International Education Week (November 17-24) and Global Youth Service Day (April 24-26) events.
5. Cyber-Diaries Project - students are asked to post occasional entries on the iearn.com blog approximately every two weeks. Students should spend no more than 30 minutes per month on this project. This project is coordinated through iEARN.

## Keeping Track of Your Activities

Your local Area Representative or Field Director will be in touch with you to help with activity ideas and to talk to you about the activities in which you are already involved. In order to help you keep track of your various activities, we have included two log books: a *community service log* to keep track of your volunteer involvement and a *mentor log* to record your meetings with your mentor (see Appendix I for copies of these logs). Please be sure to fill in these logs after each volunteer activity or meeting with your mentor.

### Submitting your community service/mentor log information

On **December 1, March 1 and June 1** students should submit photocopies of their *community service and mentor logs* to their YES Cluster Leader. Your Cluster Leader will also review this information with you on a monthly basis.

### Questions

If you have questions about the information in this booklet, get in touch with your Area Representative or Field Director. If you are not sure how to contact them, call your District Office at 1-(800) 4YFU-USA (1-800-493-8872) to request this information.

## 1. Community Service Project

Community Service and volunteering are important parts of the culture of the United States, where many people believe that they have a duty to give back to those who are less fortunate than themselves and to those in need. According to the Corporation for National and Community Service, since September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, Americans have engaged in volunteer work at record levels, with the most volunteer growth among people 16-24 years of age. Volunteering is an excellent way to learn about your community, make friends, have fun, and contribute to bettering your neighborhood or city. Don't forget that your host parents are doing valuable volunteer work in welcoming you into their home!

## Requirements

All YFU USA YES students are required to complete at least 20 hours of community service between August and June (or approximately 2 hours per month).

### What is community service and how do I get started?

Community service is volunteer work that is done to improve the community or its institutions. Community service consists of activities that *benefit the community*, rather than activities that are considered normal, household chores such as babysitting or raking the yard. Going to church or acting in a play (unless it is a fundraiser) are not considered community service. The following websites will give you some ideas about available volunteer opportunities in your community.

1. <http://www.volunteermatch.org/>
2. <http://www.servenet.org/>
3. <http://www.idealists.org/>

### Explore an interest through your Community Service Project

One great way to pick a Community Service Project is to think about your interests. If you are interested in health care, you may be able to find a hospital or a clinic in your neighborhood where you can volunteer. If you have an interest in animals, you may be able to volunteer at a zoo or a local animal shelter. If you need ideas, talk to your host family, teachers and Area Representative to find a volunteer activity in your community that will provide you with the opportunity to explore an interest area while at the same time giving back to your home town or city. You may also find opportunities through your high school to volunteer with your classmates to benefit the school or the greater community.

### Keeping track of your community service hours

Use the *community service log* included in this booklet to keep track of the number of hours of volunteer work completed (see Appendix I for log). It is very important that you keep detailed records of when and where you do your community service as your Area Representative or Field Director will ask you for this information several times throughout the year. If you have filled out your *community service log* in detail, sharing this information will be much easier. As mentioned in the Introduction, on **December 1, March 1 and June 1** share a photocopy of your *community service log* with your Area Representative or Field Director.

## 2. Enhancement Activities

Each quarter the YFU YES Cluster Leader, Area Representative, or Field Director will organize an enhancement activity that will vary by cluster. Enhancement activities are intended to give students the opportunity to develop leadership skills, learn about civic education, or give back to the community and school which is hosting them. Examples of enhancement projects might include: community service projects, government day, civic education day, food bank volunteering, social service agency or church outreach, presentations about the home country at elementary or middle schools, and/or visits to state capital or local offices of legislative representatives.

Students are required to attend all Enhancement Activities. Your Area Representative or Field Director will contact you with more information about these activities.

### 3. Leadership Mentoring Project

The YES program is designed to help students develop their leadership skills through a variety of activities. The main area through which students will learn more about leadership skills is the Leadership Mentoring Project. Additionally, some Enhancement Activities may focus on exploring leadership skills.

#### Leadership Mentoring Project

This is a required project that connects YES students with adult professionals in positions of leadership in their local community. The Leadership Mentoring Project offers students an excellent opportunity to explore one of their interest areas while learning more about their community and its leaders. Students are required to meet with their mentor at least once a month throughout their exchange.

How do I pick a mentor?

A mentor is someone who can offer a student wisdom and knowledge gained from their own experience in a specific area. Given this, students will find they benefit most from a mentor-relationship when they share a common interest with a mentor. Ask yourself what you are most interested in learning about? Start by making a list of interest areas that you might have, and then sitting down with your host family, Area Representative or Field Director to think about how to find possible mentors in these interest areas. Do you have an interest in politics, for example? If so, the town mayor or councilman might be a good mentor. If you have an interest in education or teaching, a school principal or school superintendent might be a good match. Any person in a position of leadership in your community or local area is a potential mentor, including business leaders, and board members of service organizations such as the Rotary Club or Lions Club. It is also important to find someone who will listen to you, ask good questions and take an interest in your personal development.

Once I decide on a potential mentor, how do I contact this person?

Included in this booklet you will find a two-page **mentor letter** that you can give to potential mentors (see Appendix II). This letter explains the mentor program and provides answers to some of the questions a potential mentor might have. Depending on the person, it may make sense to contact someone initially by phone to set up an in-person meeting where you can give them the mentor letter and ask if they might be a good fit to be your mentor. In addition to sharing an interest with you, the potential mentor will also ideally have an interest in learning more about your experience as an exchange student and about your home country.

What do I talk about with my mentor?

Students should try to learn about the mentor and how he or she got to be in a position of leadership. Questions that the student might ask the mentor in the first meeting include:

1. How did the mentor become interested in this field initially?
2. Ask questions to find out about the mentor's educational and work background.
3. How did the mentor get a start in this field?
4. What skills or abilities helped the mentor achieve success in this field?
5. What are some of the biggest challenges that the mentor faced in getting to the position that he or she currently holds?
6. Did the mentor have any advisors, mentors, or people in positions of leadership who helped guide him or her?
7. In hindsight, are there any mistakes the mentor made along the way that he or she would change?
8. What recommendations does the mentor have for a young person entering this field?

9. What activities might the mentor recommend that an exchange student get involved in while in the US in order to learn more about this field or gain more experience (volunteer opportunities, internships, etc.)

Additionally, students are encouraged to talk about their exchange experience with their mentor. While students have a lot to learn from their mentor about leadership, mentors will likely learn a lot from students as well. The following are some topics that you might consider discussing:

1. Why you decided to become an exchange student;
2. How your expectations for your trip compare with the reality of your exchange so far;
3. How your current life in the United States is similar/different from your life in your home country;
4. Things that surprised you about the United States;
5. Challenging things for you to adjust to;
6. Your goals for your exchange experience.

Additionally, students will likely find that mentors are interested in learning about student's home country through pictures, stories and descriptions. Students are encouraged to talk to their Area Representative, Field Director and host family if they are uncertain about discussion topics with their mentor. Finally, the *Learn to Mentor Toolkit* offers great discussion ideas for both the mentor and student and can be downloaded from Mentoring.org's website here:

<http://apps.mentoring.org/training/TMT/tmt10010.adp>

#### What do I do after each meeting?

Included in this booklet students will find a *Mentor Log* to record information about their sessions with mentors (see Appendix I). These logs must be filled out and returned to your Cluster Leader every quarter. As mentioned in the Introduction, on **December 1, March 1 and June 1** make a photocopy of your *community service log* and *mentor log* and submit give it to your Cluster Leader.

## 4. International Education Week & Global Youth Service Day

All exchange students serve as ambassadors from their home country, teaching others about their home culture while living in United States. This cultural exchange creates an opportunity for YES students to build greater bridges of understanding and tolerance within their host community. To help create opportunities for cultural exchange, students are required to participate in a number of activities, including International Education Week & Global Youth Service Day. Additionally, some Enhancement Activities may focus on issues of tolerance, diversity or religious discourse.

### **Participation in International Education Week & Global Youth Service Day**

With the help of their local Area Representative, YES students are required to participate in International Education Week (November 17-24) and Global Youth Service Day (April 24-26). Cluster Leaders will contact students regarding these celebrations, both of which are likely to be conducted as Enhancement Activities. To learn more about **International Education Week** visit <http://iew.state.gov/>. To learn more about and **Global Youth Service Day**, go to <http://www.gysd.net/> and <http://ysa.org/NatlGYSD/tabid/59/Default.aspx>.

## 5. Cyber-Diaries Project

YES program partner iEARN created an online forum for students to share resources and connect with fellow YES students during their time in the United States. Students can access this online forum at <http://www.iearn.org>. Click on the “Interactive Forums” tab in the upper right corner of the screen to get to the log-in page. Students received a briefing about this required activity at their arrival orientation.

How often am I required to post?

Students are asked to post occasional entries on blog, every 2 weeks or so. Students should spend no more than 30 minutes per month on this project.

## 6. Sharing Information About Other Activities

Aside from the required activities listed in this booklet, students are encouraged to participate in academic contests and other opportunities in order to get more involved in their local and school communities. Students should share their accomplishments with the YFU Cluster Leader (Area Representative or Field Director) so that they can be publicized appropriately. The Department of State may from time to time ask students to participate in surveys or other reports about the exchange.

**Appendix I:  
Community Service Log & Mentor Log**





## YES Mentor Log

**Instructions: Please fill this out every month after meeting with your Mentor**

Remember to ask your mentor thoughtful questions and pursue your personal interests. Refer to the *Learn to Mentor Toolkit* for discussion ideas.

**On December 1, March 1 and June 1 you should submit the information on this sheet to their Cluster Leader**

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_

Cluster Leader Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date	Name of Mentor	Location of meeting	Highlight of meeting
September:			
October:			
November:			
December:			
January:			
February:			
March:			
April:			
May:			
June:			

## **Appendix II: Mentor Letter & FAQ**



Dear Community Leader:

Thank you for thinking about mentoring a YES student.

The Youth Exchange and Study (YES) Program provides high school students from the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia with the opportunity to live and study in the United States for an academic year. This Program is sponsored by the U.S. State Department, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, and administered by a consortium of organizations that includes Youth For Understanding USA (YFU), one of the world's oldest, largest, and most respected international exchange organizations. Each year YFU arranges exchange experiences for more than 2,500 high-school students between over 50 nations, including the countries involved in the YES Program. YES students were selected for their academic excellence, commitment to community service and desire to share their countries and cultures with Americans and, in turn, share their experiences upon returning home. Cross-cultural exchange, interpersonal development and civic education are important components of the YES experience.

As part of their scholarship, all YES students are required to identify and interact with a mentor on a regular basis; this interaction adds depth and breath to the student exchange experience. We realize that you are very busy and if you are able to be a YES student mentor, we ask only that your interaction be consistent throughout the year. Meeting monthly either in-person, or over the phone, and communicating via email would add a lot to a YES student's exchange year.

Your encouragement is a valuable component of student growth. Together, mentors and students can discover and cultivate talents and interests. As you discuss career opportunities, you will likely help your student to develop long term plans and build self-confidence.

Mentoring is especially beneficial to exchange students. As they navigate their way through a foreign world of language, culture and ideas, exchange students are introduced to educational and career opportunities they might not have previously thought possible.

Thank you for your consideration. We hope you are able to mentor a YES student!

Sincerely,

Michael Finnell  
President  
Youth For Understanding USA

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **How much time should I plan to spend with the YES student?**

Youth For Understanding USA asks mentors to commit to spending 1-2 hours per month meeting with their YES student mentee.

### **How long is the time commitment?**

Mentors should plan to meet with their YES student once per month from now until June when students return to their home countries.

### **Where does the mentoring take place? At my office? At the home of the host family? At school?**

Students, mentors and host families can work together to find a location and a time that accommodates everyone's schedules and needs. Meeting at the office or workplace of a mentor is one option, as is meeting at the home of a host family. Schools may have regulations about who is allowed on the grounds, so be sure to check with the principal's office if this option is being considered.

### **What resources does YFU USA provide for mentors?**

People new to mentoring and experienced mentors alike will benefit from the online *Learn to Mentor* course made available through Mentoring.org website at:

<http://apps.mentoring.org/training/TMT/index.adp>

This course is designed to give you all the information and tools you will need to become a great mentor. Also, you can download the [\*Learn to Mentor Toolkit\*](#) which is a great resource for both mentors and mentees. This toolkit includes worksheets that will help inspire conversation topics. The Learn to Mentor Toolkit can be downloaded here:

<http://apps.mentoring.org/training/TMT/tmt10010.adp>

With some patience and planning, a mentor relationship can be extremely beneficial to both students and mentors alike. One of the goals of the YES program is to foster leadership skills, so students will be especially interested in learning more about your trajectory into your current position of leadership. This is also a great opportunity to learn about the student's home country and his or her experience of being an exchange student in your community.

### **If the student is having a problem, who should I contact?**

If in the course of your conversations you learn that the student is struggling to overcome some challenge, YFU USA encourages you to talk to the host family about the issue. If you feel the need to bring in outside help, contact the YFU USA District Office at (800) 4-YFU-USA and ask to speak to the Support Services Manager.